

## **To the Nation from the Tribal Chair, Joseph “Zeke” Rupnick**

Dear Tribal Members,

Throughout history, the leaders of our Nation that have come before us made decisions with one thought in mind, survival of our most valuable resource, the People. Many can debate whether those decisions were good or bad, but one fact remains, we are still here. This week there has been a flurry of activity and Tribal Council has had to make some hard decisions as well. These decisions will be debated as to their effectiveness but that should be at a later point in time. Now is a time for us to come together as a people, for us to protect our families and communities and for all of us to exercise good judgement.

The country and our nation are facing uncertain times. The recent COVID-19 outbreak is an unprecedented public safety situation that requires an unprecedented response. Communities in the area are just starting to confirm cases and it is reasonable to expect that all communities, including ours, will experience confirmed cases. Currently, there are no cases on the reservation, but we must still exercise caution. I feel it is important for the members of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation to hear directly from me the steps we are taking to ensure the health and safety of the people.

First, Tribal council will do everything in its power to protect the Prairie Band members. Essential services will remain open, but precautions are being taken to ensure the safety of all. Given the unknown and the lack of reliable testing, we must take actions and consider everyone has the virus and we are asking our members to do the same.

On March 16, 2020 during an emergency meeting, Tribal Council declared a State of Emergency. This declaration of emergency shall allow the Tribal Council to take any necessary action and have all necessary power as authorized under the Nation’s constitution to provide for the welfare of the tribal government, tribal organizations, tribal assets, tribal lands and tribal members to ensure their safety, health and welfare for the duration of this emergency. Included in this declaration, all emergency plans will be initiated.

Yesterday, on March 17, 2020, Tribal Council determined that in the best interest of the Nation, the Nation should temporarily suspend operations at its gaming facilities. This decision was made in part because COVID-19 is spread person-to-person and can remain on surfaces for extended periods of time. To limit the risk

to our community, we have implemented strategies suggested by health care officials by reducing person-to-person contact and we encourage our members to do the same.

Finally, we cannot stop members from traveling in and out of the reservation, but we are encouraging those that do travel, to exercise caution. If members feel they must travel to areas that have severe outbreaks, follow the guidance and self-quarantine. The Prairie Band People have faced many challenges in the past since first contact through disease and annihilation, yet we are still here. This outbreak is another challenge that we must face and like the others, it too will pass. We cannot say how long our lives will be disrupted but decisions made today will ensure we will remain, and the people will go on.

And one more thing, we would like to recognize the strength of our local community. Our Health Center staff and emergency services personnel remain committed to providing the best care during this time. The Early Childcare Education Center, Boys and Girls Club and Elders Center have been closed for normal service operations yet continue to serve the community by providing meals as needed. And we thank all of the Nation's employees for remaining dedicated to their individual posts as we are all dealing with the various impacts of COVID-19.

Migwett

Joseph P. Rupnick, Chairman

Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation