

Will bill 186 affect Six Nations smoke shop economy?

By Jim Windle
SIX NATIONS

Bill 186 passed in Ontario last year has now been incorporated as part of the Ontario Tobacco Tax Act. Federally, they have created a task force of 40 or more officers to crack down on so-called "contraband cigarettes".

Elected Chief Bill Montour is not happy with that decision.

"To me, there is no such thing as 'contraband cigarettes'", he says. "That is a part of our economy and I think Canada has to come to realize, as well as Ontario, that we have a right to an economy. We are prepared to go to war, in court, on that. They can't dictate any kind of an economy for us."

Self sufficiency for Six Nations is a matter Montour believes is essential to the very existence of Six Nations as a people.

"Right now they (the government) say, you get in the business and start to become self sufficient, but you can only do it on reserve with a certain group of people determining who is eligible — like a status Indian — and everybody else you gotta collect taxes for us from. That's a no-go from here. We have been saying very clearly for years now, we are not tax collectors for any government and this Canadian society."

Some have speculated that with the Ontario Bill 186 now passed, Six Nations smoke shacks will be targeted by the OPP and forcibly shut down. Montour does not believe that will happen.

"They know better than to try and bust the smoke shops," says Montour. "They will enforce it by trying to get the people who are buying cigarettes on reserve as they come off reserve. We have been very clear with the government that if they feel there are people not paying their taxes, collect it off reserve and don't come around here and shut us down, because you ain't gonna."

Montour estimates that the cigarette economy of Six Nations generated between 4,500 and 5,000 jobs in this community.

"We're not going to roll over and let them take that away," he says.

Last year along Highway #6 the OPP was stopping customers leaving smoke shops and charging them. That only lasted a couple of weeks because they found the practice was not cost ef-



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ficient to conduct long term and did very little to curb the sale of Native cigarettes in any significant numbers.

Chief Montour believes that this latest threat of police intervention is just another show for the masses and will be short lived if in fact it is practiced at all.

"How many millions of dollars have they spent over the last 20 years trying to get a handle on what they call 'contraband tobacco'", says Montour. "It hasn't made even a small dent in the whole thing because society is going to smoke whether the government says so or not. I don't think the government has any right to dictate societal behaviour. They say there are health costs, but they collect enough tax off us to deal with that."

According to Chief Montour, GRE is going to pay \$168 million this year in excise taxes to Canada, and another \$20 million from those working off reserve.

"I'd say between \$178 and \$190 million taking all things into account is going off this community and into Canada by way of taxes," he says. "Meanwhile, the transfer back to Six Nations to run the reserve community is \$23 million from the federal government and our contribution arrangement of \$27 million from the province. It takes \$70 million just to run the Six Nations community. That means we have to raise 49% of our need through user fees for water. The Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership puts in \$8 million through gaming arrangements, the Six Nations Gas Company, land leases,

and other avenues as well, but not nearly enough, especially with a growing community."

Montour is also against the delivery charges some service providers are including in their bills to Six Nations residents.

"We have been having a lot of issues with this," he says. "When we fought against the HST being imposed on us in 2010, we got Ontario and Canada — two governments — to agree that that would not happen to any services coming to the Six Nations. But there are still pockets of resistance within the business community that do not want to recognize it."

So what can a Six Nations resident do about being billed for delivery of services to Six Nations Territory?

"I've got draft letters in my office for anyone who has problems with the collection of tax on telephone bills, hydro bills, outside cable and internet bills. Those services should all come to Six Nations free of any tax."

Is it too late to do anything about the gasoline tax here on reserve?

"Gasoline is another issue that we're going to have to get our heads around because as I have said and it is documented, anything coming to Six Nations whether it is wired, trucked, dropped, carried, or by any other means, when it come here it comes free of taxes."

"Gasoline is coming here and we are getting 14.7 cents taken off a litre of gas. I want to know where the rest of it is going, because there is about 34 cents per litre going to taxes."