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**Public Testimony on the Montana Indian Language  
Pilot Preservation Program (MILP3)**

**BEFORE:**

**Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government  
Montana State Capitol Building  
Room 350**

**Tuesday, January 20, 2015**

**Testimony From: Gerald J. Gray, Sr., Director, MILP3 Program,  
Little Shell Tribal Native Languages (Cree, Chippewa & Michif)**

***The Importance of Our Tribal Languages: Cree, Chippewa and Michif  
to Our Tribe "The Little Shell Chippewa Indians of Montana"***

**The influence of the Montana Indian Preservation Pilot Program  
has made a huge positive difference in many people's lives.**

**The Little Shell Tribe is very great-full to the Department of  
Commerce, the State-Tribal Economic Development Commission  
for all its work on behalf of Montana's Tribal nations and *"We are  
truly grateful to the State of Montana, the 63<sup>rd</sup> State Legislatures  
and to the Authors of SB0342 for their foresight, compassion, and  
intelligence for seeing to it that the Indian Tribes in Montana receive  
financial assistance in the Tribe's efforts to work toward restoring  
and preserving our indigenous Tribal Languages!"***

***The Little Shell Tribe has never had its own Tribal Schools or funds  
to develop a Language Curriculum and Language Program.  
Therefore it was, and still is, critical that we use the materials we  
have gathered and the strategies we have developed through the  
Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program which has***

*helped us begin to develop and implement the Little Shell Tribal native language program we critically and so desperately need to restore and preserve our indigenous Little Shell Tribal Languages.*

**The Little Shell Tribe has never had a Government funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the State of Montana or any other source. The Tribal Government has always had to rely on financial donations from mainly a few Tribal members and a few non-members to hold Tribal Council meetings; other business meetings and related events. The membership is scattered throughout Montana and various other states in the U. S.; most Tribal members are unemployed; the Tribe has no Reservation or Land Base for its membership to call home; has no mineral, timber, coal, gold or silver, or other precious metals and has no large amounts of water or other natural resources that can be developed for Tribal income. Therefore the Tribe has no financial resources to develop industries or other businesses from which the Tribe can depend upon to operate its government, provide jobs, build schools or a community college or provide health care for its membership. The Little Shell Tribal Council cannot afford to even apply for various grants from the State of Montana do to the fact that 98% or more of these grants require matching funds. The Tribe has no money to match anything. The very small amount of funds the Tribe has are those monies that come to us for some health related and social program grants from the State of Montana that do not require matching funds. The grant dollars provide by the State to operate these health and social programs are, in the majority of cases, very minimal. Please do not get us wrong, we are very grateful to receive these grants to operate these small programs or we would not have any Tribal programs to offer our membership. As we mentioned above, we are very grateful to all of the individuals mentioned who have advocated for and received the program funds for the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program. Without these program funds we would not have been able to preform the work we did to begin to restore our Native Languages. This program has been of great help in an effort for us to begin to revive and preserve our Tribal Languages. For this, we are very grateful to the State of Montana!**

**The State of Montana, may I add, has been a leader among all of the states in the United States in the field of Indian Education. Examples of Montana's national leadership in the field of Indian**

**Education include: the State for many years has provided State Indian Fee Waiver Scholarships to Naïve American students attending Montana Colleges and Universities; in 1972 the State of Montana Legislature added Article X, Section 1, Subsection (2) of the Montana Constitution which reads: “The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity”; another example of Montana being a leader among the States in the U.S. is adoption of the “The Montana Indian Education For All Act, the first of its kind in the country; the passage of House Bill 528 (HB528), which has become Montana Code Annotated 20-1-501. HB528 outlined the legislative intent of Article X, Section 1 Subsection (2) of the Montana State Constitution that has been in place since 1972. The law requires all Montana schools to include curricula about the history, culture and contemporary status of the state’s American Indian population. The law also requires tribes to contribute directly to the curricula; and further proof that the State of Montana is a Leader in Indian Education is the State’s just recent passage of SB342, the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program (MILP3) from which all Tribes in Montana are benefiting and this program has helped the Montana Tribes to engage in concrete efforts to restore, preserve and perpetuate their Tribal Native Languages. From these efforts, each Tribe has an opportunity to work toward keeping their languages from becoming extinct!**

**I know I speak on behalf of all of the Indian Tribes in Montana when I say “We are all very grateful and thankful for all that the past and present Montana Legislators and the State has done in the area of Indian Education for our Tribes! We are also especially thankful to everyone has worked to ensure that the Montana Indian Language Pilot Program was introduced, funded and implemented! With this program we have been able to restore and develop plans to perpetuate our native languages. Without this program, many of our Tribal languages will become extinct.**

**WHY THE LS TRIBE IS IN THE CURRENT SITUATION OF HAVING IT’S LANGUAGES BEING ON THE VERGE OF EXTINCTION:**

**The Little Shell Tribe, unlike the majority of other Tribes in the United States, has never had a Land Base and they had to endure a great many extreme hardships. Little Shell Tribal members had to**

roam from various cities and towns throughout the State of Montana and to various cities and towns throughout the United States in an attempt to scrounge out a living and to look for employment. This was quite difficult and a real challenge for many who did not have a home or an education to help them obtain employment. In the early days many had to live in crowded tents and shacks with no running water or indoor toilet facilities. A family often lived with many other extended families or friends in what we would consider today, Shanty Towns. Most of our Tribal members experienced prejudice and ridicule for speaking their native Indian languages (Cree, Chippewa and Michif) and practicing their culture and religion. Our Indian children who attended some Public, Religious (Parochal) and Federally operated Boarding Schools for Indian children were not allowed to speak, were punished for speaking, and were taught to be ashamed of speaking their native language. As a direct consequence, parents and children were forced to abandon their use of speaking their native language. Many of our Native Indian people's pride and self-esteem suffer from the fact that they were ridiculed and forced to stop speaking their Naïve Language!

### **Little Shell Native Languages Survey:**

Our Native Language Survey was an Experimental Survey as we wanted it to serve as an "Indicator" as to how many of our Tribal members still speak some, or are fluent speakers, of our Native Cree, Chippewa and Michif languages. Our Little Shell Tribal Native Language Survey was developed and distributed at the Tribe's Annual Joe Dussome Day (a former Tribal Leader); at quarterly council meetings; distributed at tribal social gatherings and at the Annual Shimowin (Dance/Pow Wow); the Survey was also posted on the Tribe's Facebook page and was conducted by direct telephone, in addition we mailed out 400 Surveys to Tribal members via direct mail.

We wanted to assess Tribal language resources by finding our how many of our people still speak some of the languages or are still fluent speakers of our native languages. In addition to wanting to find out how many aboriginal language speakers we still have, we wanted to develop resource lists of prospective elders and culture

**bearers for documentation in an effort to coordinate our Little Shell Tribal and MILP3 implementation efforts.**

**Do to the fact that the Tribal membership is widely scattered throughout the State of Montana and the United States; the cost of mailing back the completed survey forms: mailing addresses of Tribal members change often and the membership move often and forget or do not bother to notify the LS Tribal Office of their change of address, it has been a challenge to get Tribal members to complete and get the survey back to the office.**

**Following the August 24th, 2014 cut-off date for survey completion, final tabulation and assessment of Language Survey forms occurred.**

**OUR LITTLE SHELL NATIVE LANGUAGE SURVEY INTERPRETATION and EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ARE:**

***The interpretation of the data by the Little Shell Tribal Native Language Program (MILP3) Advisory Board and Staff:***

- All respondents think language is important to preserve for future generations on behalf of our ancestors, children and future generations to come.***
- Though the historic language of Little Shell people has largely been Michif, due to the preponderance of Cree speakers in the area we believe Cree should be the focus of language programming for the Great Falls schools for enrolled Little Shell Tribal children and our Little Shell Tribal Language program and communities.***
- Because of the prejudice and colonialist policies we experienced over the years, our traditional languages have been nearly eliminated from our families and communities. Little Shell people were forbidden to speak any of the languages – Cree, Chippewa/Ojibwa and/or Michif; were taught to be ashamed of speaking our Native Languages; and, as children, were often punished by U. S. Government and Religious operated School's staff for speaking their native languages and practicing any of their ceremonies and culture.***

- *There is an overarching sadness for this incredible void and sense of sadness and loss of the Little Shell Tribe's native languages among Little Shell Tribal members.*
- *As pleased as we are with the state of Montana passing the law to preserve our language, the irony is not lost on us. At the end of this project, there has been a clear expression of a profound sense of loss of our Native languages and culture.*
- *From our wide-ranging responses, we are able to interpret a variety of perceptions, and finally*
- *There is a strong sense of desire, willingness and motivation to rejuvenate and perpetuate our tribal languages among our people!*

**WHAT THE MILP3 PROGRAM HAS ALLOWED US TO PRODUCE AND ACCOMPLISH:**

*Our most critical and important accomplishment from our MILP3 efforts has been the discovery of the many resources there are throughout the country on the Internet and in the colleges and universities and other institutions that can be gathered and used to assist in developing a language program to restore, preserve and perpetuate our Little Shell Native languages.*

**THE IMPORTANCE OF MY NATIVE LANGUAGES TO ME AND THE LITTLE SHELL TRIBE**

*The most important thing about the Cree, Chippewa, and Michif Native Indian languages is the fact that they will not become extinct among the Little Shell adults and children in the Little Shell Tribe! Without the finances from the MILP3, our Language would become extinct within a few more years! This program has enabled us to develop, produce, establish and acquire:*

- **Many Cree, Chippewa and Michif Language books and related documents for our newly established Little Shell Native Language Program Archives.**

- **A Little Shell Tribal Native Language Archives to house all our language materials we have collected and still to be acquired in the future.**
- **The Native Language Archives is located in the new Little Shell Tribal Office, 625 Central Avenue West, Great Falls, Montana.**
- **Photographs of our Little Shell Tribal Language Archives.**
- **Native language classroom table and chairs for an adult and a student classroom.**
- **Digital Projectors and Screens for both classrooms.**
- **Professional Filming Equipment for teaching adults and students how to use this equipment to film Native language speakers.**
- **Tipis so we and the Great Falls Public School system can establish and conduct Language Emersion Summer Camps.**
- **Develop and establish a Little Shell Tribal Native Language WEB-SITE to help educate, advertise and promote the learning of our Cree, Chippewa and Michif languages.**
- **Inventory of Computers purchased for use in our research.**
- **Inventory of Steel Storage Cabinets for storing Language materials in our Archives.**
- **Little Shell Native Cree, Chippewa and Michif Curriculums for youth and adults.**
- **Native Language Survey Data Base which serves as an *"Indicator" as to how many of our Tribal members still speak some, or are fluent speakers, of our Native Cree, Chippewa and Michif languages.***
- **An Annotated Bibliography of Cree Language Resources.**
- **An Annotated Bibliography of Anishinaabe/Chippewa/Ojibwa Language Resources.**
- **An Annotated Bibliography of Michif Language Resources.**
- **Lists of Tribal Language Practice CD s and DVD s are included in each Language Bibliography.**
- **Booklet on The History of the Little Shell Languages.**
- **The Best Way to Teach and Learn a Native Language.**
- **Language Practice CD s and DVD s included with the Curriculums.**
- **Native Language Practice Sheets included in the Curriculums.**
- **Lists of Dictionaries, Language Books and Textbooks included in the Native Language Bibliographies.**

- **List/Inventory of various Language materials are categorized in the Native Language (Cree, Chippewa, Michif) Bibliographies.**
- **List/Inventory of various Language materials given to our Language program.**
- **Professional Film on our Language program meetings and discussions.**

**Additional Items Our Program Created Above and Beyond the deliverables Stated in Our Program Proposal:**

- **Little Shell Tribe Nation Pipe Bundle Gifting Ceremony**
- **Alliance Network—developed a traditional cultural homeland network including Stone Child College, Cree/Michif of Saskatchewan (Gabriel Dumont Institute), Chippewa/Cree/Michif of Manitoba (Louis Riel Institute), Turtle Mountain Community College, Great Falls Public Schools, and Little Shell Tribal Council.**
- **Great Falls school system *Indian Education for All* Indian language program.**
- **Public education—Press releases and news items, Facebook activity, History Tour Blog.**
- **Halfbreed amendment to Squaw bill presented to State legislature.**
- **Hosted State/Tribal Economic Development Commission and State/Tribal Relations Committee.**
- **Coordinated strategies between Little Shell and Rocky Boy tribal language programs as a special alliance within the greater alliance.**
- **Two facilities for Little Shell cultural public programs, outfitted that are media ready.**
- **Refurbished a secure archive space for the special collections developed through this program, located at the tribes newly acquired property at 625 West Central, Great Falls.**
- **Gifting of language materials and curriculum to eight Montana school districts with significant Little Shell student populations.**

**Intangible items created by MILP3 program:**

- Brought focus and clarity to the mission of the tribe to reinforce identify document protect and encouraged Little Shell language and culture
- Coalesced pride around a reaffirmed language and cultural identity for the tribe.
- Projected a positive and accountable and transparent and confident public image of the tribe.
- Involved the tribe in nation to nation relationships throughout the traditional historic homeland.
- We have recognized our significant role within Montana society.

**Why Montana Indian Language Pilot Program is Important to the State of Montana:**

Indian people, their languages, culture, ceremonies, dances, celebrations, reservations and religious activities are very popular with Non-Indian Tourists. Many tourists travel to States throughout the U.S. that have a number of Indian Reservations within their State borders throughout the year to visit and attend Indian cultural activities. Tourists who travel to visit Indian reservations make an important economic contribution to these towns, cities and States. Tourist's financial expenditures assists with increasing the State of Montana's Financial Coffers.

The tribal Native Language program developed with financial assistance of the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program also helps Indian children, youth and adults gain back their self-esteem; develop pride in their Tribal Heritage; develop stronger Indian identity and self confidence; and most importantly, assists Indian School Students with improving their academic performance in school.

**There are Four (4) Stages to a Native Language Program Development and Implementation:**

1. **Development:** The Little Shell Tribe through the Montana Indian Language Preservation Program (MILP3) has nearly completed the Development phase of it's Native Languages Program through

conducting extensive research; compiling information on what information and resources there are that exist on the Internet and in various Libraries, Historical Societies, Archives, etc. throughout the U.S. and Canada. We know there may a number of Cree, Chippewa and Michif Language resources in additional resources throughout European Countires we have not had time to contact. There is still additional work to be done in this area.

**2. Implementation:** The Little Shell Tribe has begun the Implementation Stage of the development and implementation stage of our Native Language Program by partnerning with the Great Falls Indian Education Department which will offer the Little Shell Tribal Cree language to the Little Shell students enrolled in the Great Falls School system. We also need to begin to Implement an Adult Native Language program within our Little Shell Office classroom facility, which has been equipped to offer a program for adults

**3. Maintenance:** The maintenance phase of the Little Shell Language Program has yet to begin. This phase will make certain that the implementation phase is effective. Even though it has not begun, a thorough research must be completed to make certain the Native Language Programs that have been developed and implemented are being adequately maintained for the youth and adults. This is a crucial part of Language implementation and its success.

**4. Assessment:** Assessment is crucial to the four stages of a Native Language Program. Each stage must be assessed for its effectiveness. This stage also supports the implementation of possible changes to the program to make certain it is ongoing and successful and that the language is, indeed, being learned, maintained and utilized by those involved in the process.

**THERE IS STILL A LOT OF ONGOING WORK TO BE DONE AND WE NEED TO AQUIRE ADEQUATE FUNDS TO IMPLEMENT A TRULY SUCCESSFUL NATIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR OUR PEOPLE AND THOSE NON-INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS INTERESTED IN LEARNING ONE OR ALL THREE OF OUR NATIVE LANGUAGES.**

**WE HOPE YOU WILL WORK TO CONTINUE THIS VERY IMPORTANT NATIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM.**

**This project has helped bring focus and clarity to the mission of the Tribe to reinforce, identify, document, protect, and encourage Little Shell language and culture. It has assisted us in coalescing pride around a reaffirmed language and cultural identity for the tribe. As a direct consequence of the resources, planning, administration, and superior assistance and advisement of STEDC staff, we have been able to project a positive, accountable, transparent, and confident public image of the tribe to not only our own citizenry, but across Montana society as a whole. Through these resources, we have been able to engage and involve the Tribe in nation-to-nation relationships throughout our traditional historic homeland. And, as a direct result of this project and these resources, we have more fully recognized and embodied our significant and critical role within Montana history and contemporary society. On behalf of the Little Shell Tribe, you have our deepest respect and gratitude. Miigwich (Thank you.)**

**THANK YOU EVER SO MUCH!**