

Le Metis President's Message

The Manitoba Métis are Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation and the Founders of Manitoba. To some these may be bold words yet they are held up for all to see as written in our histories, in our laws, and in our hearts. We are recognized as an Aboriginal People protected by Canada's Constitution, and, using the language of international rights, we are affirmed as an Indigenous People.

The Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) is the self-government representative of the Métis Nation's Manitoba Métis Community. While echoing a lower court in the Goodon decision, the MMF's standing as our people's representative for our rights and interests has been recognized by the Supreme Court in our MMF Land Claim case. No one can question our rightful place in Canadian society.

Many of you will read this while participating at our Annual General Assembly (AGA). Along with regular elections, local meetings, regional assemblies, and ongoing consultations and committees, the AGA is critically important to our Métis democracy. Our Métis government is both deliberative and participatory. These are rare traits in any government but our traditional democratic structure ensures all important dialogue and direct participation of our people.

The AGA is an unequalled opportunity to receive reports, discuss the issues, and provide direction through questions and comment on the microphone, as well as through the debating and voting on the resolutions that are brought to the floor. This year there are no constitutional amendment resolutions to be addressed by the delegates but I would expect the delegates to bring one or more resolutions forward during the AGA weekend.

The buzz at this year's AGA without a doubt will include next month's federal election. As I said before, the MMF website will have information concerning the political campaign platforms of the major parties, their Métis impacts, and their Métis-specific commitments. It is a very tight race and the Métis ballot can determine the outcome of the election results. For the federal parties this will feel like the perfect storm.

As I already reported here, the MMF and Métis National Council (MNC) sent questions to the party leaders asking how they would address major Métis concerns. We await answers. As taxpayers we pay hundreds of millions of dollars annually. We have a right to know how our taxes are spent and expect funding for health and wellness, education and training, and economic development, among others, will come back to us for our programs and services that meet our community's needs and build our children's futures.

In all elections we need your help. Yet, voting in this federal election is particularly crucial. Your vote may be the one that makes the difference on which party forms the next government. I am not asking you to vote for any particular party, nor am I telling you how to vote. What I am asking is that you come out and vote. Take five or fifteen minutes, or whatever it takes, to put

your “x” on the ballot. Show the federal parties they must listen to you. Stand up and be counted.

Among other topics sure to be discussed at our AGA will be status of the MMF Land Claim, the impacts of racism and the roles of education and the news media, the Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) impacts on our culture, territory and economy. The Duty to Consult is a discussion which will direct priorities and help ensure the Métis fully receive the economic benefits from government and corporate development of our natural resources and our traditional lands.

Another hot topic will be Métis harvesting. We have constitutional rights to harvest in our traditional lands found throughout the province. Our Elders have told us that with these rights come responsibilities. Conservation and wise use of fish and wildlife, and their habitats is critical. Since signing our 2012 agreement we have been patient and have been attempting to work with Manitoba as they have a constitutional obligation to manage the same resources.

We are expecting an AGA announcement on expanding the boundaries of the Métis Recognized Harvesting Zone. I have spoken with Premier Selinger as well as his Conservation and Water Stewardship Minister, Tom Nevaakshonoff, and his Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Gord Mackintosh. I look forward to this announcement whether as a joint endeavor or as MMF taking the next steps on our own. If the MMF goes it alone, there will likely be legal and political implications.

We are always open to continuing partnerships, but we will not stand by and watch while our people and our harvesters are insulted. We will stand united. The law is going our way and the MMF has set a new direction. Governments and industries must recognize Métis rights. Recognize our rights or we will do it another way. One way or another it is coming. We will be harvesting outside the temporary boundaries. We will be backing our Métis Law abiding harvesters.

Nothing that we have has been given to us. We have struggled for everything we have. It has always been an uphill climb since the early days of the Battle of Seven Oaks, the Sayer Trial, and the Red River Resistance through today’s Court Decisions that reaffirm our claims and rights. As I have also said recently, there are lots of moving parts and to resolve these often take time. Together, united, we will overcome the challenges thrown onto our path to success.

I offer my prayers for our friends, family members, 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 offer my best wishes to all our Métis Citizens and their families and friends.

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