

President's Message

April 8, 2015

This past week I was asked to make the keynote dinner address at the I DO BUSINESS National Summit & Trade Show 2015. The conference theme this year was *"Strategies for Aboriginal Success."* I wish to thank the organizers for their kind invitation. I spoke on the topic of *"What is Procurement & Why it is important for business?"* This is a hot topic much discussed in Metis business circles.

In Winnipeg, at the recent MEDS III Economic Development Roundtable and the subsequent MEDS III Symposium there were common themes about Metis business needs including access to capital, building human resources, and procurement. A good procurement policy for both governments and industry will ensure necessary equipment, supplies and services can and will be provided by Metis businesses. Doing so will make everyone a winner. The province is a winner with the increased taxes, purchases, and meeting economic and social objectives. Industry wins by getting Metis support and participation in successfully getting the job done.

I keep telling governments that if done right it would not cost the government one extra red cent to increase and strengthen Metis economic development. Governments need to use set-asides and hard targets, put procedures in place, and rules with teeth, to ensure departments are using Metis businesses in their budget planning and in making their purchases. Manitoba's expansion of the Red River Floodway was a great example of this thinking. Metis construction companies on the floodway were successful in winning bids and successfully completing the work on budget and on time.

On the other hand, the current version of Manitoba's Aboriginal Procurement Initiative (API) is weak. There is no enforceable requirement of having direct negotiated contracts with Metis businesses or in giving points in tenders to project bidders to ensure Metis business participation. Also, which doesn't make much sense, the Minister responsible for the API has no way of enforcing Metis or other Aboriginal Procurement on the other Ministers and their departments. Unfortunately, using the regular bidding process, the government message is telling companies that there is no need for including the Metis.

One example how a procurement approach by government has not worked is in provincial housing. As you will recall, the MMF used to manage much of the rural housing portfolio. When we returned management to the province, we provided some good advice that was promptly ignored. When getting contractors for housing work we had kept the tenders to a manageable size that recognized the contractors' abilities for bonding and getting loans. The current approach by government to lump work together and bundle projects into large tender packages, is effectively locking the Metis out of the bidding and running dozens into bankruptcy.

Procurement is good for business. A good procurement policy provides leverage for negotiations. It's a win-win scenario. It is an unequalled opportunity to build strong relationships along with building a strong Metis community. Working together brings key benefits to industry such as increasing the labour pool, building supply chains, gaining access to Metis traditional lands and resources, and learning from the local experience of our companies and employees. The Metis gain from training, employment and jobs, development and growth, and revenue.

Procurement is an important tool to economic development. Unfortunately there has not been fast or enough change by government to ensure procurement is properly and effectively used. We need to push this harder. We believe industry is moving in the right direction. They want to be partners with the Metis despite little encouragement from the federal and provincial governments. The Metis are not asking for charity. This is not a hand out. Nor is it only a hand up. It is a handshake! We are looking for partnerships. Together we can do business.

Upon closing, I offer my prayers for our friends, family, and veterans who have passed on and my condolences to those who have lost a loved one. My hopes are with those who are sick or shut in. I also offer my best wishes to all.

Believe in Yourself – Believe in Metis

Meeqwetch!