

Thank you. I am honored to speak to you ~~and~~ today on this special day of the American year.

We tend to think that our form of government began with Tom Jefferson and friends, but they were only extending a tradition of democracy that existed on this soil for centuries before they came.

When our founders—specifically, Constitutional Convention member John Rutledge of South Carolina and his Committee of Detail--were struggling with the form of the new U.S. Constitution, they carefully studied the constitution of the Iroquois League of Nations as their model. That great Native American constitution, which originated somewhere in the 14th to 16th Centuries, was well known to the early Anglo settlers, who wrote it down for the first time, as the Native Americans recited it to them.

In a moment, I shall read from it.

The animal symbol of the Five Nations of the Iroquois was the eagle, like ours, perched high

with its eye looking out for any danger to the peace.

Another important symbol of the Five Nations was the cluster of five arrows. Look at our One Dollar bill and you will see our newer cluster of thirteen arrows, in the iron grip of the eagle. The Iroquois Constitution says this: "As the five arrows are strongly bound this shall symbolize the complete union of the nations. Thus are the Five Nations united completely and enfolded together, united into one head, one body and one mind. Therefore they shall labor, legislate and council together for the interest of future generations."

Well, that would be us. They, too, are our forefathers. And in times of trouble we should take their council.

They had wise laws. The men had all the power in council, but the women had the power to choose the men who would lead—a workable balance, for their day. The men and the women had their own, highly democratic council fires, where concerns could be voiced and presented for action to the nation.

They had quite an elegant disarmament policy, which went like this:

"(We) now uproot the tallest pine tree and into the cavity made thereby we cast all weapons of war. Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep ~~under-earth-currents-of-water~~ flowing to unknown regions we cast all the weapons of strife. We bury them from sight and we plant again the tree. Thus shall the Great Peace be established..."

They had two houses of legislative deliberation, plus an executive and judicial branch, ~~more-or-less~~, and veto powers, impeachment, and a fair justice system that respected the dignity of every person. We should not admire that history as outsiders; we should embrace it proudly as a part of our own history, ever working to mend the historical divisions that might keep us from accepting its wisdom and humanity.

We would do well to install our new senators and representatives in the same way that we Americans did when we were the Five Nations. Here is a part of the ceremony, addressed to any new representative arriving at council:

"Your heart shall be filled with peace and good will and your mind filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people. With endless patience you shall carry out your duty and your firmness shall be tempered with tenderness for your people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in your mind and all your words and actions shall be marked with calm deliberation. In all of your deliberations in Council, and in your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self interest shall be cast into oblivion."

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There is the model we still hold in our hearts for our democracy, isn't it?

Here is how, in their constitution, the Iroquois instructed their leaders to begin their great meetings:

"Offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the corn and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the

Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above, who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life."

There are many beautiful passages in this first American constitution. It lays down specific rituals to keep the peace:

It begins thus:

I am De-kana-widah and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace. I plant it in your territory. I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you. We place you upon those seats, spread soft with the feathery down of the globe thistle, there beneath the shade of the spreading branches of the Tree of Peace. There shall you sit and watch the Council Fire of the Confederacy of the Five Nations, and all the affairs of the Five Nations shall be

transacted at this place before you..

Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength. If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace and make known their disposition to the Lords of the Confederacy, they may trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are

obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves. We place at the top of the Tree of the Long Leaves an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy.

When there is any business to be transacted and the Confederate Council is not in session, a messenger shall be dispatched to the Fire Keepers, or to their War Chiefs with a full statement of the case desired to be considered. Then shall we call his cousin Lords together and consider whether or

not the case is of sufficient importance to demand the attention of the Confederate Council. If so, they shall be summoned to assemble beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves. When the Lords are assembled, the Council Fire shall be kindled, but not with chestnut wood.

(Why the rule against a particular kind of wood, well, it is because chestnut pops and sparks too much, I think, and they wanted a peaceful meeting.)

In all cases the procedure must be as follows: when the Mohawk and Seneca Lords have unanimously agreed upon a question, they shall report their decision to the Cayuga and Oneida Lords who shall deliberate upon the question and report a unanimous decision to the Mohawk Lords. The Mohawk Lords will then report the standing of the case to the Firekeepers, who shall render a decision as they see fit in case of a disagreement by the two bodies, or confirm the decisions of the two bodies if they are identical. The Fire Keepers shall then report their decision to the Mohawk Lords who shall announce it to the open council.

If through any misunderstanding or obstinacy on the part of the Fire Keepers, they render a decision at variance with that of the Two Sides, the Two Sides shall reconsider the matter and if their decisions are jointly the same as before they shall report to the Fire Keepers who are then compelled to confirm their joint decision.

When the Council of the Five Nation Lords shall convene they shall appoint a speaker for the day. He shall be a Lord of either the Mohawk, Onondaga or Seneca Nation. The next day the Council shall appoint another speaker, but the first speaker may be reappointed if there is no objection, but a speaker's term shall not be regarded more than for the day.

(I can imagine the boys at the Constitutional Convention busily scribbling notes as they read this.)

(Here is where the women come in:)

If any Confederate Lord neglects or refuses to attend the Confederate Council, the other Lords of the Nation of which he is a member

shall require their War Chief to request the female sponsors of the Lord so guilty of defection to demand his attendance of the Council. If he refuses, the women holding the title shall immediately select another candidate for the title. No Lord shall be asked more than once to attend the Confederate Council.

If at any time it shall be manifest that a Confederate Lord has not in mind the welfare of the people or disobeys the rules of this Great Law, the men or women of the Confederacy, or both jointly, shall come to the Council and upbraid the erring Lord through his War Chief. If the complaint of the people through the War Chief is not heeded the first time it shall be uttered again and then if no attention is given a third complaint and warning shall be given.

When the Lord is deposed the women shall notify the Confederate Lords through their War Chief, and the Confederate Lords shall sanction the act. The women will then select another of their sons as a candidate and the Lords shall elect him. Then shall the chosen one be installed by the Installation Ceremony.

(So you see that the men were only in charge for so long as they behaved and served the people well. And showed up for work. But if they are really troublesome, there is a remedy:)

Should it happen that the Lords refuse to heed the third warning, then two courses are open: either the men may decide in their council to depose the Lords or to club them to death with war clubs.”

(That is certainly more economical than a recall election.)

The soil of the earth from one end of the land to the other is the property of the people who inhabit it. The Great Creator has made us of the one blood and of the same soil he made us and as only different tongues constitute different nations he established different hunting grounds and territories and made boundary lines between them.

When any alien nation or individual is admitted into the Five Nations the admission shall be understood only to be a temporary one. Should the person or nation create loss, do

wrong or cause suffering of any kind to endanger the peace of the Confederacy, the Confederate Lords shall order one of their war chiefs to reprimand him or them and if a similar offence is again committed the offending party or parties shall be expelled from the territory of the Five United Nations.

When a member of an alien nation comes to the territory of the Five Nations and seeks refuge and permanent residence, the Lords of the Nation to which he comes shall extend hospitality and make him a member of the nation. Then shall he be accorded equal rights and privileges.

(There is some oral fine print that is less than generous, but overall you can see that the American spirit we embrace, enjoy and celebrate is more Native American than European. Isn't that a remarkable fact, hidden so long by the shame of our genocide against them?)

Whenever a foreign nation enters the Confederacy or accepts the Great Peace, the Five Nations and the foreign nation shall enter into an agreement and compact by which the

foreign nation shall endeavor to persuade other nations to accept the Great Peace.

(Will someone please make a copy of this and send it immediately to the White House?)

Whenever a specially important matter or a great emergency is presented before the Confederate Council and the nature of the matter affects the entire body of the Five Nations, threatening their utter ruin, then the Lords of the Confederacy must submit the matter to the decision of their people and the decision of the people shall affect the decision of the Confederate Council. This decision shall be a confirmation of the voice of the people.

(The rules for holding local council fires was spelled out in great detail, so that it would be fair and the people's opinions would be counted. There were not electronic voting machines to cause trouble, as there are today.)

There. It is a long document and I have only read a small part of it for you, so that you can get its flavor and wisdom. We are men and

women in a land of free people –people who have served each other with dignity and sacrifice for many centuries, going back long before the European invasion. On this Fourth of July, I thank~~s~~ our Native Americans for what they have given us.

Thank You.