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President's Message

Winnipeg, also once known as the Red River Settlement, is the Birthplace of the Métis Nation and the Heart of the Métis Nation Homeland. The Métis Nation is Manitoba's largest Indigenous People by both population and by the extent of our traditional territory. The Métis are the Founders of Manitoba and Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation. We stand as both proud Métis and proud Canadians.

As Canada's Partner, our Citizens helped build and protect our country and our way of life. What does partnership mean? What is a partner? We all can agree that partners have roles, rights, and responsibilities to the partnership and to each other. In a partnership there must be mutual accountability, accommodation and respect. This will be true in a successful business, lasting marriage, and, as in our anthem: the True North strong and free!

There is the standard dictionary meaning: a partner is a person who takes part in an undertaking with another or others with shared risks and profits. As a Treaty, this is the constitutional pact the Manitoba Metis entered when we became Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation and when our Ancestors agreed to put down their arms and allowed our traditional territory to become a part of Canada.

The concept of partner comes from an old Middle English word "parcener" which means both partner and joint heir. I like this idea of joint heir. An heir is someone who shares with another the right to inherit something. In this case we, the Métis, Manitobans, and indeed, all Canadians inherit the vision of Métis Leader Louis Riel, the Métis Bill of Rights, and the fruits the Métis Provisional Government.

Partners don't always do justice to one another, although they should. Sometimes a third party is necessary to bring the partners back together to deal with an issue. As you will recall, in 2013, after 32 years of legal battles, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) vindicated our people's 143-year-old struggle for justice. The SCC reaffirmed that Section 31 of the *Manitoba Act 1870* was to set aside 1.4 million acres of land for 7,000 Metis children. This was a promise from one partner to another that was not kept.

This constitutional obligation was to give the children a head start over the expected influx of settlers from the east. But the Métis were marginalized. The Court acknowledged this promise was frustrated by persistent inattention, negligence, repeated mistakes, delays, and inaction by Canada, and held that this solemn promise was not implemented "in accordance with the honour of the Crown."

We are currently in discussions with Canada as to taking the next steps forward to renew the partnership between the Métis and other Canadians for meaningful reconciliation and mutual respect. It is our objective to enter negotiations with Canada to reach a comprehensive land claims agreement that will address this outstanding constitutional grievance. It is a commitment of the Liberal Government that negotiations begin immediately.

As one, but perhaps the best, example of Canadian spirit, the Métis have gone to battle both here in our Homeland and abroad in other countries to protect democracy and human rights. Our veterans and their families made great sacrifices. Unfortunately, as an example of one partner insulting another: when many Métis came home they did not receive the veteran supports and respect given to others upon their return. This has still to be addressed.

Our Métis Citizens are hardworking taxpayers. We understand the importance of our tax contributions in continuing to build our province and our country. As one person said: it is the price of a civilized society. I have said many times at our public events and assemblies that the tax collector can easily find us when it is time to pay our taxes. Yet it is apparently difficult to find us and give us back our fair share of tax revenues for our Métis health, education, cultural, social economic and business development, and other self-government priorities.

Getting our share of tax revenue: this is not charity; this is not a handout; this is our right as a recognized equal. We have the right to decide within the partnership which priorities are important and how they will be met. Being self-determining, receiving our share of tax and resource royalty revenues; fully and properly consulted by the Crown; and, being an equal in Crown decision-making: that is true partnership between Partners in Confederation.

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.

Meeqwetch,