

# The Empire Club Presents



## **NATIONAL CHIEF PERRY BELLEGARDE**

ASSEMBLY OF  
FIRST NATIONS,

### ***WITH:* FIRST NATIONS' PRIORITIES NEED TO BE CANADIAN PRIORITIES**

Welcome Address, by Ms. Kelly Jackson, Associate Vice President, Government Relations, Marketing, and Communications, Humber College; Director, Empire Club of Canada

---

May 22, 2019

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. From the Arcadian Court in downtown Toronto, welcome, to the Empire Club of Canada.

For those of you just joining us through our webcast or our podcast, welcome, to the meeting. Today, we present National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Assembly of First Nations.

## **HEAD TABLE**

### **Distinguished Guest Speaker:**

Mr. Perry Bellegarde, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations

### **Guests:**

Mr. Izzie Abrams, Vice President, Government and External Affairs,  
Waste Connections of Canada

Mr. Daniel Brock, Partner, Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP

Ms. Tabatha Bull, Chief Operating Officer, Canadian Council  
for Aboriginal Business

Mr. Mike Martelli, President, Renewable Generation, Ontario Power Generation  
Ms. Jennifer McKelvie, Councillor for Ward 25 (Scarborough–Rouge Park),  
City of Toronto

Ms. MJ Perry, Vice President and Owner, Mr. Discount Ltd.; PhD Candidate in  
Theology, University of Toronto; Director, Empire Club of Canada

Ms. Jennifer Rowe, Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs  
Ontario Power Generation Inc.

Mr. Larry Villeneuve, Director, Indigenous Relations, LiUNAMs. Loralene  
Whiteye, Graduate of Paralegal Program at Humber College;  
Indigenous Outreach Coordinator, Aboriginal Resource Centre, Humber College

For 115 years, the Empire Club has provided a forum for speakers to engage and debate, advancing the dialogue on issues of importance to Canada. While our name harkens back to an older time, and toasting the Queen may seem old-fashioned, we are surprisingly, to some, a forward-looking organization, committed to celebrating multiple histories and stories, engaging in challenging discussions and advancing the relationships critical to Canada's evolution.

Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this country. A few years ago we hosted a conversation about reconciliation on Bay Street, identifying opportunities for the corporate sector in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action.

Today, our speaker's topic is broader. From education to economic development to environmental protections and creating a just, diverse and safe society, there is no shortage of shared areas of interest between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Yet, when it comes to shared experiences and quality of life, the gap is significant. When thinking about reconciliation, a key question is: How do we move forward together to recognize and address the inequality that exists and the numerous misconceptions that many still have?

Through the "Closing the Gap" platform, Chief Bellegarde and the Assembly of First Nations have kept this question front and centre on the national political scene.

He has been relentless in his focus on achieving real, measurable progress across the priorities that matter most to First Nations peoples. Under his leadership, the Assembly's agenda has directly influenced the federal government's planning and priorities.

According to Chief Bellegarde, the inequality gap is holding us all back from building healthy and thriving First Nations and a stronger Canada. That, in itself, is a power-

ful statement on what he will be speaking about today, why First Nations' priorities need to be Canadian priorities.

Perry Bellegarde was re-elected National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations in 2018. Originally from Little Black Bear First Nation in Treaty 4 Territory, he has held a number of leadership roles at all levels of First Nations governance, including Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and Saskatchewan Regional Chief for the Assembly of First Nations.

Chief Bellegarde is a strong advocate for the implementation of Aboriginal and treaty rights, presenting at the national and international levels, including at the United Nations.

He has been awarded—and it is a long list, so I chose a few—the Confederation Medal, the Saskatchewan Medal, the Queen's Jubilee Medal, on two separate occasions, and, this year, the Province of Saskatchewan recognized Chief Bellegarde with the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

He has spent the past 30 years putting into practice his strong beliefs on the laws and traditions instilled in him by the many chiefs and elders he has known over the years. Please, join me in welcoming National Chief Perry Bellegarde to the podium.

## National Chief Perry Bellegarde

Thank you so much, Kelly. *[Remarks in Cree.]* Just to my relatives and friends here, I said I will speak a little bit in Cree. I am just going to say a little bit in Cree.

*[Remarks in Cree.]* I am happy to be here.

*[Remarks in Cree.]* And I acknowledge you all as friends and relatives. I said one of my spirit names: King Thunderbird Child is who I am. I also said where I am from.

*[Remarks in Cree.]* And I pointed at my lips.

*[Remarks in Cree.]* Little Black Bear First Nation, Treaty 4 Territory.

As well, I want to acknowledge and thank Kelly for that introduction, as well as Jennifer, for the acknowledgment of the land and territory here. Thank you for that.

We always say to all the members of the Empire Club, to all the dignitaries and friends and relatives in attendance, I say a big thank you for being here. To everyone, I always say I shake hands with each and every one of you in a respectful and humble way.

A big sincere thanks for coming here and again, to those of you I have not met, I have already introduced myself in my language. I have done the formal way of introducing myself in Cree, and I am the National Chief for the Assembly of First Nations. The AFN, it is the national organization in Canada representing First Nations. There are upwards of 60 distinct First Nations people in Canada. Here, I am referring to the original First Nations of the lands, not the

reserves or the bands of Indians, but I am speaking of the Cree people, the Anishinaabeg people, the Dene people, the Haida people, the Mi'kmaq people, the Mohawk peoples, the Chehalis people, the Halkomelem people, the 60-plus different Nations. Our people live in towns and cities and on more than 600 reserves spread out across the country.

I will break it down quickly for some of you. There are 203 in British Columbia; there are 47 in Alberta; 74 in Saskatchewan; 66 in Manitoba; 134 in Ontario; 47 in la belle province de Quebec; 13 Nova Scotia; 15 in New Brunswick; two in PEI; two in Newfoundland; 14 in the Yukon; 28 in the Northwest Territories.

I know the numbers because I need 64% of those chiefs to vote for me as National Chief. I am elected by those chiefs from across our territories in what we now call Canada. Those chiefs are, in turn, elected by all their citizens and all their First Nations on the reserve and off the reserve. They represent all their people. I want to talk to you today about the relationship between First Nations peoples in Canada, what is it based on for our people, how we are doing, and what we should be working on together.

Reconciliation is a big part of that picture. It must be based on finally changing the fundamentals of how our people live in Canada and how Canada engages with us.

You will see we have made progress, but there is much more work to do. Some of the things I say today may challenge your assumptions about First Nations people and our shared future together. Being here, today, I ask for things,

things like your ears to be open and your hearts to be open while I map out some of our history, some of our progress and some ideas for a path forward together, because I always say this: Nobody is going anywhere in this country.

You are not going anywhere; your children are not going anywhere; your grandchildren are not going anywhere, and neither am I. Let us roll up our sleeves and get together and build a better country together because nobody is going anywhere. That is what I always say. Let us work together.

I have said I am from Little Black Bear in Saskatchewan, the First Nations that is part of Treaty 4. I always say it is a strong treaty territory. I grew up out on the rez., that is what we call it. “Where are you from? I am from the rez.”

I grew up in Little Black Bear. I learned about the treaties and the treaty relationship that we have with the Crown and I learned about that from our old people, the Elders, the knowledge keepers, the wisdom keepers. There is a ceremony about that treaty. Every time I talk treaty, what do I pull out? Well, lo and behold, I just happen to have a treaty medallion with me.

What does this treaty medallion represent? It represents first, our relationship with the Crown. This is Queen Victoria. We have a relationship with the Crown. Nations make treaties. Treaties do not make Nations. The relationship with the British sovereign is very important. Canada was a colony of Great Britain right up until 1982. These treaty medallions for us in the Numbered Treaties come to represent something very important for us because, on the other

side, you will see the newcomer coming, on this side, and they are shaking hands with this First Nations person.

They are shaking hands. You will see the hatchet that is buried in the ground symbolizing no more war.

Peace between our peoples. You will see the sun; you will see the water; you will see the grass. You will see big teepees, smaller teepees going into the future. You always hear this line that as long as that sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows, this treaty will remain in effect for those generations now and for those yet unborn. We say there is a sacredness or a sanctity of agreement with this treaty relationship with the Crown and those two fundamental principles, peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. And we are to share the land and the resource wealth together.

We are to share it. Even in the Numbered Treaties, I do not believe Chief Little Black Bear understood “cede, surrender and relinquish.”

***[Remarks in Cree.]*** That is the words in the treaty, but he knows about we are going to share. ***[Remarks in Cree.]***

We will share with our white brothers and sisters, so again back to that principle about peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and to share the bounty of this land and resource together. That is what this treaty relationship is.

It is true that not all First Nations in Canada are treaty First Nations. For example, in British Columbia and in Quebec and in the north, they are not covered by treaties but in many of these areas, First Nations are working with governments on what could be called “modern treaties.”



All of our people agree with that relationship embraced in the treaties. It is the essence of our understanding of our relationship with Canada, a relationship that is based on the very positive values of peace between our peoples and mutual respect, and we all are to benefit from the land and resource wealth, embracing a true partnership.

I believe that it is that relationship, the treaty relationship, that we need to re-establish, re-affirm, and implement, but implement the treaty according to the spirit and intent. The courts continue to affirm the First Nations understanding of our treaty rights and our inherent rights, but it is also the best way to move forward, the best way to achieve certainty and prosperity, the best way to achieve real reconciliation. To close an unacceptable gap in the standard of living for many First Nations people in Canada is to embrace that relationship. That gap that people keep talking about, no question: 6 versus 63rd. Do you know what that is?

In 2015, there was a big federal government election coming up. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, Canada was rated 6th for quality of life.

You apply the same indices to First Nations people; we are 63rd. It was 6 versus 63rd. That is what I keep trying to address.

That gap is holding all of us back not only for First Nations people, but all of Canada. It is true that First Nations feel the most severe impacts of that gap from poor housing, contaminated drinking water, tragic epidemic of youth suicides, 1,200+ missing Indigenous women and girls, an

overall shortage lifespan other than non-First Nations Canadians, 40,000 children in foster care in provincial care systems and territorial government care systems, too many of our people in jail, a disproportionate number of our people in jails.

That gap needs to be addressed. We know that that gap is the result of more than a century of failed laws and policies imposed on our peoples. Laws and policies imposed on us without our involvement or our agreement—one of them, the Indian Act. It has been around since 1876. I do not want to spend time on the Indian Act, but did you know that we were not allowed to vote until 1961? We were not allowed to leave the reserve without a permit until 1951. We were not allowed to have access to legal counsel, and there are a lot of good lawyers here. How many good lawyers are in the room? Put your hands up. There are lots of good lawyers. If I went and saw you in 1950, I would get thrown in jail. You would be disbarred for giving advice to a treaty Indian, under the Indian Act. It is not good. We still have it.

Another example is the genocide of the residential school system. I do not call it ‘cultural genocide’. It is genocide. It fits the United Nations’ definition: Forcibly removing children from their families and homes, inflicting harm and pain, suffering abuse. It fits. We still feel the intergenerational traumas of that genocide, so we see it as a flawed system, no question.

There is also the flawed funding approach that has led to decades of underfunding and, of course, all the stolen

lands and our stolen children. These policies are dysfunctional and are a barrier to progress for all of us, and they must change. All Canadians feel the impacts of that gap. You feel it through lost productivity, a lower overall GDP growth in Canada, high social costs, high unemployment rates, and under-employment rates, and it is a black mark on our global reputation as a fair and just country.

That is our past. Together we can look to a different future, because I always say let us learn from the past.

Let us not live there, but let us do some truth telling and learn from the past, so that we can have a better future together, one where we can take that lost productivity and unlock the full potential of our peoples and the full potential of this country. That will build a stronger Canada for all of us.

First Nations priorities are Canada's priorities. Acting on First Nations' priorities is not only good for our people, but it is good for all of us because, when we succeed, everybody succeeds. I am pleased to say that in the last four years, we have made some progress. I am always careful when I say this because *[then I hear]*: "Oh, Bellegarde is a Liberal," or "Oh, Bellegarde is a Conservative," or "Oh, Bellegarde is a Green!" I am not anything, but I am a national advocate for change, a national advocate for policy and legislative change, and we have to work with whomever gets elected. It is my job, so I get along with all the party leaders, every one of them.

In our terms of our work with this federal government over the last four years, over the past four budgeting cycles,

every year there is a federal budget. Every fiscal year, what has happened? There has been \$21.4 billion pledged for over seven fiscal years for First Nations issues. When is the last time that happened? The answer is never: \$21.4 billion. It is a significant and necessary investment, no question, and it is starting to unlock the potential for First Nations peoples in Canada. It starts to address those factors I spoke about a moment ago: lost productivity, high social cost, high unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and the fact that our young people are taking their lives. The investments are way beyond. Remember this thing called the Kelowna Accord, and everybody was jumping up and down: “Kelowna Accord, Kelowna!” in 2005. Well, this is four times the Kelowna Accord, four times the Kelowna Accord.

Now that we see that this \$21.4 billion is there, it is a direct result of the advocacy by the AFN and the chiefs and other leaders across Canada. We use that “Closing the Gap” document to educate people and to show the parties that you have got to close the gap. We have this great document, “Closing the Gap” document, in 2015. I was unrolling this document platform, and I was saying we need investments in education, employment, housing, water, infrastructure and youth and all this stuff. All these things I was unrolling in front of this big bunch of reporters, because we are using that “Close the Gap” document to influence the party platforms before the October election in 2015 and really great, rolling it out.

Then, a very astute reporter said, “Chief Bellegarde,

do you vote?" I said, "No, I don't vote." Then, he asked, "Well, then how do you expect First Nations people to vote if you, as National Chief, don't vote?" I said, "Good question. Let me get back to you on that." I had to go home and get my mandate to vote for my people, my Elders, my youth, my aunties, my uncles back from Little Black Bear, because, *[as I was]* growing up as a little kid, the Elders would say, "Don't vote. That's not our government.

It's not ours. We got a treaty with the Crown. We don't have a treaty with the Liberals or the Conservatives or the Greens. Our treaty is with the Crown, so we do not need to vote for anybody. The Crown has got to live by and an honour this treaty in accordance with the spirit intent."

I was taught that. Then, I was also taught that is not our government. Okay, get it. Do not need to vote.

Did not vote, but 2015 comes along and then, when I go home, and we go through ceremony, get the green light: "Okay, embrace *[remarks in Cree]*, grandson, this concept of dual citizenship." So, I voted for the very first time.

I was nervous as hell, but I did. Because the National Chief voted, holy smokes, we lit a fire under First Nations people across Canada. Get out to vote, get out to vote.

We have 64% of First Nations people voting now in 2015. That is unprecedented, unheard of. We flipped 22 ridings, so if you want to become government, you had better listen to our issues and priorities or you are not getting our support. That is where it rests.

We have another election coming up now. Now, we are

participating, and now we are voting. We have got a left-wing and right-wing as Indian people, First Nations people, too. To our Indian sovereigntists here in the crowd, First Nations sovereigntists, I say, “I do not feel any less Cree for voting. I do not feel any less a member of Little Black Bear for voting.” We have got some political power; we exercise it. That individual human right supersedes the collective right of the people now. I am going to keep voting because I have embraced dual citizenship. That is what I feel like, and I feel okay about it. Now, back to the federal government investments, and I call them “investments.” They are investments in First Nations children and families. They are investments in human capital, because we are the fastest-growing segment of Canada’s population, young First Nations men and women, no question. We are seeing progress. Since November 2015, the number of long-term drinking waters has gone down, no question. I think the latest number is 58 as of March 2019. It is still not done yet, but it is moving. There have been significant new investments in post-secondary education and K-12 education for First Nation students.

There was a big gap there. On reserves, it was \$6,500 per child for tuition. Yet, in provincial school systems, it is double that, \$12,000–\$13,000; in the French school system, almost \$20,000—big gap in K-12 education.

Close that gap. Ten thousand students now on the post-secondary student waitlist. We still have work to do regarding K-12 and post-secondary education.

There have also been investments in housing. All these things are moving, but I say it this way: progress does not mean parity. Progress does not mean parity.

With the drinking water advisories, there is still a gap. We still have a higher risk when it comes to water and drinking water.

Some people on the reserves are going to grow up not knowing what it is like to turn on the taps and drink the water just the way it is. We still have that 10,000 student number on the waiting lists. No question, that has to be addressed. With respect to housing, more than one-quarter of status Indians live in a house that needs major repairs, and more than one-third of our people live in an over-crowded house. Think of Cat Lake. Did you guys see that a few months back or a few weeks back? Overcrowded housing, sickness, overcrowded housing, problems with that.

This is not good for anybody's mental, physical health. Just think of how hard it is for a young person to go to school and excel in school while living in an overcrowded house contaminated with black mold and everything else. We have got a lot more work to do. There is progress, but our goal must be to maintain momentum and keep moving forward in a positive way. Now, October is coming.

Closing this gap and moving forward requires we work with, and when necessary—we always have to push our treaty partners.

That is the Crown. Now, it is the federal government on behalf of the Crown, we get that. I have already mentioned

the investments that are needed. Funding is very important, no question, but we have been underfunded for so long, that it is difficult to get out of poverty. We need those basic resources, no question.

We are going to keep pushing for that, but it is not only about funding and financing. We have got to move the right way. We have got to see a more growing self-sufficiency for First Nations, healthy people living in healthy communities with strong governments who can plan strategically and be full participants in the economy. That, of course, benefits all of us. We need our action, our rights, our rights to maintain our identities and our rights to make a decision that affect our lives. I call it this way, the right to self-determination. Canada will only achieve reconciliation by recognizing and honouring First Nations' rights, title and jurisdiction.

Briefly, June is coming, the end of June. That means this current government is going to be done. I ask me, myself, and all the AFN staff, chiefs, everybody, "What are we going to get done by the end of June? What are we focusing on?" There are three pieces of legislation we want to see passed before the end of June, before the House rises, and it is critical to our agenda. First is Bill C-92. That bill is about First Nations taking responsibility for First Nations child welfare. Remember I said there are 40,000 kids in foster care, provincial and territorial care. Bill C-91 is the other one, the Indigenous Languages Act. Then, there is Bill C-262. It is a private member's bill to give life to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



Those are the three pieces of legislation. I have got a three-day meeting coming up in July with the chiefs of Canada in Fredericton, New Brunswick: July 23, 24, 25. I want it to be a happy gathering. It will be happy if we get these three bills passed.

I want to tell you why these three bills are important and why they all deserve your support. Concerning child welfare, Bill C-92, the formal name of that act, is An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families. It is aimed at dealing with the massive and tragic over-representation of children in the child welfare system. Every day, our children are taken from their families and placed in government care. All too often, it is because of poverty. It is not simply about bad parents. Where that is the case, absolutely.

We do not want our children in unsafe environments, but we want an approach that, as much as possible, keeps children with their families, their extended families, in their communities, in their nations and tribes.

Decades of underfunding and apprehension is harming our children and families. You might have heard the latest statistic that there are more First Nations children in state care right now than at the height of the residential school system. That is brutally bad.

I say to Canada, we can do better; we must do better. This legislation is an important piece of the more comprehensive reform that is needed across the system. It is about putting the responsibility for First Nations children back

where it rightfully belongs, with First Nations. The goal is to apply First Nations laws, policies and values to systems designed and implemented by First Nations people. I have always said, “Occupy the field, Chiefs.” If you do not want federal law and provincial law to apply, create your own laws and exert your jurisdiction and occupy that space.

In some places, these systems exist, and they are working. In other places, the bill supports First Nations in building their systems to keep the circle of community strong and to protect the young people. Bill C-92 represents a new chapter and a new approach for children and families.

It places a bigger focus on prevention over apprehension. It says clearly that, wherever possible, children must stay at home or in their community with their parents and their relatives, so they are close to all of their loved ones.

This legislation is about First Nations taking care of First Nations children. I know many of you are parents.

We would all insist on the right to look after and care for our own children. Bill C-92 is about our authority and responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of our children.

It is about recognizing First Nations jurisdiction over child welfare. We need to get it done. Now, the Indigenous Languages Act, Bill C-91. It is a response to calls over many years by First Nations for action to save and strengthen Indigenous languages. Respecting and restoring our languages is a fundamental step in reconciliation. I have said it this way: The Crown has an obligation, a duty to expend just as many resources to rebuild, rejuvenate, bring back our

Indigenous languages as they spend on trying to eradicate and kill them by the residential school system. They have got an obligation to do that. Language is so important to maintaining a culture and culture identity as peoples.

These languages are the original languages of these lands. They are found nowhere else other than our territories on Turtle Island.

I said they are, indeed, national treasures. Our traditional knowledge and our world views are founded in our languages. They are key to our identity. We know they are key to our own health and wellbeing.

For First Nations, language is life, and it is why I pushed for an Indigenous Languages Act as a priority, one that should be co-developed with us. I am pleased that the government responded favourably to that regard. The act has received support from all parties, and we even know from polling, that the majority of Canadians, 74% of Canadians support the Indigenous Languages Act. We want it to become law before parliament rises this summer, so I am asking for all your help and support. Connect to your member of parliament, even any senator you know and ask them to support this, and get it done. And 2019 is the International Year of Indigenous Languages. There is no better way for Canada to mark this year than to pass this bill. It has been co-developed with us to preserve, promote and revitalize Indigenous languages. I have said it this way: Fluency is important. Fluency. I do not need to see Cree on a box of Corn Flakes. You have got English and French there, fine.

I need to see and hear how we say, all the 60+ languages, all of them still spoken. How the old people say it.

We need to hear and listen; the old people, our grandmothers and grandfathers whispering the stories, their creation stories to the ears of their little ones. We need fluency. That is what it is about. As I said before, this is not only good for us, it is good for Canada because studies have shown when young First Nations people are fluent in their language, they know who they are, where they come from.

They are more successful in school, and they are therefore, more successful in life. Even this languages act is an investment in human capital. You will see graduation rates go up and employment increase. It is good. Our young people deserve the same opportunity as other young people in Canada. They deserve that chance to dream and achieve their dreams.

The other piece of legislation is Bill C-262. It is a private member's bill in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We have said it before that the UN Declaration is nothing less than our roadmap to reconciliation and its full implementation is crucial to the proper recognition of First Nations' fundamental human rights not only here in Canada, not only regionally, nationally, but internationally. Canada is committed to fully implement the UN Declaration. Bill C-262 is necessary to fulfill that promise.

I know there is some fear mongering about the UN Declaration, especially the concept about 'free, prior and informed consent', or the free, prior and informed consent

over activities that affect our peoples, lands, our territories and our waters and our rights. People do not need to fear this concept of ‘free, prior and informed consent.’ Some call it a veto, but the word veto does not appear anywhere in the UN Declaration. It is actually a way forward, and it is the right way forward. ‘Free, prior and informed consent’ I say even does better than ‘duty to consult and accommodate’. This will not create any uncertainty over resource development projects. It is indeed quite the opposite—uncertainties created when governments and industry ignore First Nation rights and title. That is exactly what leads to uncertainty. It also leads to conflict, and it also leads to blockades, and it also leads to court cases if you do not respect rights, title and jurisdiction. ‘Free, prior and informed consent’ I say would ensure that governments and industry and business and First Nations are on board and on side before any development begins if they sit down and talk.

Think about this concept about ‘free, prior and informed consent’ in a simple way or phrase I always use: If you are the federal government, provincial governments—any government or industry—before you try to build anything, ensure that you built the respectful relationship with First Nations people. It is really as simple as that. It is as straightforward as that. Do not build anything or even try to build anything until you have that respectful relationship. That is the best way forward. We want to see Bill C-262 passed.

Again, I am going to ask you all for your support. Now, October is coming; a big federal election is coming.

The writ will be dropped some time. What is on the party platforms? What do First Nations want to see? Boy, there is a range. We know the countdown is underway.

I said there are certain critical priorities that we need to see. There is an opportunity to make history and set an agenda for real change and reconciliation in this country.

We say our agenda extends well beyond a single parliament or one government. Our agenda has been supported by all parties on certain issues. Our path to growing self-sufficiency, to healthy people living in healthy homes and communities is the work of our lifetimes and a legacy we owe to our people and to those seven generations yet to come after us. It took us all more than a century to create these challenges. Now, we need to work together to change our common future. Our Assembly of First Nations will continue to push for an agenda to make progress and continue to walk the paths forward for First Nations and Canada together. Yes, there is an election coming in October. My job as National Chief is to try to influence the national agenda, to influence all party platforms, so we have been working on a new document. I do not want to call it “Closing the Gap 2.” I do not know if we will call it “Pathway to Prosperity.” I do not know if we are going to call it “Maintaining Momentum,” but it is going to be something, and we will be releasing our priorities soon in that document.

I can tell you, today, that the overarching goal of our agenda will be redefining the relationship with First Nations and Canada.

It really is about moving beyond the Indian Act, which has been in place since 1876, and into real recognition of First Nations governments, including our long-standing treaty relationships with the Crown. Let us get our treaty honoured and implemented in accordance with the spirit and intent. Let us find ways to move beyond the Indian Act, standing up as nations. Our leaders have been pushed, and we have pushed way beyond certain aspects within the Indian Act. Some are already moving beyond it.

Others are ready to do so. This Indian Act controls our lives and gives the Government of Canada power to make decisions for us. That is not self-determination. Our new agenda will set out our commitments to our traditional duties and responsibilities as stewards of the lands and waters with a view of seven generations from now. This has to be the number one priority not only for Canada, but for the world. We have got to be leaders. We have to know, feel and see that all the policies and plans to transition from our dependency on fossil fuels to clean energy is there, and it has got to be clear. We have no choice but to meet the Paris targets and ensure that the earth does not warm up more than 2°C. We have got to make sure that it does not warm more than 1.5°C. Do you see what is going on in the world?

Big winds, big fires, floods, more icebergs. This is not just a Canadian issue; this is a global issue. We must maintain and enhance the world's biodiversity. Some of the most biodiverse-rich regions of the world remain in our territories here, in Canada. We have to draw upon our peoples'

ancient knowledge as together we find ourselves within our natural world. What I am talking about, as you know, is climate change, greenhouse gas emissions. Our worldview is this: When I gave the greeting, all my relatives, when we say we are not really racist as Indians or First Nations people, we do not see colour. When we go to the Assembly, we acknowledge that, this is our world view in 30 seconds; we acknowledge the Creator. Then, we acknowledge those beings that sit one in the east, in the south, the west and north. They all have roles and functions.

We acknowledge mother earth for everything she does for us every day; father sky; grandmother moon; grandfather sun; our relatives; the star people. We acknowledge our relatives, the four-legged ones. We acknowledge the ones that fly, the ones that swim, the ones that crawl.

We acknowledge the male plants and the female plants, and then we will acknowledge those four grandmother spirits that look after the waters, rainwater, freshwater, saltwater and then, you are so powerful, as women, because when life comes, what happens?

Water breaks. That is our family. We are all part of that. We are the two-leggeds. I do not care if you are black, white, pink, polka dot; we are the two-leggeds. We fit into that worldview. If we can get that worldview taught and educated in the private sector and in the public sectors, not only in Canada, but throughout the world, we might have a chance of keeping the degrees down, because we are part of that. Whatever befalls our relatives in any of that thing that



I just described will eventually befall us as two-leggeds.

That is not acceptable. We need to move, and we need to use our Elders' knowledge, our traditional knowledge, to get this educated and taught, not only domestically but internationally. I also want to say that in our new agenda are innovative ways to spark economic prosperity. I always say you cannot talk self-determination, self-government, unless you really talk about economic self-sufficiency as well, which means unlocking the full potential of our young and blooming population. Canada does have an aging workforce. We have to unlock the potential of our lands and traditional territories in ways that are responsible and sustainable. Even for economic development—there is a lot of economic development people in the room—what are the basic four, five things we say? Greater access to capital is needed. You have got to have better access to capital and know how to raise money, how to raise funds. There needs to be more effective procurement policies, locally, regionally, nationally. Procurement is a big issue. Even provincial policy changes, and I have said this before to the premiers. I am going to go to the COF, the Council of the Federation, where all the premiers are meeting. This is one simple policy change that could happen. I have asked them to do this:

If you are the provincial government, I have said to them, think of this policy change as a government that before you issue a license or a permit to any industry operating on your provincial government boundaries in any sector, whether it be forestry, mining, tourism, whatever, that that company

must demonstrate that they have got a strategic plan when it comes to First Nations engagement, when it comes to procurement and, perhaps a workforce strategy, benefit sharing, members on their board, all of the above. If that company does not have a strategy or plan, you, as a government, do not issue them a license or permit. Boom. You will watch a lot of partnerships develop.

The policy change is another piece for economic development and prosperity. Federal government, speed up the comprehensive and specific lands claim process. It is good for the economy, really good. It is slow. If you do all those things, you will set out the agenda to create stronger and safer First Nations communities, a stronger economic base for all of us.

We are going to keep pushing for better housing, better infrastructure; it will all be stronger and safer through restorative justice systems and new approaches to police and community safety. We want to make sure that all women, First Nations women, girls, boys and men, two-spirit and transgender are free from violence.

When I talk about the justice system, everybody is going to remember two big names: Colten Boushie and Jon Styres. We say this punitive justice system has got to go, and we need to look at restorative justice systems. It is about having our laws recognized and being as equally important as common law and civil law. Canada is a big enough country; it is a progressive enough country to have other laws and systems recognized in addition to common law and civil

law. That is about looking at a really comprehensive restorative justice process. Finally, we need to see continued investments in housing, water and sewer infrastructure and education as well as health care. It is a given that we will push for those things. It is no question. To conclude, today, I want to make it clear that our agenda is not simply a federal government agenda; it is a national agenda. Every government, every citizen has a role to play in reconciliation in closing this gap.

There is a great deal all of you in this room can do in supporting our agenda and being agents of understanding and change. Even by you simply being here today tells me you have an interest in our work, in finding our path forward.

I thank you for listening with open hearts and open minds. I am always open to discussing ways we can work together to shape a future and a country that we all can be proud of. First Nations will continue to push forward for our children and our families. I know we can move forward faster when we move together. It is time to keep up the momentum to ensure we see results on the ground, in our homes and in our nations as our agenda is Canada's agenda.

When First Nations succeed, Canada succeeds. I want to say something and acknowledge a very important young man. Marcus Cooney, are you here, Marcus?

Marcus, stand up. This young man is 12 years old.

He has got a birthday coming up. He is 11; he is going to be 12 on May 25th, right? He is 12 years old. He is on his reconciliation journey. He is on his education journey.

He wanted to be here. It is these young men and women that are going to help create change, so I wanted to acknowledge you and thank you, because he is the one that is going to be challenging his mom and dad around the dinner table, his grandparents around that dinner table about what reconciliation looks like, what treaties look like, and about how we can work together to build a better country and more respect for First Nations people. He is here listening. I want to say a big thank you Marcus for doing that.

You are awesome. Keep it up. Thanks for listening, everybody. Thank you so much.

KJ: Thank you so much National Chief Bellegarde.

We are conscious of people's time, but the National Chief did kindly agree to take a couple of questions.

PB: If there are any questions. I am conscious of your time.

KJ: There is a lot of interest. You mentioned that at the end of your speech that, ultimately, everybody here is interested in having a dialogue and a discussion.

I did not mention this before, but it is a sold-out event. That, right there, in terms of the Empire Club of Canada, tells me there has got to be a few questions out there.

## Questions & Answers

---

**Q: Good afternoon. I believe, just like the Queen, you also have a duty to the un-ceded, un-surrendered Métis. I would like to invite you to close the gap with us. We would also like to be represented and be a part of the Native Indians across the country. Thank you.**

PB: Thanks for that comment. I just wanted my paper, so I can make notes. Again, in Canada's Constitution, First Nations, Métis and Inuit are recognized in s. 35. Even back home in Treaty 4 Territory, our old people used to say when John A. Macdonald was the Prime Minister of Canada, he put in place a treaty-making process, and he put the Treaty Commissioner in place.

The Treaty Commissioner came out to meet with our chiefs, with Poundmaker, Little Black Bear, all of the chiefs. Our chiefs were concerned about their Métis brothers and sisters and relatives. In Treaty 4, the chiefs asked Alexander Morris, Treaty Commissioner, "What about our Métis relatives, our brothers and sisters?" The chiefs were concerned about our relatives.

Alexander Morris said this: "We'll make Treaty with you first, as First Nations people, and we'll come back; the Crown will come back. We have to work together to push the Crown to come back for your peoples." I can only go by those teachings because you are also recognized in Canada's Constitution and there

is a different relationship in some regards, but I know our relatives back home—and this is true. What I said is true, the teaching about trying to push the Crown to come back and deal with your issues. However, we can work together; we work together. Maybe one day maybe the Métis will have one vote for the National Chief, too, and then I will really be concerned about the Métis issues. That is a good point.

**Q: I want to first thank you, National Chief, for your words today. They were inspiring. A fabulous job, as always. You always speak from the heart, so we really appreciate that. On behalf of the women in Ontario, we want to ask, after 50 years of discrimination under the Indian Act against Indigenous women and their descendants, if the AFN will stand with us to push this government to remove the final discrimination before they break for the summer?**

PB: Yes. We are on the same page. Just so the audience knows, under the Indian Act, there was a really discriminatory system against First Nations women.

Under the Indian Act, prior to 1985, a First Nation woman marrying a non-First Nations man, would lose status. Yet, if I married a non-Indian person, she gains that. If I married you in 1984, she would be a Treaty Indian. There was a discriminatory piece within the Indian Act. There is Bill S-3; it is the Descheneaux case. We are saying we support it all the way back

to 1876, to the first Indian Act to end discrimination against First Nations women, because of that. We support that. We will stand with you. We have chiefs' resolutions, so there is no question; we have got to end discrimination all the way back to 1876. The answer is yes.

**Q: Ziggy Krupa. Hello, Chief Perry. Thank you very much. I want to share a little story with you.**

**My younger daughter decided to go to the University of Ottawa. We had a family discussion as to her career path. She said she is taking Indigenous studies. I was taken aback about it, but said, okay. I had to pause for a minute and think about it, but then quickly realized that this is how change starts. It has got to start with somebody, and I am very proud of my daughter for making that choice. What are some of the opportunities for somebody like my daughter, going forward?**

**PB:** Good question. We encourage everyone to go out and listen and learn, get educated. There are opportunities at the band level, the reserve level, tribal council level, provincial territorial organization level, even at the AFN level. We are always looking for good people for research, writers, policy analysts, to come help and join the teams. There are opportunities like that.

There are summer student programs at each of those levels as well. She has got to learn how to knock

on the door and build a relationship and ask people to go for coffee first, go for lunch first. That is how you get your foot in the door, and I would encourage that to happen.

***Q: Bonjour.***

**My name is Randall Becker. I am the traditional Council Chief of the Teme Augama Anishnabai in Temagami. I am also the CEO of Gamet Gold Corp. and the owner of Nimkie Mining Services Corp. When we talk about moving forward—and really, sovereignty, I believe, I agree with you, is economic development, successful economic development—the underlying issues I see is that the building codes on the reserves are not up to the standards sometimes of everybody else. Also, the workplace safety laws on the reserve are different.**

**That should not be. You can go to a reserve and start putting on shingles with running shoes and a ball cap, but if you tried that in downtown Toronto, there would be tickets for everybody all the way around. I think that is an underlying problem with our people, too, is that the colleges are training for profit, so the classes are too big; they are not getting the courses they need; they are just getting rubber-stamped and thrown out the door; and they do not have the knowledge they need to be successful in mining or construction or anything.**



**It is a for-profit thing that this funding is going into. I would like to also see change on the reserve where our safety standards are on par with Canada and our building codes are on par with Canada.**

**All through the far north and all through the reserves, if you installed a central sewer and water system the way they are allowed to on the reserves, there would not be clean drinking water anywhere in this country. I would like to ask you if you could lobby for that, too, as well.**

*[Remarks in Indigenous language.]*

PB: Thanks, Randall.

Yes, that is a whole big thing. Building codes on the reserves, safety laws on the reserve, the standards are different. I grew up on the rez and we did not have running water, had to haul water in the wintertime, melt it on the wood stove, and I used to be perplexed as a little five-year-old kid hauling in snow, a big stack of snow, about how, after it melts, you only get a little bit of water. I had to keep doing that. I went to school off the reserve, grade one. I did not know how to flush a toilet, because we never had flush toilets. That is how we grew up. The issue of my long introduction here is that even when we got water—plumbing and sewer—it was not installed properly.

It would always freeze up in the winter, so we always had to maintain the outhouse summer and winter, because the standards were not the same. When I say when we have to occupy the field as First Nations people, in different laws, in different areas, in different jurisdictions, in different policies, I mean they have got to be as good as and/or better than provincial law or federal-provincial law or federal laws. If we occupied a field at Little Black Bear and have our own safety code, it is going to be better than the Building Code of Canada. If we occupied a field in any jurisdiction, it has to be better. Then, we have to have the capacity to enforce and implement that code. That is what we need to keep doing, so we have better services, better infrastructure comparable to everybody else, because right now there is not one. It varies, because each of those 634 reserves is a separate jurisdiction. Each of those 634 First Nations are at different levels about capacity. Some can do that. Others have a long way to go. The answer is yes, we can help lobby for that, and the answer is to the chiefs and councils and the people watching and listening, occupy the field, but you have to make sure that you also have the capacity to enforce that law. It has got to be just as good as and/or better than provincial and federal law—for building codes, all of those things, the safety pieces and law, but we have got to keep pushing for that to happen. Those are my comments.

KJ: Thank you very much.

PB: All right. Thanks, guys.

KJ: I am pleased to welcome Mike Martelli from Ontario Power Generation to the podium to thank National Chief Bellegarde.

**Note of Appreciation, by Mr. Mike Martelli, President,  
Renewable Generation, Ontario Power Generation**

Thank you, Kelly. Good afternoon. Thank you Chief Bellegarde for those inspiring words. Your words gave us pause to reflect, and I know everyone in this room will take your call to action to heart. Personally, I will strive to listen with empathy and do everything I can to support our First Nations partners.

It is particularly important to me, because OPG has held a special relationship with Indigenous peoples of Ontario for a very long time. Since our inception as a company 20 years ago, Indigenous policy has been a vital part of our identity. The policy has evolved as our business has evolved, but one thing has remained constant:

We want to build and grow lasting, impactful and respectful relationships with Indigenous communities near our current and future operations. I am proud of the prog-

ress that we have made developing several commercial partnerships for clean energy projects with First Nations communities. The legacy of these partnerships beyond the decades of clean power is a lasting economic benefit, and it means opportunities for skilled workers.

Through these projects, our First Nations partners receive a long-term revenue stream that helps grow strong communities, strong communities that can share their culture and continue their traditions. This is something that matters a great deal to OPG and to all of Canada.

As Chief Bellegarde previously said, “We focus on bringing back Indigenous languages, ceremonies, cultures and traditions, all that was lost over the past 150 years.

This is how we will generate hope for all Canadian people.” With these words in mind, we will strive to do much more.

We will strengthen our bonds through openness and trust; we will look to build more mutual beneficial partnerships; and we will continue to listen and serve while respecting the traditional territories and culture of the province’s First Nations. Thank you. Miigwetch.

## **Concluding Remarks, by Ms. Jackson**

Thank you. Our event is coming to a close, and we look forward to welcoming you at some of our upcoming events. Tonight, we have an evening event focused on “Canada’s Fresh Political Voices.”

On June 10th, we are hosting a very special “Power in Politics” event featuring Vassy Kapelos. On June 13th, we will have a panel discussion entitled “The Rise of White Nationalism in Canada.”

That day, as well, in the evening, we will have an event featuring the Honourable Mary Ng: “Women Who Build.” This meeting is now adjourned.

Thank you for attending.