

Speaking Notes

Chief Brian Francis/Chief Darlene Bernard

Public Information Meetings on Bill C-45

January 29 and 30

Various locations

Good Afternoon/ Good Evening

On behalf of the PEI Mi'kmaq Governments in Lennox Island and Abegweit, I want to thank everyone for attending this information meeting.

We are here today/tonight to discuss Bill C-45...what its changes will mean to Islanders and Canadians...as well as the entire approach by the Harper Government as it relates to Aboriginal Affairs in this country.

As the drastic changes enacted in Bill C-45 have been brought to public light, we have seen members of First Nations all across Canada stand up and express their bitter disappointment – not only with the changes, but also the consultation process – or lack thereof - that has occurred. The fear and disappointment is shared by all Canadians from coast to coast.

This bill has highlighted what Canadians have feared for a long time – a Harper Government with a majority – free to proceed with an approach that is cold-hearted, heavy-handed and one that is very much top-down without real consultation.

Consultation involves a discussion – two sides making suggestions, listening to the others ideas and working together to find a positive path forward. The Harper Government thinks consultation is them telling us what they are doing...and giving us no choice but to accept what is being shoved down our throats. As Canadians – it should not be a stretch or some kind of concession to have their Government participate in meaningful consultation when drastic changes are being discussed.

As a Mi'kmaq leader, I am the first to stand up and say that life as we know it on reserve is in need of change. The status quo is not a desirable goal for anyone – particularly for those of us who live it every day. But there is a way to achieve equity, fairness and decency...and that is to consult with those who are most impacted.

The Harper Government does not consult with Canadians. They don't want to hear dissenting opinion. They have no interest in good faith.

At its very roots, that is exactly what Idle No More is all about.

It is about fairness.

It is about respect.

It is about dignity.

It is about decency.

It is about honour.

With these public meetings over the next two days, we will try to share as much information as we have...we don't have all the answers to the questions you may ask...but we will try our best. I believe that is true consultation.

We will begin with an overview of Bill C-45, how the changes can and/or will impact First Nations and all Canadians. We will outline, to the best of our abilities, what First Nations Governments and communities in other parts of the country are doing....as well as what may be some options for us going forward.

This is an information meeting. Those in attendance who are looking for answers will be given the opportunity to ask questions...we will do our very best to provide answers. If we don't have the answers we will try our best to find out.

The reason we are here is because we are united against these changes and the manner in which they have being thrust upon us.

We share a desire to seek a fair and equitable process of consultation.

We share a desire to play a leading role in the development of policies needed to grow our communities and improve the lives of our citizens today and tomorrow.

With that, we will begin our meeting with an overview presentation from Don MacKenzie of MCPEI.

Thank you very much

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