

## **DIFFICULT CHOICES AHEAD**

The Macdonald Laurier Institute (MLI) used the Ottawa Citizen's January 14 issue to point out that achieving a balance between the 'right to be heard' and the right of Canadians to see "their" [sic] resources developed thoughtfully and responsibly had just rocketed to the top of the national agenda. What MLI was talking about was the right of First Nations and others opposing the Northern Gateway Pipeline to be heard through the National Energy Board (NEB) process and the right of Prime Minister Harper's cabinet to overrule a 'no' decision by the NEB by citing Canada's national interest. Several experts commenting in the news and social media on the issue raised by MLI believe Harper will try to achieve the balance through unilaterally approving the Gateway project while tossing a few concessions the First Nations' way.

Should the First Nations want more than offered, the matter will likely end up in the federal court and would put First Nations at risk of losing any gains that they've made under the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as well as all Duty to Consult and Accommodate case law.

If the federal government were to win in court and try to go ahead with pipeline construction, then all the talk among First Nations, in British Columbia especially, around physical resistance may quickly turn to action, which is something groups like the American Indian Movement are already getting prepared for, as can be seen in their recent activities.

A summer of discontent may very well be on the way. Given the gains in Rights that may be at stake, how will First Nations leaders/people in this province respond?

## **DUTY TO CONSULT NARROWED**

Saskatchewan's Ministry of First Nation and Métis Relations quietly issued a news media release January 16 on a new focus for its Duty to Consult and Accommodate Fund. This year it will only provide funding for consultations related to projects on "Crown lands." This represents a further step in limiting the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate obligations since the vast majority of resource development projects are located outside Crown lands. What about those projects?

## **FIRST NATION SCHOOLS GET SHAFT**

Saskatchewan recently increased the salaries of its teachers. As per the federal-provincial lock-step policy on everything from social assistance rates, foster care rates, and teachers' salaries, INAC was supposed to achieve parity and come up with a corresponding increase. It did not happen. Late last week INAC announced its new Band School Teacher Salary Funding Formula and guess what? It only provided one-third of the funds necessary overall to bring First Nation teachers' salaries in line with Saskatchewan's.

## **STAND UP & BE COUNTED, PAT**

UNESCO's Canadian Coalition Against Racism and Discrimination has been around since 2004. Its purpose is to set priorities, actions and timelines and allocate resources to combat racism and discrimination against 'Aboriginal' peoples. Many municipalities across the country have signed on to the Coalition – Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Prince Albert among them. Where then are Mayor Pat and the City of Regina on this?

## **DRILLING ON THE RISE**

Year-end statistics from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Energy and Resources show that 3,528 oil wells were drilled in 2011. This represents a 29 per cent increase over the figure for 2010 and is just shy of the record set for 1997. In other words, 2011 was the province's second-best year for drilling oil wells in its history. Looks like Bill & da Boyz are still getting rich on First Nations resources. NRTA, eh?

## **BEAR BITES INMATES**

Saskatchewan's Corrections, Public Safety and Policing Minister Yogi Huyghebaert plans to "modernize" the *Correctional Services Act* during this spring's legislative session. Among his proposed amendments: the strengthening of inmate search provisions, wider inmate discipline powers, and an increased ability to segregate inmates. He also wants to expand current drug testing provisions and transfer inmates at will.

