

President's Message
May 31, 2017

Recently I spoke at the annual Vision Quest Conference held at the RBC Convention Centre here in Winnipeg. For the last 20 years, Vision Quest has been bringing people together to discuss and promote Aboriginal Business, Community and Economic Development. With recent renewals in our relationships as Indigenous peoples and the federal government, we are realizing new opportunities to develop our respective Nations and Peoples. However, there are still areas that need focus and change.

Take procurement for example. Procurement can be defined as the process of selecting vendors – which are businesses or people who can provide a good or service; establishing terms regarding paying for that good or service; and negotiating the contracts for providing those goods or services.

Governments often promise more opportunity to our Métis businesses, but they then turn around and set the criteria in such a way that we cannot take advantage of the opportunities they promise us. This is no more than lip service designed to try and keep us quiet. If governments truly meant what they say, they would do more to ensure we can actually participate on a level playing field when bidding for work in our towns and villages.

Current government procurement processes make it near impossible for Métis businesses to successfully bid on and secure government contracts. For example, the province is currently building a large number of housing units on a reserve. According to their procurement process, any companies bidding on this contract, including any Indigenous business, they must prove that they can build all 150 units. What Indigenous company can do that here in Manitoba? There aren't too many! How is that fair to those smaller, solid and capable Métis businesses? These businesses, because they are smaller, cannot carry the costs of purchasing the necessary building materials, permits and salaries to pay the workers to build all 150 units. Getting bonding and insurance to operate at such a scale can also be a difficult challenge to overcome. Why can't the government break the project in to smaller, more manageable pieces so Indigenous businesses can compete for this work?

This small change in the procurement process can provide much needed income, training and support to our Citizens. I have often said this, and it bears repeating, when the person is strengthened, the family is strengthened. When the family is strengthened, the community is strengthened. When the community is strengthened, the Nation is strong!

By truly giving our smaller Métis businesses the opportunity to bid on these types of contracts, governments are only then truly investing in our communities. When our Métis businesses land these contracts, they require skilled labour. This gives our citizens, whether women, men, or youth, the opportunity to build skills in trades. It also gives our experienced workers stabilized income in which they can build a solid foundation for their families. Employment means our Citizens have money to spend and invest in their homes and villages. This strengthens our economy. When the economy begins to thrive, we are able to invest more strategically to ensure a solid economic foundation for years to come.

Another way in which we can help support and build up Métis business is by investing in Métis business. We must support our local Métis businesses. Instead of driving a few miles or hours to next urban centre, why not invest those dollars you spend in fuel by buying locally? When you invest locally, it gives the local business an opportunity to grow and bring in more product or services that directly benefit your Métis neighbours!

Then there are partnership opportunities that can be realized between Indigenous businesses. Why not work together to become a bigger player? Divided and on our own we will never land those big contracts. Together, supporting one another and working together, we can become unstoppable! Métis Citizens must support Métis business. Métis business must support other Métis businesses. If there are no Métis business to support or partner with, look for another Indigenous business to support and partner with. It is time for us to stop looking to beef up other businesses bottom lines and start investing in the bottom lines of our Métis businesses and the businesses of our Indigenous cousins.

As the old saying goes “United we stand, divided we fall.” Let us stand together, building each other up and supporting one another.

In closing I wish to send my thoughts and prayers to those of us who have been given reason to grieve, or who are not well. Remember one another, share in the good and difficult times. I send my best wishes to each and every one of you. Thank you for your support and your feedback to your Métis government. It is always good to hear from you.

Believe in yourself – Believe in Métis!

Meeqwetch,