



ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA CHIEFS SECRETARIAT INC.

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September 24, 2012

Colin Craig
Winnipeg Sun

Via email: ccraig@taxpayer.com

Dear Sir;

RE: GRASSROOTS REJOICE, CHIEFS GRUMBLE; Winnipeg Sun, September 22, 2012

In the months following the federal Conservative majority government I have observed a steady and strategically empowered 'taxpayer rhetoric', perpetuated by individuals such as yourself in the Saturday, September 22, 2012 edition of the Winnipeg Sun. I normally avoid paying too much attention to individual 'opinions' because I have the difficult task of working in the complex realities we live with as First Nations people in the Canadian idea.

The opinions you are spreading in the media are misinformed, ignorant of fact, and demonstrate the careful manipulation of public perception that the federal government is using to mislead and misinform the public. As such, the empowerment of your message in the black and white pages of popular media is really a demonstration of how you are being utilized as a pawn in the propaganda efforts of the conservative government agenda. It is the careful manipulation of misinformation that has allowed federal (and to a lesser extent provincial) governments to continue denying First Nations people basic human rights to a quality of life that so many enjoy in Canada. Much worse however, is how misinformed public perception is now being used as political leverage to push through legislation that further entrenches misunderstanding and division. To support my observation, you need look no further than the fact that First Nations people do not have a voice to promote a balanced perspective in popular media outlets like the Winnipeg Sun.

It is apparent that you purport to represent a community of persons known as the "Canadian Taxpayers Federation" (CTF). As such, I believe that in some respects, you represent all of us, because we all pay taxes, First Nations and non-first nations alike. As such, if you are my leader when it comes to my taxes, I have to hold you accountable to speaking from an objective and informed platform. Without objectivity and knowledge as the foundation of your opinions, you will never gain legitimacy with anyone from our First Nations communities. My people hold me to standards of informed objectivity from many perspectives and as such, I have no problem applying the same criteria to those who purport to represent leadership perspectives.

Clearly from what you have shared, you have a long way to go when it comes to understanding the complexities of the social and fiscal realities of First Nations people attempting to operate within fiscal policies of settler society governments. I say this with no disrespect to your investment to become an educated and experienced person in universities and various posts in government.

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The economies that we have created (giving way to taxable outputs) over the past several generations (particularly here in the settled lands of treaties 1 through 11), are built on the foundations of treaties made with its indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples I refer to are today's First Nations people, living throughout Canada and the world and represented by Chiefs and Councils. To a lesser extent, the political territorial organizations (PTOs) created in recent times such as the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) are also safeguards to the inherent and treaty agreements made with settlers. More fundamental to the treaties however are the inherent rights of our people that preceded treaty and were never negotiated with any governments. It is the inherent rights of indigenous people that are the true source of legitimate authority or governance in this part of the world. Successive provincial and federal governments know this truth, and it is through the careful manipulation of 'taxpayer' dollars and people that they control and limit the repatriation of indigenous governments here in Canada.

There are many lucrative economies that spin-off the hardships of our people. As a result, it is practical for governments to continue implementing systems and processes to assure our continued poverty and hardship. We have grown to characterize this effort on the part of governments as "*the cost of status quo*". The primary vehicle for processes and systems of *status quo* is the *Indian Act*, which for the past 140 years has preserved our poverty through the utilization of programs and services that mimic treaty responsibilities. The *Indian Act* is also the tool that is being used to funnel taxpayer dollars to our communities in the form of contribution funding agreements (CFA's) or other financial instruments that are equally crafty in their manipulation of public opinion.

The CFA's are wound so tight in red tape and reporting that they keep our communities in a constant state of reaction to deficit budgeting and fiscal crises. When funds are not expended exactly as prescribed within the discretion of a bureaucrat that does not live in the community, the issue of 'capacity' is raised and our people are characterized as not having adequate training or ability to expend the taxpayer dollar. The truth is however that even the best chartered financial managers in Canada often times cannot make community finances work in such a fiscally punitive and backwards environment. One only needs to look as far as the 'co-management' or 'third party management' schemes that keep some communities in receivership for decades to see the failure of the system.

The CFA's are also encumbered by reporting requirements that make it impossible to hide salaries to chiefs or councils. For many years now, the CFA's have included a requirement that the salaries of chiefs and councils be disclosed as schedules to the audits. Failure to report on mandatory components of the audits leads to instant and complete financial shut down of the

bands operations. In some communities, the CFA is the only source of income coming into the community. As such, to say that there is an issue with accountability and transparency warranting the implementation of new federal laws on accountability is completely without merit. As a taxpaying Canadian, you should be asking why the government is expending vast resources on this legislative exercise, when it should be focusing its efforts on helping every person in the Canadian idea reach basic standards of living and assuring access to safe drinking water, housing and adequate health services.

You might observe my comments and my own reliance on CFA's as somewhat of a paradox or even hypocritical. Let me assure you however that everything I do and say in my capacity as a leader is with the intent to break the inter-generational chains of poverty that continues to mislead the public and prevents our people from realizing our potential and the wealth of our lands.

Sincerely,

ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA CHIEFS



Derek J. Nepinak, LLB, B.A.(Hons.)
Grand Chief, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
Taxpayer