Residents take off to Conservative MP’s flyer on indigenous people

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.

“Unfortunately, we are encouraged to check a box beside either “Yes” or “No”, a fair bit of the Harper Government’s plan” or “No!” First Nations are sovereign and don’t need to disclose their finances to taxpayers.”

Pessamit Chief Hugh Akagi points out that Williamson’s survey gets transparency wrong. 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 Pessamit territory in their indigenous territory in the Ungava Peninsula Canada. This territory extends from Point Pointeau through to Pessamit Bay and the St Croix River, much of which is known today as Charlotte County, Unceded Pessamit 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.

All of 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 the First Nation community. Given that this was coming from John Williamson and that we have not received anything else relating to First Nations issues, I had to wonder about ulterior motives,” comments Wishart.

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, particularly the spread of disease and parasites from tame fish raised in pens to wild stocks salmon, 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 industries 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 led to a major re-thinking of this approach and the launch of the bold “Clean up Salmon Farming” campaign.

“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 Shuval Bay, Newfoundland may be targeted next by the campaign. ... (continued on page 2)