



New Brunswick First Nations pledge unity in face of Higgs' divide-and-conquer tactics

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FREDERICTON - Leaders from the First Nations in New Brunswick emerged from joint meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday deeply unified to work together for the collective good.

These meetings aligned the Mi'gmaq and Wolastoqey nations in negotiations with the provincial government in areas like natural resource development, taxation and approach to discussions around title.

"Our message for the Premier is simple: you will not divide and conquer us," said Chief George Ginnish of Natoaganeg, speaking on behalf of Mi'gmaw'e'l Tplu'taqnn. "We all want what is in the best interests of our community members. We have reaffirmed our commitment to work together to ensure the government does not pit us against each other. We feel it is important to ensure the government sees us not as stakeholders but as rightful partners at the table. "

First Nations communities, like many New Brunswickers, are struggling to cope with the rising price of fuel, food, and the crumbling state of healthcare in the province.

"This government must be reminded again and again that some of the poorest postal codes in Canada are First Nations communities in New Brunswick. The province has to learn to work with us to address these issues.. We all live in this province," Ginnish added.

Compounding this pressure is the looming expiry of tax-sharing agreements. The Higgs government unilaterally cancelled these agreements without any plan to replace the critical funding they provide to First Nations.

Those agreements offset chronically underfunded programs like housing, healthcare, social assistance and education needs in First Nation communities.

"We need a new fiscal relationship with the provincial government. This paternalistic negotiation process has been a blatant attempt to force impoverished communities into a corner and squeeze us hard enough to take a poor deal out of desperation," said Chief Allan Polchies Jr. of Sitansisk on behalf of the Wolastoqey Nation.

"This attempt at economic genocide is unacceptable and must be stopped in its tracks by anyone brave enough to intervene on this premier's personal pet peeve and overwhelming fascination against my people," Polchies continued.

First Nations leaders met with the premier, ministers and government officials, and outlined how they want to be consulted and how negotiations should be approached for the common good. The province continues to forge ahead with what they think is best for the First Nations people in this province.

“As other minority groups like the Acadians have recently experienced, New Brunswick’s premier is blinded by his own narrow worldview. Our leaders have acted bravely in response to the reductive and toxic tactics Higgs has deployed. The Premier needs a new approach to negotiation. The social and economic advancement of this province depends on it,” said Kenneth Francis, Speaker for Kopit Lodge.

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Media contact:

Andrew Chase
Communications Coordinator, MTI
andrewchase@migmawel.org

Logan Perley
Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick
logan.perley@wolastoqey.ca

Attached photo cutline:

First Nations leaders gathered for meetings in Fredericton on Tuesday. Photographed from left to right are, back row: Chief Tim Paul of Wotstak; Chief Ross Perley of Neqotkuk; Chief Gabriel Atwin of Bilijk, Chief Vince Leblanc of Tjipogtotjg; Chief Allan Polchies Jr. of Sitansisk; Chief Ken Barlow of L’nui Menikuk and Chief Alvery Paul of Esgenoôpetitj.

In the front row are: Chief Terry Richardson of Pabineau; Chief Shelley Sabattis of Welamukotuk; Chief Sasha Labillois of Ugpi’ganjig; Chief Patricia Bernard of Matawaskiye and Elder Gordon Labillois of Ugpi’ganjig.

Not pictured but also attending the meeting were Chief Aaron Sock of Elsipogtog; Chief Bill Ward of Metepenagiag; Chief Rebecca Knockwood of Amlamgog; and Chief George Ginnish of Natoaganeg.