



The Brief

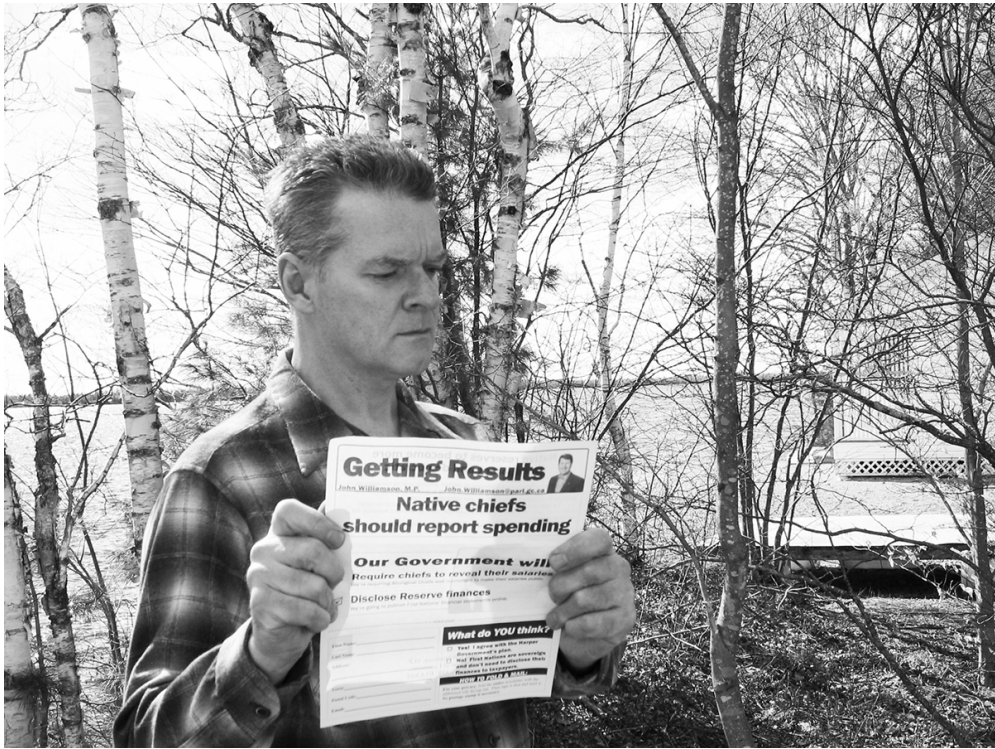
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Residents take offense to Conservative MP's flyer on indigenous people



Terry Wishart, resident of Harvey, looks at a flyer that was sent to residents in Conservative MP, John Williamson's riding. Many residents of the flyer have taken issue with the flyer's racist overtones. Photo courtesy of Terry Wishart.

By MATTHEW ABBOTT

St. Andrews - A flyer about First Nations' spending circulated by Conservative MP John Williamson irked many of his Charlotte County constituents for its attack on indigenous sovereignty and its racist overtones.

Williamson and many MPs send regular "householders" or flyers to constituents at public expense to update people in their ridings about what they have been doing in parliament.

The topics covered by flyers from Conservative MPs include cuts to government-funded environmental science, changes in immigration laws and reductions of services to refugees, and changes to the criminal justice system that will see more people incarcerated.

A recent flyer entitled, "Native Chiefs Should Report Spending," arrived in mailboxes in Williamson's Southwest New Brunswick riding in March. The flyer was timed with legislation aimed at "increasing financial transparency on First Nation reserves," which became law in late March after passing in the Senate. The law will require First Nation governments to publish audited financial statements and the salaries and expenses of

their chiefs and councillors.

The flyer includes a survey which residents are encouraged to fill out and send back to Williamson. Readers are encouraged to check a box beside either "Yes! I agree with the Harper Government's plan" or "No! First Nations are sovereign and don't need to disclose their finances to taxpayers."

Passamaquoddy Chief Hugh Akagi points out that Williamson's survey pits transparency against First Nations sovereignty. A vote for transparency is treated as, effectively, a vote against First Nations sovereignty.

Chief Akagi is currently negotiating with the government of Canada for the return of recognition of the Passamaquoddy in their indigenous territory within Canada. This territory extends from Point Lepreau through to Passamaquoddy Bay and the St Croix River, much of which is known today as Charlotte County. Unceded Passamaquoddy territory, which is subject to treaty and constitutional

rights, makes up a significant portion of Williamson's riding.

While Chief Akagi supports transparency from all governments, he does not believe that a call for transparency has anything to do with inherent sovereignty. "There is a lack of transparency in my territory. The federal government, represented here by Mr. Williamson, has failed to be transparent on where it stands regarding the implementation of international commitments such as the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," says Chief Akagi.

Of all the issues facing indigenous people in Canada, most recently articulated in the Idle No More movement, Williamson has apparently limited the discussion to perceived issues of corruption on reserves.

Terry Wishart, resident of Harvey, was not pleased when he received the flyer in the mail. "The first thing that struck me when I received the flyer was that it had racist intentions. This seemed like a set up, a way to throw negative light on one community. Given that this was coming from John Williamson and that I have not received anything else relating to First Nations Issues, I had to wonder about ulterior motives," comments Wishart.

Harper to workers: don't worry, be happy about EI changes

By JEAN-CLAUDE BASQUE

After nearly one year of waiting, I was very happy to receive a personal letter from our Federal Government explaining changes to the Employment Insurance Program.

I told myself that after all that time, I would finally get real facts and data on why these changes were necessary. Instead, after reading the unsigned double-side page, I was really disappointed with the content.

The first bullet point tells us that the changes are only new definitions of terms. I am sorry but creating three distinct categories of unemployed workers (long-tenure, frequent and occasional), where there were none before, and attaching different criteria for each one is quite a drastic change and not simply a new definition of terms.

The second bullet point says that we will not be worse off financially and that personal circumstances will be taken into account. I would like to understand how, by having to accept 30 percent less revenue, I am going to be better off? As for taking personal circumstances into account, how can it be so when Service Canada's own document states that claimants who have not made arrangements to free themselves of family obligations or other personal responsibilities to allow them to seek and accept all available hours of work may not be able to prove that they are available for work.

The third bullet point says that if one is not satisfied when he or she has been cut off, that person has the right to appeal. However, the 65 year-old EI Board of Referees has just been disbanded and replaced with a Tribunal. The former non-bureaucratic system, based on part-time members from labour and employers (who were funding the program), has been replaced by full-time government nominees paid between \$90,800 and \$107,900 a year. The decisions formerly taken by a three-member board will now be taken by one member only. The five New Brunswick regional boards will disappear. It will now be also almost impossible to defend your case in person.

The fourth bullet point specifies that EI will continue to be there, as always, as long as people make reasonable efforts to get a job. This is supposed to be reassuring. Reasonable efforts actually mean "accepting any kind of job, at all kinds of working hours, ensuring arrangements for family obligations such as childcare and eldercare are possible, taking care of travel accommodations, etc." These efforts are demanded in order to be able to accept any work that is available.

The fifth bullet point states that nobody will be forced to move to find a job. Of course not, nobody will have to move, but if you are forced to accept a job situated at a long distance from your family, perhaps you will be forced to move to keep your family together.

The letter from Service Canada does not mention several concerns of workers. For example, the abolition of the "Extended Five Weeks of Benefits Pilot Project" for 21 regions is not mentioned. This... (continued on page 2)

Gloves come off in salmon war

By M.L. SHEPPARD

Fredericton - It's open season on open-pen salmon farming these days, with groups previously reluctant to criticize the industry going public with their concerns in a big way.

Signs of opposition have popped up since December, the most conspicuous of which, are large billboards with the entreaty, "Clean up Salmon Farming," in the Halifax area. The billboards draw attention to harm caused by ocean-based salmon farming, namely the spread of disease and parasites from tame fish raised in pens to wild salmon stocks, coupled with the vast amounts of byproducts scientists say cause pollution and deaden parts of the sea floor.

Sue Scott of the St. Andrews based Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF) says her organization is "working with industry towards more sustainable practices," including research and development of land-based fish rearing systems. "We have taken a more vocal route with ads and billboards lately because government continues to promote open net pens and deny the science on impacts," says Scott.

Until recently, many groups were reluctant to speak out against open-pen aquaculture. But the results of numerous scientific studies have caused a major re-thinking of this approach and the launch of the bold "Clean up Salmon Farming" campaign.

"In New Brunswick, industry has more or less had its way," Scott says. "New Brunswickers haven't spoken out about the industry; whereas in Nova Scotia, they're not taking it sitting down. People are speaking out."

Nova Scotia is the target of the novel clean up campaign due to planned expansions of the industry there. Evidence that pressure brought by the campaign may be working is a recent decision by the Nova Scotia government to decline a proposed open-pen aquaculture site in Shoal Bay. Newfoundland may be targeted next by the campaign. ... (continued on page 2)



Billboards like this one in Halifax are drawing attention to unsustainable fish farming practices occurring in the Atlantic Ocean. Photo by Mike Bardsley.