

SPEAKING NOTES FOR PRESIDENT GARY LIPINSKI

MOVING FORWARD --- TOGETHER

MAY 6, 2008

(Check against Delivery)

It is with a deep sense of humility and high resolve that I accept the responsibility with which you have entrusted me as the new President of the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO).

Today, when I stop and look back at what the Métis people in Ontario, through the MNO, have accomplished in the past 15 years, it is truly remarkable.

We have come together from all corners of the province, to put into place a democratic and strong governance structure in order to implement Métis self-government.

We have created a credible and objectively verifiable centralized registry of Métis citizens that continues to grow in size and numbers daily.

We have created a province-wide system which effectively delivers much needed programs and services to our families and communities in the areas of health, education and labour market training.

We have reclaimed and strengthened our identity, culture and traditions as a distinct Aboriginal people, and have begun to write the unwritten chapters of Métis history in this province.

We have established respectful nation-to-nation relationships with our First Nation relations.

We have successfully asserted our rights in the courts and with governments. As a result, our constitutionally protected rights as a full fledged rights-bearing people have been confirmed by the highest court of the land. We remain the only Métis government with a provincially negotiated accommodation agreement, which recognizes our own Métis harvesting laws and traditions.

We have had dynamic and dedicated leadership, and we could not have accomplished so much in so little time without the incredible vision, energy and passion of Past President Tony Belcourt. As Tony moves on to other pursuits we want to wish him the very best in his retirement, and we extend to him sincere appreciation from all of us for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

It now falls upon new leadership to build on this strong foundation as we take our nation to the next level--- together! There is much to be done!

It is a time to take stock, to consolidate and build on our many gains, to seize on the opportunities that are all around us, and, to place the MNO on a firm financial footing so that we can achieve our collective goals.

To do this, we must develop a new plan which focuses on developing stronger citizens, families and communities.

Over the last few months I have heard about and seen first-hand, the amazing things that are being done at the local and regional levels to empower Métis people and to promote the Métis Nation, all with little to no capacity or financial support.

The dedication and ‘can-do’ attitude of our citizens and leaders, whether they are a Senator, a Community Council President or a Regional Councillor is exemplary. Too often, other Aboriginal peoples are funded and have staff to participate in important initiatives, while our people are left to participate as “volunteers” relying solely on the goodness of their hearts and their commitment to their nation. This must change!

The capacity needs of Community Councils will be a key part of our discussion with the Ontario Government in negotiating a framework agreement and community capacity will be a priority for the MNO in its discussions with the Ontario Government on the New Relationship Fund, recommended by the Ipperwash Inquiry Report.

As the new President of the MNO, I will help and empower our Community Councils and volunteers. We can no longer depend entirely on the good will and benevolence of our people to support our work. We must improve communications with local and regional Métis leaders. We must create sustained capacity for Community Councils to play a stronger role at the local level as well as within the MNO’s overall governance structure.

We must also expand and enhance the programs and services that we are able to provide to our citizens at the community level. A Métis government must be able to help and deliver culturally appropriate and needed programs and services to its own people.

Our current staff across the province, who number well over 160, are dedicated professionals and exceptional people who give their heart and souls to the Métis Nation. As President, I want to better recognize their contributions as well as provide better training and support for their important work.

I also want to enhance the MNO’s ability to further assist Métis people in areas of mental health, justice, education, child and family services, housing, culture and heritage, as well as economic development. To better support Métis children, families and communities, the MNO must be able to offer a holistic approach to addressing Métis needs. Currently, the MNO does not have all of the tools and supports our citizens need from their government. I am committed to expanding discussions with the provincial and federal governments to assume Métis jurisdiction in areas which are essential to improving the quality of life of Métis people in the province.

For the MNO to grow and expand its operations, we need to strengthen our financial management and administration. Leadership on these issues starts at the top, and I am committed to putting in place a comprehensive action plan to address the MNO’s existing debt, and the challenges in relation to cash flow for the MNO and its Community Councils. This plan will also put in place stronger financial management processes, increased transparency and effective checks and balances, to ensure deficits become a thing of the past within the MNO.

The recognition and protection of our rights as a distinct Aboriginal people in this province will continue to be central to the MNO's agenda. We now have the opportunity to move our rights agenda from the courtroom to the negotiating table with governments.

In partnership with the Ontario Government, the MNO will move forward implementing the recommendations from the Ipperwash Inquiry Report. We will continue to work with the provincial and federal government to realize the full implementation of the *Powley* decision. In these negotiations, we need to address important rights issues such as trapping, mobility as it relates to Métis harvesting rights, and commercial harvesting issues.

Moving forward on ensuring the Crown is fulfilling its duty to consult and accommodate Métis rights will also be a key part of our advancing our rights agenda. Métis citizens have stressed that our communities need to know, and have a say in the development and activities that are affecting our rights, interests and way of life throughout the province.

Our collaborative work on developing a MNO consultation framework will be an important starting point for engaging governments and industry on the duty. Again, Métis citizens have emphasized that our communities should not only be consulted, but should be benefiting from the development and activities that are occurring on Métis traditional lands.

We need to engage governments and industry on guaranteeing quality jobs for Métis people, contracts for Métis businesses, partnerships between the Métis Nation and industry, as well as Métis inclusion in revenue resources sharing initiatives.

Based on the strength and will of our people and nation, I know that this ambitious agenda can be achieved. However, I also know that this agenda can only be achieved if we work on it – together!

To lead this effort you have selected a strong team that brings an exciting mix of experience, energy, talent and ideas. With France Picotte as Chair of the Provisional Council, Tim Pile as Secretary/Treasurer, a new Co-chair, and, an enthusiastic blend of returning and first term Councillors, I look forward to capitalizing on our strengths, while immediately addressing those areas where we must be stronger.

As I have travelled the province over the last several months, I have listened to you and will continue to listen to you. I realize that the test of any government is how honestly and fairly it deals with those that it is meant to serve. I want to continue this open and frank two-way conversation over the next four years.

We all know that there needs to be changes in how the MNO has operated in the past, and I am not going to shy away from controversial issues, which people want addressed. Change can be a very good thing. It provides an opportunity to build on what has worked and refine what has not. Once again, the most important part of any change is that we make the changes – together!

In our history in Ontario, we have been most successful not when we have reacted to situations, but when we have discussed, planned and collectively acted. The creation of the MNO, our centralized Registry, our Harvesters Policy and our harvesting agreement with the Ontario Government are just some of these successes achieved with this type of strategic approach.

It is time that we develop an overall, long range strategic plan for the MNO. To achieve this we need to engage all Métis citizens, Community Councils, the Provisional Council of the MNO, and the MNO Annual Assembly, in a discussion on where we want to be in 5, 10 or even 50 years.

From these discussions, we can develop a blueprint that will not only guide us, but will also grow and evolve as we do. It will also allow us to set targets and goals, to evaluate our progress and refine our plans as we go. I look forward to engaging in this process over the next 6 to 8 months with Métis citizens and fellow Métis leaders.

In conclusion, I want to say that over my last fourteen years in various leadership roles within the MNO, a huge constant for me has been my wife Dianne and my daughter Rachel. They have sacrificed so much for a frequently absent husband and father. I draw strength from their love and support and the trust that Métis citizens have placed in me.

Together, we have built the Métis Nation to what it is today. Today is the start of a new and exciting chapter of our history. I encourage all of our citizens to continue to show your pride in being Métis. Engage with me to make our nation stronger --- attend a community meeting, volunteer your time to support the MNO long-term care program, get a Métis flag raised in your village, town or city, or put your name forward for the next Community Council election in your area. Be involved:

Our Citizens are the Métis Nation of Ontario. Our nation only grows stronger when we do things – together!

Once again, thank you for the great honour you have bestowed on me in selecting me as your President.

I look forward to working on your behalf as we go forward!