

Racino speech for the House
April 2004

Racino bill on the floor of the house.

Thank you Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the house.
With the speakers permission I would like to make a
statement on behalf of the Penobscot Nation.

First of all I would like to refresh our memories of recent
historical events.

The Penobscot Nation and the Passamaquoddy Tribe
introduced legislation that would require referendum on the
question of a casino run by the tribes here in Maine. As we
all know that went down in a two to one defeat. During that
campaign all guns were pointed at us and believe me every
bullet was fired!

To the point where some are still firing shots at us!

How is that relevant to this racino amendment you ask? It
is relevant because had the tribes not taken all the fire, all
the flack and the mean spiritedness that existed and still
exists. The racino question would have been taken apart
sentence by sentence and carefully examined. The way it
should have been. If that indeed would have taken place I
am certain that question would have failed as well. The
racino question was passed and approved by the people of
Maine at the tribe's expense. The expense was not only
monetary but emotional and spiritual. In many respects it
was the most expensive campaign in Maine history.

We as Indian people are still paying the emotional and spiritual price. We chose the gaming industry because there was no other way for us to survive. It was the only economic tool that was successful for tribes across the country. Our intentions were honorable and as Maine citizens we offered to share a large portion of our venture with the State, 400 million dollars a year and thousands of jobs. Our offer was turned down in no uncertain terms and we were left with nothing but an extended empty hand and wounded spirits.

We intervened in the racino process to open up that process and allow others as well as ourselves to submit their proposals to Bangor and give Bangor a chance to choose the proposal most lucrative for itself and the State.

Certain interests viewed tribal intervention into this process in a highly negative manner. So negatively that at one point while a TV reporter was interviewing Chief Dana we were all confronted by a screaming individual stalking up and down the hall way at the Civic Center. Screaming hate filled comments at the top of his voice about "Indians not paying income tax" "Getting to hunt moose whenever they want" saying and I quote "You said we were dead now your dead." It was obvious that he was trying to induce a physical confrontation.

These mean spirited, racist comments certainly caused a chilling effect. Those sentiments expressed by this angry individual were hidden sentiments of many not only in certain organizations and the media but also in the hallways of this body. The very next morning I saw Chief Dana being interviewed on TV and you know what? The TV media that was there during this man's rampage gave this

same man the last word on its morning newscast. I was stunned and appalled. I was still in shock when I entered the House Chamber. Shortly after I arrived I was asked if I was going to attend the legal and vets committee hearing. (The same committee who the week before had refused to allow our amendment in even for discussion) I said, "Yes" but after giving it more thought I decided I had just about enough and was not going to put my people or myself through this again. I had spoken to enough committee members to know their minds were made up on this issue and I was not going to allow myself to be the target of unscrupulous comments and innuendos about Indians. (Given the fact that the same crowd was going to be there.)

With all the meanness, the hate filled comments and negativity being projected upon us I would like to say to you my fellow legislators. Do not take the two-thirds vote against the casino as being against anything Indian. It would be a mistake. The majority of Maine people are good, honest and fair. For every one person who is full of hate and anger over this one issue there are two who are kind and thoughtful.

The same day as the raving individual in the hallway made his debut I happened to mention the incident to an acquaintance during a business meeting. It saddened me that anybody could have those hate filled feelings and that they were directed at the tribes. That afternoon as I was home and typing my thoughts into an email to a friend a knock came at my door. I had no idea who would dare maneuver my ice-covered driveway. I went to open the

door and to my surprise standing there was the business acquaintance I had spoken to earlier. With a dozen red roses. It was a wonderful gesture and it made my very negative day into a positive one.

Last month I was at the Richmond American Legion Post 132 of which I am a member. The event was a dinner recognizing past commanders of the post. The room was filled with camaraderie and a spirit of pride in Country and in themselves for serving their Country. These Veterans actually cared for each other. In fact the motto of post 132 is "Dare to Care" They were very supportive of me and the tribes. It was good to be in such a positive atmosphere with people who loved and respected each other. I left the dinner with my spirits strengthened by my fellow Veterans.

The gaming question and controversy has hit Maine and the tribes with a vengeance. The expansion of gaming through a Racino and Powerball has been embraced while the Tribe's casino proposal has been denied. I ask that in the future you remember the price we as Indian people paid for bringing gaming forward. Without the tribes initiative there would be no racino and no powerball. The irony is that we were brave enough to bring this controversial idea forward and in the end got nothing. Some might say not much has changed between Maine and the Tribes in the past two hundred years.

This whole gaming issue with its controversy and Court battles has not been good for anyone. With all the accusations and rhetoric flying, there is something I want you all to remember:

Maine Indians deserve to be treated fairly. We deserve to be treated with respect. My people are good and honorable people. We have served this State and this Country well in every war since the American Revolution. More Native Americans have served in the military than any other race. We are Maine citizens. We are American Citizens and yes we are Tribal citizens. We have built a network of Individuals and organizations that support us across this State. **And we all vote.** We will not retreat to our tribal communities. We will not lock our doors as we have done in the past when we have felt wronged or mistreated. With the help of our friends, neighbors, organizations and sympathetic Legislators we will continue the fight for our cultural and economic survival.

And in the end, we will win this economic war that we have been waging for the past two hundred years.

Thank you