

President's Message

July 14, 2016

Friday March 8, 2013 is a day that will be forever known as a new beginning for the Métis People.

The Manitoba Métis Land Claim had languished on a shelf for a number of years before I began my first term as President of the Manitoba Metis Federation. When I became President in 1997, your Métis made a commitment to revitalize our Manitoba Metis Federation Land Claim. One of the first things I did as President was to make our Land Claim truly a claim of the People. Instead of putting my name on the Land Claim as *Chartrand vs Canada*, I put the land claim in the name of our people. The Land Claim became the *Manitoba Metis Federation vs Canada* land claim. As the representative government of the Métis of Manitoba, the Manitoba Metis Federation by this one action breathed new and necessary life into our nearly hundred and twenty year old claim.

The Manitoba Métis Land Claim slowly made its way through the Queen's Bench, the Court of Appeal and finally to the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) in March 2013 where the Court accepted the Manitoba Metis Federation's right to govern and acknowledged it as the body that represents the Manitoba Métis in this collective claim against the Crown.

Also on that historic day, the SCC said the Federal Government had not kept its word and broke a solemn promise. The Court recognized the injustice committed against the Métis, spoke the truth of our history, and vindicated our People. For decades, together we fought to protect our land rights in the political and legal arenas. After more than 100 years of our People's struggles, our Métis victory made it clear this was the time to right past wrongs.

This battle we led to victory for the Métis of Manitoba took sacrifice, persistent hard work and \$5.6 million dollars. The Federal Government did its best to bankrupt us. In fact when I first became President, the MMF was over \$300,000 in debt on the Land Claim file.

With clear vision, persuasion and strong management, your Métis Government, with your support, were able to bring the MMF back into the black. We raised the necessary funds to pay the lawyers who fought alongside us as we worked to right this historic wrong. Along the way, the MMF also grew. Today it is the democratic, self-governing body representing Manitoba's Métis people and employs nearly 750 people in 7 regions province wide.

At the time of the 2013 Supreme Court Decision, I said it will have the biggest impact on the Métis People since the Battle of Batoche. We are a Nation with a history and rights that are often ignored - but no longer. Our time has come!

After our historic win, your Métis Government secured commitments from both the Liberal and NDP parties to support the settlement of the Manitoba Métis Land Claim. We were even able to secure a commitment on video from Justin Trudeau - who wasn't Prime Minister at that time. This commitment was shown to the Métis Citizens at the 2013 Annual General Assembly.

Also during this Assembly, we asked the Métis Citizens what should be done with any settlement from the Land Claim once it has been negotiated. The unanimous response we received stands as one of the greatest moments of my life. To see our Métis Citizens - many who are the working poor - stand together and say they want whatever we win to be placed in trust for the benefit of our children and their children and future generations gave me great pride. This wisdom of our leaders and our people will ensure our Métis children will finally get the head start that was promised over a century ago.

Again in 2015 when the writ was dropped for the Federal Election, I met face to face with Justin Trudeau to remind him of his commitment to the Métis. Mr. Trudeau again recommitted to settling this land claim in a

letter written to me and in the election campaign literature. Immediately after winning the 2015 Federal Election, the new Prime Minister - Justin Trudeau - reached out to us to begin the process of settling this outstanding Land Claim.

The Métis are Canada's negotiating partners in Confederation. The Federal Government was the other partner - and they left the table. Now, with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on May 27th, the Government is coming back to the negotiating table.

We are committed to pursuing the best opportunities for our people today and for future generations. After years of struggle, your Métis Government is preparing to negotiate on your behalf the settlement of the collective claim of Manitoba's Métis Community. Together, we will stand and protect our rights and interests in the negotiations to come. This has been called the unfinished business of Confederation. It is now time for the partners to work together to finish this equitably and honourably.

We have begun undertaking sessions across the province to inform our Métis Citizens of our steps in developing a modern day treaty with Canada. As of my writing this message, we have already consulted Métis Citizens in Churchill, Duck Bay, Camperville, and surrounding areas. We are meeting with our Métis Citizens all summer long. Visit our website at www.mmf.mb.ca for more information on our Land Claim Consultations. Also tune into Metis Hour x2 for my weekly report. Here you will also find information on what your Métis Government is doing in developing the Framework Agreement to settle our Land Claim.

As your President, I offer my thoughts and prayers for those who are shut-in or are having difficult times through failing health, sickness or loss. May you find company, encouragement, and help through your connections with family, friends and community. I wish you the best as you enjoy these warm summer days.

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