

Open letter to the Anishinabek Citizens

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I offered to write this letter to the people in our First Nations on behalf of the Restoration of Jurisdiction Department about the *Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement* for the people in our First Nations.

You should know that I retired as Grand Council Chief a year ago June after working on First Nation issues for 46 years. I have been asked to participate in the community meetings explaining the Agreement. It is a process I first started hearing Chiefs and Councils talking about more than 40 years ago. Most times, they

were complaining about the control the *Indian Act* has on our people from cradle to grave. Over two decades ago, the Chiefs directed the Anishinabek Nation to work on four areas as the foundation to restore governance and take back Jurisdiction. The four areas are Elections, Citizenship, Language and Culture, and the Management and Financial Operations of Government, which has to do with providing Band support services TO YOU.

I want to tell you upfront, if I did not believe in this I would not be championing this to you. I have not fought for our rights all of my adult life to take us down a treacherous path. Besides myself, I have family, fellow community members, and all of you, that I would never betray by promoting something if I did not believe would move us further down the path to taking more control of our lives.

I also say upfront that this does not have anything to do with Indian Affairs Inherent Right Framework Policy, nor does it have any impact on Aboriginal and Treaty Rights protected by Section 35 of the Constitution, Aboriginal and Treaty Rights on their own, and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was the INSPIRATION of Past and Present Leaders, the PERSPIRATION of working on this, and now the IMPLEMENTATION of the path forward.

Yes, there are those that believe this is not good for us. They are usually academics, consultants and critics—most of whom have never been on Band Council, never lived on a First Nation or ever been involved in operating anything on a First Nation. Armchair experts are everywhere, just look at social media. Yet you ask them what the alternatives or options



Patrick Wedaseh Madahbee, former Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief. – Photo by Laura Barrios

are and they have no idea. On the other hand, it is hypocritical to criticize people that are trying to improve the way we do business, when they themselves have done nothing but maintain the status quo of *Indian Act* Bands. This Agreement does not get us totally out of the *Indian Act*. It merely lays the foundation to build on.

There has been negotiated a process called the Intergovernmental Forum, which is unique to the Anishinabek Nation. This Intergovernmental Forum will establish a new government-to-government relationship on matters of concern to our First Nations.

This Agreement does not do away with the Federal Fiduciary Obligation of the Crown, nor does it impact our taxation exemption.

What is now possible is the following:

- Election reform: We can decide what the ideal length of the term of office is for Chief and Council. We can decide, if it is felt to be necessary, guidelines for who can run for office, to eliminate the nastiness of the election process, and determine the size of your government without any Indian Affairs involvement. I ask you: What bureaucrat dreamed up this nonsense of one Councillor for every 100 people, or developed a short two-year term to create instability in our Governments? That bureaucrat has likely never stepped foot on YOUR land.
- Citizenship: If we continue to operate with the *Indian Act* registration system, we are helping the government to get rid of us. It is outright genocide to do this. Only we know who belongs to our First Nations. We need a healthy discussion of good old common sense to make the call as to who belongs. We know our people.
- Language and Culture: It goes to the heart of our identity as Anishinabek people. I heard Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau say: "If you do not know your language and culture, you are just like ordinary Canadians." Why do you think he fought so hard for the French language and culture?
- Management and Financial Transparency and Accountability: This process provides an opportunity for YOU the citizens to help Councils set the priorities relevant to YOU. YOU need to be involved in looking at the budgeting of YOUR money for those priorities and then to assess the outcomes. This will allow you to see what is being spent by whom and if it has been spent wisely on your priorities. This all means better results. ACCOUNTABILITY and TRANSPARENCY.

For the First Nations that approve the *Anishinabek Nation Fiscal Agreement*, it provides for substantially more money for governance activities, seven-times more funding than we receive now under the *Indian Act*, to support the law-making authorities that come with the Governance Agreement. It will be an annual increase and the Anishinabek Nation Government will not keep any of it.

These opportunities only come along rarely, where we can change things. If not, we can't complain about outside control for another 152 years of the Canadian Government in our face. Beware the Trump-style attitude that is seeping northward. Sadly, not all of our citizens will have a say on this Governance Agreement as their First Nations leadership have not submitted a Band Council Resolution allowing a vote on the Governance Agreement. But, for those of us who do have the opportunity to change our future, we need to act now by supporting this governance process. Do not expect outside Governments to do it for YOU. YOU make the choice.

Miigwetch,

Patrick Wedaseh Madahbee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Wedaseh Madahbee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.