

President's Message – March 21

Welcome to Spring! This is such a beautiful season. With it comes more sunshine, warmer days and a rejuvenation of the spirit. Over the past couple of weeks, I have had the pleasure to participate in community consultations around child and family services legislation reform. We heard a lot of important feedback from many who have lived or are living within the system. It became even more clear in these consultations that now is the time for reform. I am thankful to Minister Scott Fielding for his work in this area.

On Monday, March 19, Minister Fielding presented a bill which will recognize customary care in legislation. This is so important. Metis Citizens have already been engaging, in an unofficial capacity, in these practices for many, many years. This bill recognizes the importance of keeping children and families together, within their home communities. It also demonstrates a greater respect for our heritage and culture. I commend Minister Fielding for his commitment to this work, for hearing the voices of our Citizens, and for translating those voices into change. I hope that the rest of the legislative assembly will support this bill as it could make a meaningful impact for our children, families and their futures. This change marks the beginning of recognition for the Metis Government by the Province of Manitoba. We certainly aren't all the way there with them in terms of respect, but we are working to get there and the relationship is certainly better than it once was.

I'm currently in Ottawa for a variety of meetings. Earlier this week the Metis National Council held its Board of Governors meeting. On Monday, we had our semi-annual permanent bilateral mechanism meeting of 2018. This meeting was an opportunity for us to bring the priorities of the Metis Nation forward to Canada. I personally spoke to a number of key areas including veterans and the need to better support them, housing and the job and wage opportunities available now, skills, employment and training and the need to create more opportunities. Additionally, I spoke to early learning child care and the need to invest in our children, as well as child and family services and the need to provide preventative supports to children and families. I spoke about post-secondary education and the opportunity to use our knowledge and skills to prepare Metis Citizens for professional opportunities and the trades, as well as economic development and the need to provide equitable opportunities for the Metis Nation. A full report of the meeting will be available in the next issue of Grassroots News.

I'm also attending a Metis Nation Education Conference as we speak. Topics include a Metis Nation education strategy, developing Metis Nation Centres of Excellence, early learning resource development and training and post-secondary education. It's also an opportunity for our Metis Government to showcase some of the truly excellent work we are doing, and to learn from our counterparts across Western Canada. We are looking for ways for the Metis Nation to collaborate more and offer Metis-specific opportunities across the Nation.

Next week we will host the Metis National Council Child and Family Services Summit. Delegates from across western Canada will come together to share issues and areas of improvement for the child welfare system on a national, Metis-specific scale. Ministers from Canada and

Manitoba will be in attendance to hear these important discussions. I want to thank all those who have prayed for change. Your tears and your prayers will not be for nothing. Government's commitment to the Metis Nation is beginning to solidify itself. We will keep this momentum going.

Finally, I wish to send my prayers and thoughts to those of our Metis Citizens who are in mourning and grief. May you be heartened by the presence and love of family and friends. Those of you who are sick and shut-in, I also send my thoughts and prayers. Remember one another and continue to care for each other as you already do. When you are out harvesting your spring goose, I encourage you to remember our Elders. Share your bounty and blessing.

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