

## **President's Message**

*May 2, 2017*

This past weekend we were proud to host the Métis National Council Annual General Assembly. On Friday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, an election for National President took place. Two candidates were put forward by the governing members for consideration – Clément Chartier, who was the incumbent, and Bev New, Regional Director for the Métis Nation Alberta. It was a spirited contest but in the end, Clément Chartier was re-elected by a good majority.

Personally, I am pleased with the outcome of our election. We are advancing as a Métis Nation and President Chartier has been an important player in many of these advancements. He has a very positive working relationship with all our governing members, and he has an excellent working relationship with the federal government and our Prime Minister. With this forward momentum, it would have been ill-advised for us to change our Captain. Doing so would have slowed our forward movement with the federal government. Relationships and trust would have to be built between new leadership and the federal government and its bureaucracy. To make an unnecessary change at this time could very well have jeopardized some of our hard-earned progress, at the very least, it would have slowed our momentum down. We cannot afford to do this – as the saying goes, we make hay while the sun is shining.

With recent good news and favourable rulings over the past couple of years, we have seen a much greater interest in people seeking Citizenship. While on the surface this is a great thing to see - our people coming out from under the darkness of the past and declaring their identity as Métis - it is also revealing a lack of understanding held by groups in Canada regarding who exactly the Métis are. The Métis are a western people, born on the Prairies, in the Red River Valley. While we are descendent from First Nations Mothers and European Fathers, we are not simply a 'mixed blood' people. We are a people with a national identity, culture, traditions and language that pre-exist Canada. For hundreds of years we have roamed the Prairies from the Great Lakes in the East to the Rockies in the West, North to the Arctic Circle and as far South as the Midwest of the United States.

There are groups like CAP – the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples – claiming they represent the Métis here in the West. Let me be clear. Such groups do not. The Métis Nation is represented by the Métis National Council and its five governing members. There are other groups springing up and people coming forward claiming they are Métis simply because they happen to find an ancestor that has some Aboriginal blood. As I said before, simply having Aboriginal blood in your family tree does not automatically make you a Métis. If that were the case, we could say the children of Inuit and Chinese parents are Métis- that is ridiculous! Just because a person is of mixed ancestry, it does not mean they have a connection to the historic Métis Nation.

As our Constitution outlines and the federally recognized Powley test affirms, to be recognized as Métis, there are specific criteria that has to be met including an ancestral connection to the historic Métis Nation and contemporary community acceptance. While self-identification is an important first step in proving your Métis identity, it is not the only criteria that must be met.

Those who seek to confuse the issue of Métis identity are simply looking to gain access to the fruits of our difficult labour and hard earned legal victories. As a Nation, we must be vigilant and protect what is rightfully ours. Unity in our Métis Nation is crucial. We must be cohesive in our vision and our approach. We cannot run the risk of these 'Johnny-come-latelys' using ill-formed and uninformed arguments to confuse and cause unnecessary worry. We must stand united on our understanding and definition of who is a Citizen of the Métis Nation. For the Manitoba Métis Federation, this definition is clearly outlined in our Constitution. I encourage you to review this. If you have questions, please contact our Citizenship Office for answers.

We must also not allow ourselves to become distracted by silly or unimportant differences of opinion on matters of lesser importance. Our provincial and national governance structures permit healthy, lively and meaningful debate and discussion on all matters of importance to the Métis Nation. These discussions are encouraged and strongly defended by our democratic processes. However, we must not allow our internal growth and refinements to be used against us in the public forum. When we face outwards, negotiating with our national partner, or defending ourselves against those who would seek to divide us, we must remain unified with our eyes and minds fixed on the goals and visions we have set as the Métis Nation. It is together we are the strongest. It is only in this togetherness can we accomplish and secure for our Citizens and our Métis Nation that which was stolen from us in the past. Together we will create that lasting place promised to us back when we negotiated the creation of Manitoba and its Confederation with Canada.

In closing, I wish to send my thoughts and prayers to those of you who have been facing difficulties and challenges with your health, or in your families. I encourage you to stand together. The unity and strength we need as a Nation begins right at home, among family and friends. Those of you who have more, I encourage you to share with those who have less. The Métis have long been known as the 'Society of Generous Ones' – let this not become a relic of our history. Let it remain as a beacon of strength as we move forward together. Finally, I invite you to engage with your Métis Government. Get involved with your Local and in your Region. We need you. We need your ideas, your energy and your perspectives. I look forward to seeing you as I travel throughout our Province this coming Summer and Fall. I wish each and every one of you health and success.

Meeqwetch,