

Elected chief warns Ottawa of "threat of violence" if Bill C-10 approved

By Donna Duric
Writer

Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill has warned Liberal senators there could be a "threat of violence" if the Conservative government pushes through anti-tobacco legislation Bill C-10.

Hill and a number of Iroquois Caucus elected chiefs and delegates met with the senators in Ottawa last week to air their concerns with Bill C-10, the Tackling Contraband Tobacco Act.

The legislation aims to amend the Criminal Code to add a penalty for trafficking in "contraband" tobacco.

Hill and elected leaders from Tyendinaga and Kahnawake met with a number of senators on Wednesday and Thursday last week, as well as NDP leader Thomas Mulcair and Liberal MP Wayne Easter.

"If this bill passes, there's a threat of violence that could occur in our communities," Hill said she told the lawmakers. "I also told them about

the big loss of economy that could suffer if this goes ahead and that we're going to go back and probably do a bigger lobby in May."

Hill said the majority Conservative government will vote in favour of the bill.

"The Conservatives have the numbers to push it through if they want," she said. "When we go back (to Ottawa) we're going to try to meet with some Conservative MPs."

The group met with Liberal senators Lillian Dyck, Nick Sibbeston, and Charlie Watt.

Liberal Public Safety Critic Wayne Easter says he is also concerned about the potential for violence should Bill C-10 go through.

"If you throw hundreds of people out of work, there is the potential for violence," he said. "They (the Iroquois Caucus) were meeting with me as; it being a public safety issue, given that if the results of C-10 criminalizes a group of people...there could be problems. I understand that."



Elected Chief Ava Hill

He said he is going to work with his party to see if aboriginal leaders can have an opportunity to voice their concerns about the bill in the Senate.

"It's something I said I would talk about in (the Liberal) caucus, to see if there is a way of amending it (Bill C-10) to accommodate some of their needs."

He said aboriginal leaders should have had their concerns heard during federal justice committee meetings late last fall when the Conservatives first tabled the amended bill. "I don't know why they were not at the

committee as witnesses. There's a problem in terms of the process."

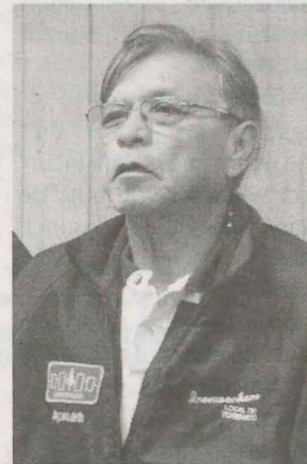
The Assembly of First Nations, Kahnawake and Akwesasne made presentations at the hearings.

Hill says the bill will probably become law before parliament breaks for the summer recess in late June. The bill has yet to pass third reading in the House of Commons before heading to the Senate. Hill said it will probably pass third reading before the end of April.

"We are starting to do some advocacy work on it (Bill C-10)," said Hill at last week's general council meeting when a delegation of community members asked how they could help fight the bill.

"We came to offer peace and find out how we can help," said Chris "Jagwadeth" Sandy.

He said he had heard band council was going to sponsor a number of buses to Ottawa.



Chris "Jagwadeth" Sandy

Hill said that type of action will most likely come in May. "We're going to do a bigger lobby effort probably the beginning of May," she said. "There may come a day when do need buses. That day is not here yet."

She said band council needs to hold another community meeting.

"We probably need to have a another community meeting to talk about how and what we're going to do," she said. "If we do get buses, we want those buses to be full

because in the past when we've gotten buses, we've gone to big expenses to get them and there've been only like 20 or 30 people on them. What we need to do is have a good planning session with everybody in the community."

Sandy said band council should appoint an elected representative for community members to talk to about the bill

"Nobody knows what's going on," he said. "There's not enough information about: how are we going to plan? Who do we contact? It involves everybody. It's not just the cigarettes right now. It's every taxable dollar on the Grand River."

Hill agreed, "That's what that bill is all about, is taxation."

She said in the meantime, band council also needs to touch base with local cigarette manufacturers, who have been meeting regularly to strategize against Bill C-10.