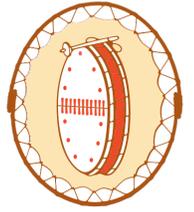




G. C. C. E. I.
est. 1974



C. N. G.
G. N. C.
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**SPEAKING NOTES
FOR
GRAND CHIEF DR. ABEL BOSUM
TO THE
VILLE DE MONTREAL-CREE NATION OF EEYOU ISTCHEE
COCKTAIL RECEPTION
[MAISON DES RÉGIONS, MONTRÉAL : FEBRUARY 26, 2020]**

WACHIYA, KWEY, GOOD EVENING, BONSOIR.

I am very pleased to be sharing this stage with Deputy Mayor Downey and would like to thank the City of Montreal for co-hosting this event with the Cree Nation Government. As Mr. Downey has described, there is a long and positive relationship between the Cree people and Montreal.

To read the media over the past several weeks would give us the impression that Indigenous Rights and the appetite of non-Indigenous society for resources are irreconcilable, that polarization is inevitable, and that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians are incapable of listening to one another. So perhaps we should remind ourselves that it doesn't have to be this way. Recent Cree history bears this out and shows that learning to listen to one another is the only way to bring down the barricades that separate us.

By 2002, the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee had been embroiled in two decades of bitter conflict with Quebec. The conflict was so intense because it arose from the existential threat posed by large-scale resource development to our traditional Cree way of life, based on hunting, fishing and trapping. We were forced to turn, time and again, to the courts, and to international organizations, to defend our rights.

The conflict became so intense that our relations with Quebec broke down completely. It was only with a change of government in Quebec in 2002, that the new Premier, Bernard Landry, and our Grand Chief Ted Moses were able to restart a dialogue and to reset our relationship. The result was the Agreement that has come to be called the Paix des Braves, and it marked a turning point in Cree-Quebec relations. It established a Nation-to-Nation partnership between the Cree and Quebec in the governance and development of our traditional territory of Eeyou Istchee.

Our relationship with Quebec has turned 180 degrees, from bitter conflict to real partnership. It all started with a conversation between two leaders who had the courage to really listen to each other. And this listening led them, together, to see a better way forward.

The stories of two little known, but very influential Crees also show the power of learning to listen. In 2003 Tommy Neeposh, of the Cree community of Mistissini, was a 90-year old family leader and master hunter, with no formal western education. Yet Tommy sat with an army of engineers and his fellow Cree hunters and had the audacity to suggest the construction of a two-kilometer transfer tunnel that would reduce the environmental impact of a major

hydroelectric project. Astonishingly, the engineers listened to Tommy, understood the ingeniousness of his recommendation, and so “his” transfer tunnel came to be built.

In 2007 Saunders Weistche, another master hunter from Waskaganish, was responsible for protecting a sacred community fishing site that has fed our people for thousands of years. He redesigned a riverbed and shoreline to save this critical site, when hydrologists, biologists and engineers were unable to reassure the community that they could do so. They also listened to Mr. Weistche and stepped aside, giving him access to the machinery he needed to save this sacred site, securing the support of his community and the Cree Nation for a major hydroelectric project.

The families, neighbors and fellow community members of Mr. Weistche and Mr. Neeposh witnessed their actions and were empowered by what they saw. Quebec and Canada continue to benefit from this empowerment because it has deeply embedded in our people the conviction that we have the power to participate, to improve, to direct, to influence, to decide.

We have become a Nation of deciders, with our own mature government, in control of our fate and our future. This knowledge has given us the confidence to partner with other governments and industry to develop the resources of our territory in a way that respects our environment and way of life.

The Cree Nation, Quebec and Canada all owe a debt of gratitude to courageous Crees like Mr. Neeposh and Mr. Weistche who were willing to share their traditional knowledge. Meegwetch Tommy. Meegwetch Saunders.

These experiences make plain that listening, really listening, is the only way to bring down the barricades of distrust, and to keep them down.

When I first met with Premier François Legault in 2019 to discuss the desire of the Cree Nation to be involved in shaping major transportation infrastructure on our traditional lands, I was not met with dismissive disrespect or even scepticism. Instead I met a leader who was open and excited to explore what we could achieve together. Premier Legault stretched out his hand across the table to us upon hearing of what we wanted to build with him.

This 30-year agreement will provide major economic, environmental and social improvements in the Eeyou Istchee–James Bay region, benefitting Crees and non-Crees alike. It will substantially enhance the infrastructure of the region by extending the transportation network and expanding

electrification. This will provide cheaper and more environmentally sustainable transportation and energy for people and businesses throughout the region.

The agreement also sets out large areas of the Cree territory that are to be protected from development.

To achieve these plans, we will be developing opportunities for partners from the Cree and other northern Quebec communities, from Montreal and southern Quebec, and from across Canada.

Our Cree Nation is strong and progressive and is a major contributor to the economies of northern and southern Quebec. At the same time, the ten communities of Eeyou Istchee do not enjoy many of the advantages non-Native communities take for granted. In housing and social services, in health care and cultural development, in education and youth development, the gap remains pronounced.

To address these needs, we have established the Eenou-Eeyou Community Foundation. The Foundation will support community development projects across Eeyou Istchee.

We have launched a major fundraising campaign for the Foundation and will ask our corporate partners and the philanthropic community to support this important initiative. We believe this is a positive way for Canadian corporations, foundations and individuals to support Indigenous social and cultural development in northern Quebec, and to contribute concretely to reconciliation in Canada.

I would like to thank La Capitale Financial Group and Power Corporation for their early, generous support to the Campaign.

We hope to speak to all of you about this important initiative for the Cree Nation and to seek your support.

MEEGWETCH, MERCI, THANK YOU.