

President's Message – May 30

On May 23, 2018, as your Métis National Council (MNC) Vice-President, I participated and took a lead role in a series of Canadian Chamber of Commerce events in support of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project. Afterwards, I was able to get our Métis Nation message out on national media such as the CBC Program On the Money and CTV Power Play. I also co-signed a joint open letter with Mr. Perrin Beatty, President and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, published this week in the Ottawa Hill Times.

The open letter can be found on our MNC website at www.MetisNation.ca, while the interviews are on the network websites. I suggest you visit the sites. The Métis Nation is the largest Indigenous population in western Canada and, when we move together, we can have a big impact on political decision-making across the country. It is important that we, as the Métis Nation, share our perspectives and ensure that both the environment and economy are considered and balanced in any decision-making towards a sustainable future.

The Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project will have direct and indirect benefits of construction, operation, and additional revenues for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples. Our most westerly Métis Nation Governing Members, situated along the path of the project in Alberta and British Columbia, have already signed mutual benefits agreements to provide revenues and other opportunities.

On this, and other natural resource development projects, it is critical that our communities reap the benefits and are compensated for the costs of the impacts on our Aboriginal rights and traditional economies. For example, here in Manitoba, we entered into agreement with Manitoba Hydro several years ago to address issues including transmission lines on our territories and interference with the exercise of our rights. It is unfortunate that the province of Manitoba has directed Hydro not to proceed with our agreement. As a result, we will be going to court in the coming days.

In many of our communities across the Métis Nation Homeland, our Citizens welcome opportunities from projects that support training, jobs, and business. Many of our communities have high unemployment. Our traditional economies of forestry and fishing have declined over the years. Other industries, such as fur trapping, have crashed and in many areas are now virtually non-existent. Our people are concerned about the short and long-term impacts.

The kind of activist accountable for the crash of our traditional fur industry is now trying to bring an end to the Trans Mountain Expansion Project. While doing their anti-fur demonstrations throughout North America and Europe, such individuals did not consider the impact of the loss of the fur industry on Indigenous peoples. Now, some oppose the pipeline without considering its impacts for us. The Métis don't need to be protected from the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project. We are a well-educated and hard working people. We can handle ourselves.

Sustainable development requires responsible decision-making. This includes following environmental assessment processes, respecting outcomes, and meeting the requirements set out by regulators and, if necessary, go to the courts. It also means considering future generations. Getting children a good education and jobs for their parents, lifting our people out of poverty and enjoying higher living standards, ensuring good personal and community health, and promoting environmental initiatives including dealing with climate change, all require investments.

Governments need money to make these investments. Governments need taxes to raise money. Taxes are raised through permits, fees, royalties, and income taxes. All these require a strong economy. A strong economy, which includes the search, development, and transmission of energy including pipelines, is the foundation for supporting both our economic and environmental investments. To transition to other cleaner energy sources, we also need to make use of the resources we currently have to work with today.

Hopefully common sense will prevail. We know we are facing a climate challenge and our use of oil is part of this challenge. The Manitoba Metis Federation, through the MNC, participated in developing the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. This Framework is designed to meet emissions reduction targets, grow the economy, and build our resilience to the world's changing climate. Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada were consulted and we continue to be part of working groups to implement the plan.

When it comes to natural resource development, there will be both short-term and long-term benefits and costs. In any and all projects, ecological concerns must be addressed and our environmental responsibilities must be taken seriously. Mitigation and monitoring, consultation and accommodation with all Indigenous peoples, including the Métis Nation, are essential in moving forward. Investments in clean energy and clean growth must also continue to be made. Together we must take the next bold steps into the future for the benefit of our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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