



ANISHINABEK NATION

To Anishinabek Nation Citizens,

As the newly appointed Commissioner on Governance for the Anishinabek Nation, I wanted to write to the citizens in our Anishinabek Nation First Nations to explore the future of Anishinaabe governance and what this could mean for the people in our communities.

As some of you may know, I retired as Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief in June 2018 after working on First Nation issues for 47 years. In most recent years, I was approached to participate in the community information sessions where my role was to explain what the proposed Anishinabek Nation Governance means and could mean for the future of Anishinabek communities. As the Commissioner on Governance, that role and dedication continue.

More than 40 years ago, I heard Chiefs and Councils talking about their frustrations and concerns about the control the *Indian Act* has on our people from cradle to grave.

Over two decades ago, the Chiefs directed the Anishinabek Nation secretariat, the Union of Ontario Indians, to work on four areas as the foundation to restore our own governance and take back our jurisdiction. The four areas are Leadership Selection, Citizenship, Language and Culture, and the Management and Financial Operations of Government, which has to do with providing Band support services to you, the people.

I want to tell you upfront that if I personally did not believe in this, I would not be championing this to you. I have not fought for our rights as Anishinaabek all of my adult life to now be taking us down a treacherous path. Besides myself, I have family, fellow community members, and all of you that I respect and care for, that I would never betray by advocating for something if I did not whole-heartedly believe it would move us further down the path to taking greater control of our own lives and restoring our jurisdiction and authority.

I also say upfront that this proposed Agreement 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, or and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. What I can say about this proposed Agreement is that it is the INSPIRATION of Past and Present Leaders, the PERSPIRATION of working on this, and now, the IMPLEMENTATION of the path forward.

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Yes, there are those that believe that 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— a quick look at social media will highlight that. Yet you ask them what the alternatives or options are to putting us on a greater path to self-determination and removing us from a government that cannot and should not have any say in how we govern and they have no idea. Silence. 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 proposed Agreement does not get us entirely out of the *Indian Act*, it merely lays the foundation to build upon.

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 proposed Agreement does not do away with the federal fiduciary obligation of the Crown, nor does it impact our taxation exemption.

What is now possible through the proposed Agreement 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 that is commonly encountered, and determine the size of your government *without* any Indian Affairs involvement or interjection. I ask you, what bureaucrat dreamt 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. Also, we have a system of governance and a process to select leaders that is not secret ballot and majority rules. Our Anishinabek Nation Head Getzit, Gordon Waindubence has shown us another authentic Anishinaabe way.
- Citizenship: If we continue to operate with the *Indian Act* registration system, we are helping the government to eliminate 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 – E'Dbendaagzijig. We know our people— Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe—we are One Anishinaabe Family.
- Language and Culture: It goes to the heart of our identity as Anishinabek people. I heard Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once 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? We need to continue to fight for the protection, preservation, and revitalization of our unique, rich, and beautiful language and culture. Anishinaabemowin holds tens of thousands of years of knowledge.

- **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 and by whom, and if it has been spent wisely on your priorities. This translates into better results. Increased accountability and transparency translate into increased trust and better relationships all around.

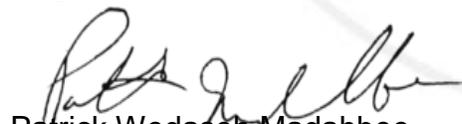
For the First Nations that approve the *Anishinabek Nation Fiscal Agreement*, it provides for substantially more money for governance-related activities— seven-times more funding than we receive now under the *Indian Act* for Band Support Funding. This increase sounds like a lot but remember that our First Nations governance under the Indian Act has been shamefully underfunded for decades.

The increased money fills that gap and recognizes that our First Nations will be exercising law-making translate authorities outlined in the proposed Governance Agreement. There will also be annual increases. No portion of First Nation funding goes to the collective body called the Anishinabek Nation Government or to any other body. What your First nation-specific offer is translate the amount your First Nation will get. Also, the funding is a grant. First Nations are able to use the money in whatever way you decide and none of it is returned.

Opportunities rarely come along where we can make truly impactful, meaningful changes. If we do not seize these opportunities, we cannot complain about outside control by Canada or another 154 years. Beware the Trump-style attitude that is seeping northward.

Sadly, not all of our citizens will have a say, as their First Nations leadership have not submitted a Band Council Resolution allowing a vote on the proposed Governance Agreement. However, for those of us who do have the opportunity to make a positive change for our future, we need to act now by learning about and supporting this governance process. Do not expect outside governments to do what is in your best interest. The power and choice are YOURS.

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Patrick Wedaseh Madahbee
Commissioner on Governance
Anishinabek Nation