

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT: Winona LaDuke, resource protector and hemp entrepreneur, recovers from Line 3 arrests, heaps blame on Biden



BY [ROB CAPRICCIOSO](#) (/STAFF-DIRECTORY/ROB-CAPRICCIOSO) | AUGUST 23, 2021

854
Shares

Winona LaDuke is a Native American woman who twice ran to become vice president of the United States. She secured the first-ever Electoral College vote for the Green Party in 2016. She receives mainstream attention without trying, like when she turned the tables on a *New York Times* reporter in a [recent interview](#)

(<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/08/09/magazine/winona-laduke-interview.html>), asking him whether and how often he thinks about Native Americans after he asked her how often white people think of Native Americans. (“I want them to let go of their white privilege and be good humans,” she ended up telling him.)

She’s an icon.

When chatting with LaDuke, listening to her arguments against the Line 3 pipeline and the police who she believes are paid by Enbridge to serve the Canadian company’s interests, this reporter’s mind can’t help but wander to 2000. That’s when she ran for the second time for the second highest office in the land (the first time was in 1996), alongside Ralph Nader, siphoning at least some votes from the Democratic candidate, former Vice President Al Gore.

Some people, including noted political scientists, believe the duo’s Green Party ticket that year took enough votes from Gore to cost him the election, helping put President George W. Bush in the White House. Others argue that Bush’s election set in motion the Iraq War and that his administration purposely increased American dependence on crude oil, which accelerated the climate crisis making headlines today. Gore has since famously become an environmentalist.

One wonders: If LaDuke and Nader hadn't run, would America find itself in the same energy conundrum that she battles today? Would Native America be better off?

LaDuke, a citizen of the Ojibwe White Earth Nation, chooses not to engage with that hypothetical premise and all the connecting dots required to make it true. She prefers to stand solid in her arguments against the ongoing Line 3 reconstruction project on and around tribal homelands in Minnesota. She prefers to talk about her burgeoning hemp business, highlighting the joy and optimism that her 20-acre "hemp and heritage" farm brings to her — and to the world, she hopes, by exemplifying the opportunities of the hemp economy.

"The Democrats should win their own elections and not blame the Greens," the 62-year-old Indigenous rights advocate tells *Tribal Business News*.

LaDuke and Nader have always maintained that Gore's loss was not their fault. Their thinking has been that Gore cost himself the election through a series of his own blunders, like not winning his home state of Tennessee and talking too much about lockboxes. At the same time, they note the Supreme Court didn't do him any favors by not allowing all votes to be counted in Florida.

In truth, we'll never know whether their 2000 run cost anyone anything. But it's interesting to ponder, especially when LaDuke says that President Joe Biden is "hellbent on destroying Ojibwe people with this pipeline," as she did in the aforementioned *New York Times* interview, arguing that the president has shoved a pipeline "down our throats" by "privileging a Canadian multinational."

In this case, at least, she is willing to place blame, but she does not accept it in return.

During a recent phone interview, hearing her speak, hearing the way she frames her arguments, the question of whether she has anything in common with former President Donald Trump comes to mind.

"Donald Trump is a complete idiot," LaDuke responds, saving even more criticism for her state's Democratic governor Tim Walz. "I'm not disrupting. I'm staying the course. I'm staying with my feet where they're supposed to be."

The rest of our interview follows.

You said earlier when we spoke that you were awaiting a call from someone from the Department of the Interior and that you were in the middle of legal talks. Can you share what your discussions were about?

Yeah. For seven years, we have tried to stop the last tar-sands pipeline. It's a bad pipeline. It was a bad idea seven years ago. The fires of Canada are burning. The smoke is covering my state. The water is just down (as) low as it could ever be. They are taking the water, and they are creating this great crime in northern Minnesota. And I'm just trying to see how to address the crime, legally. And who wants to stand up for the fact that a Canadian multinational is taking over the state of Minnesota and is taking over the Great Lakes? So that's it.

The totem pole Red Road journey just (visited) Washington to meet with (Interior Secretary) Deb Haaland, and I have been working with them. She has a great deal of influence. If the Biden administration would be interested in climate change and human rights, and if it would be interested in addressing the destruction of water and upholding trust responsibilities, that would be the right thing to do. Not to protect the Canadians. It's ridiculous. It's just so egregious.

Have you ever been able to talk to Secretary Haaland about these issues?

No, I have not.

Have you tried?

To talk personally? No. We wrote a letter to her. I just got out of jail. I couldn't even attend the Red Road meeting. I had to attend to my family matters. But I know she's a good woman, and I know she wants to do the right thing. The question is if Joe will allow her to do it. [Laughs.]

It boils down to that, right?

It does come down to that. Because I know that Deb Haaland would like to take care of the water and her trust responsibilities. But if Joe Biden made some deal with the oil industry at the end of its days that sells us down the river, that's egregious. That's wrong. And I'm going to do everything in my ability to challenge that.

Going back to the fact that you were arrested again on July 19 and had previously been arrested in January, how are you doing? Was that scary for you?



D
N
(
p
CO



(
n

—

c
st
p



This was the first time I was held in custody. The other times I was remotely charged off of a video. All of the charges are completely ridiculous. But Wadena County does not have the nicest jail, and they made sure to tell you that you weren't supposed to like it. I spent two nights in Wadena County and one night in Aitkin County, which had better food. And I had a private cell there. In Wadena County, I was in a cell with eight water protectors all together. We practiced our jailhouse tunes. We made up a new number and worked on some group dancing. And I slept a lot. I rested up.

You have a lot of battles to go.

If you look at my booking photo, my mugshot, in Aitkin County, I look much better. I look much more rested.

That's one positive.

Yeah, I slept a lot, and you didn't want to think about the fact that you were cold, and they took your snacks if you didn't eat them. [Laughs.] No peanut butter cookies for jail contraband!

Do you think the police arrested you because you are bringing a lot of attention to the Line 3 issues?

They've got way more trouble than me. [Laughs.] They've got Red Lake. They've got the Mississippi River (being) fracked out. They've got the White Earth Tribe. They've got all kinds of other water protectors. I'm just one of many people who don't like this pipeline. Sixty-nine thousand people testified against it. Six hundred people have been arrested. I'm just like every other

one.

I feel that everybody does their part. I can't do some things. I'm not very handy. I can't sit on the tripod. I mean, I could, but it would take me a while. [Laughs.] I haven't practiced my tree-climbing skills lately. [Laughs.] I'm sorry, it's just so funny.

During my arrest, there were six of us, and we sat together in lawn chairs — beach chairs — because we're elders. We were six women chained together with chains around our waists. So we were sitting there, and there were 12 cops in front of us and three behind us. They're all getting paid by Enbridge. And this one shows up in riot gear, and he looked like a stormtrooper. I just thought, 'What party did you think you were coming to, buddy?'

You've been vocal about Enbridge supporting the police.

They own the police. There's so many police in northern Minnesota right now, and they're from everywhere. They're from counties I never even heard of. Everybody is signing up to get money at the Enbridge trough. It's just crazy.

Look, we've been fighting this for a long time, and we're watching a great crime happening. It's brutal. I'm ready for the next economy, the one that doesn't involve a bunch of police and the destroying of water and the stealing of human rights — the hemp-solar-local food economy.

It's not going to be easy to get to the next economy, is it?

We waste about 60 percent of the energy between point of origin and point of consumption. We waste energy. We have no idea what we're doing. We do the dumbest stuff. So what you do is you quit wasting so much energy. And then you make decisions on what you use energy on. Do you know who the largest energy consumer is in Minnesota? Why that's Enbridge, because moving sludge takes power. So you kick some of these guys off the grid.

In the meantime, (Enbridge) should just build all of the capacity to pay for their power out of renewables. That's what they should really do. And then they should leave it for us, because they're going to be out of business in 10 years. I'm all for it. Let's let Enbridge pay for the next energy economy. They could do it right now.

And then, what I want to see is hemp because that's the next economy, that's the new green revolution. You can bioremediate giant messes. You can sequester carbon. You can build things out of it. You can make fabric out of it. You can make paper out of it. And you could transform the materials of the economy.

You talked earlier about Deb Haaland possibly having a difficult time convincing President Biden —

I'm not very federal-centric. I don't think that they have all the power. I think that there's a lot more power in a lot of other places. Exxon isn't even at the top of the S&P anymore. Who's at the top of the S&P? Oh, that'd be like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. Disruptive technologies transform the world. Who the hell thought that we'd be on cell phones and Zooming? All that stuff, that's not from Washington, D.C.

There's all kinds of stuff that transforms the world, and it's being transformed. I happen to want to be at the front end of that and have a few more thoughts about how it's going to work out for our communities and the little people who live in the woods and trees. I intend to be working to protect something, making some transformation, and Washington's going to get a clue.

They're getting a clue now. We busted our butts to get those guys in, and we're going to keep raising it up and getting people out who are old and are dinosaurs and electing people who have common sense and good heart. I have way more confidence in a people's movement than I do in anybody in Washington, D.C.

Former President Trump considers himself a disrupter, and some people see him as an agent of chaos. Would you ever align with him in terms of philosophy?

No. I'm a patriot to a land, not a flag. This is why the creator put me here, to take care of the world I'm supposed to live in. That's what I'm supposed to do. We're all supposed to actually do that. Donald Trump is a complete idiot. I'm not disrupting, I'm staying the course. I'm staying with my feet where they're supposed to be. That's the difference between us. There's a lot of differences between that guy and me. I pay way more in taxes than that guy ever paid, and I just spent three days in jail. Tell him to go spend some time in jail for what he believes in. That's my advice to you, Donald. Show us what it's like.

How do you feel about your state's Lieutenant Governor, Peggy Flanagan, who is a citizen of the White Earth Nation?

It's so disappointing, but I think that Peggy, in her heart, is on our side. But Tim (Walz), who used her to get to our communities, is totally a traitor to the Indian people. She is in a bad position for her support of him and her silence.

She says she's in a tough position.

I don't buy that. We're all in a tough position. I just spent three days in jail in a tough position, thanks Peggy. You don't get a tiara for putting in the last tar-sands pipeline.

If you were her, what would you do on Line 3?

I'd tell Walz to pull the permits for the water crossings — pull them all — because Enbridge has had nine frack-outs so far. They are running over the state. They are running over the Indian people. I would say, 'Act like an adult, Tim.' The governor of Michigan (Gretchen Whitmer) pulled their permits, revoked their easement. She did that in keeping with the public trust, that's what she said. Tim is abrogating the public's trust. More than that, he's criminally negligent in his duty to the public trust. That's my problem with Tim.

When you mention Michigan, I think about Enbridge's Line 5, which was delayed earlier this year so that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers could complete an environmental impact statement (EIS). Why do you think that happened for Line 5 and not for Line 3?

The Trump administration was in charge of the EIS process, and Trump wasn't doing any on mega-pipeline projects.

An EIS would have helped you, right?

They (Enbridge) went from 630 million gallons of water to 5 billion gallons of water (use) during the worst drought in history. An environmental impact statement would not have allowed that. And a 404 and a 401 permit — neither of those permits should be standing. They should all be revoked.

p
a

/

e

A

p

ar

/

w

e

bl

Talk about the legal arguments that tribal lawyers have put forward about how the rights of the wild rice in your region have been affected by Line 3, and how the rice should be protected. Explain why those treaty and 'rights of nature' arguments should make sense to those who don't understand them right now.

How about the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1999 (involving) the Mille Lacs Band (of Ojibwe)? It recognized the Mille Lacs Band's right to regulate and reserve basically the upper third of the state. That's why someone in Washington should pay attention: Because the Supreme Court recognized our right to protect our territory, and I think they should uphold the law.

The treaty territorial resources of the Anishinaabe that are held in the treaties have been upheld in EPA policy as subject to review by the EPA — that they should protect those as part of trust responsibility. When our ancestors signed these treaties with the United States and the people who represented the United States, you could drink the water from every creek. There was sturgeon in every river. There was wild rice everywhere. There was moose. There was buffalo. There were maple trees, and there were pine forests that covered it. That's what we understood the world was to look like, not what we have now.

We want it to be the way it's supposed to be. You all should want it to be that way (if you're working) in D.C., too, because that's how you protect the future.

How do you stay optimistic?

I live in a place where there's wild rice everywhere, where you can still drink the water from the lakes. There are all kinds of cool beings out there in the world. My grandchildren all ride horses, and I grow hemp. I live in the world that we're making, and that's where I'm going to stay. I'm going to keep making that world. That's how we stay grounded.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Want more news about the \$130 billion tribal economy?