



WHITE EARTH RESERVATION

CHAIRMAN Michael A. Fairbanks SECRETARY-Treasurer Leonard Alan Roy

DISTRICT I Raymond Auginaush, Sr. DISTRICT II Kathy Goodwin DISTRICT III Cheryl "Annie" Jackson

December 1, 2020

The Honorable Tim Walz, Governor
The Honorable Peggy Flanagan, Lt. Governor
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Postpone Enbridge Line 3 Construction due to COVID-19 Pandemic Request

Dear Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Flanagan:

I am writing this letter to request Commissioner Malcom's support to assist White Earth of Ojibwe's opposition to Enbridge's Line 3 Construction project and request it be postponed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Enbridge plans to start up construction late November for Line 3. White Earth opposes starting up the project due to the high risk of irreparable harm to our tribal members and communities. The project would bring approximately 4,200 workers into direct proximity to our Reservation and rural communities. This poses a significant problem to the health and well-being of tribal members. Beginning the project at the start of winter along with the flu season and a predicted COVID peak creates a substantial increase of a devastating COVID-19 outbreak on the Reservation.

White Earth leaders have been battling the COVID public health emergency since March 2020. As months have gone by, we have seen our initially consistently low case counts and nearly-zero death counts begin to rise steadily. Our response team has compiled the following facts:

- County cases in the three Minnesota Counties that share land area with the White Earth Reservation have risen precipitously;
- All land-sharing Counties now have rising COVID-19-related death counts. In recent weeks we are seeing new deaths every week from COVID-related complications;
- White Earth Reservation Ambulance Service has seen a serious rise in calls from citizens with respiratory, gastrointestinal and neurologic symptoms that have turned out to be related to active COVID-19 disease;
- White Earth Public Safety professionals have been touched by COVID-19-related serious disease while doing their public service duty;
- Our COVID-response team have watched Minnesota death-doubling times—the time it takes for cumulative deaths to double at today's death rate—shorten in recent weeks, from well over 100-150 days to currently under 40 days. This change represents a marked rise in Minnesota COVID-related death counts. We are now grieving the deaths of White Earth members who have lost their lives to COVID-19;
- White Earth's COVID testing program has seen a rise in percent-positive rates from less than 2 percent in the spring to recent weekly values nearing 20% positive;

- We have watched as our primary referral destination for transport of seriously-to-critically-ill White Earth members for specialty medical care, in Fargo, North Dakota has reached the point where it often cannot accept transports of our seriously-ill citizens because no ICU or general hospital beds are available for them or anyone else. Coupled with this frightening referral-medical-care evaporation, we have also watched Minnesota regional and State ICU bed availability drop from well over 30% to less than 20%, trending steadily toward statewide delay in critical care for any of our seriously-ill White Earth citizens. We have also noted official Minnesota sources stating that even available Minnesota ICU beds often do not have professional nurses adequately specialized to staff those beds. We have seen previously healthy White Earth members contract COVID-19, require transport long distances for critical-care hospitalization and return home weeks later with serious ongoing respiratory and general disabilities;
- White Earth's testing program is facing impending overwhelming numbers needing testing in our coming cold Northern Minnesota winter weather, challenging our testing effectiveness and result-return times—which in turn threatens to seriously compromise the effectiveness of our excellent contact-tracing program;
- Our stores of stockpiled personal protective equipment for COVID-response professionals, Public Safety and Public Service professionals and volunteers, and for Band member families, are steadily draining away; and
- White Earth Public Health contact tracing and case management teams are now struggling to cope with multiple case clusters of COVID-infected and COVID-exposed citizens; when in the early months of the pandemic we had very few cases and no clusters at all. These clusters seem to be concentrated around small group gatherings, especially at public social and dining places.

COVID cases in Native Nations can happen at 3.5 times or more—the rates in the general population, and at a decade younger in age. We have a large population of elders and those with diabetes and other chronic health problems that live at increased risks from COVID-related disease and complications. It is in the best interest for the safety, and even the survival, of White Earth tribal members and families, for Minnesota's State Government to place a moratorium on Enbridge's Line 3 Construction work; at least until substantial vaccine-related community COVID protection levels have clearly been reached.

A delay on Enbridge's Line 3 Construction Project will be lifesaving for White Earth tribal members and families. Please consider White Earth's respectful request to assist our Tribe with protection of our tribal members and families from accelerated COVID-19 case and death rates by influx of local-community-ambivalent, non-resident workers for a major, elective construction project.

Miigwech,



Michael Fairbanks, Chairman
White Earth Band of Ojibwe

cc: Commissioner Jan Malcom, Department of Health
Commissioner Grace Arnold, Department of Commerce