

Six Nations opposes new education act

By Jen Mt. Pleasant

OHSWEKEN - The latest version of the First Nations Education Act which is now entitled the "First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act," was introduced in Parliament last week. Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill was already in Ottawa that same day meeting with politicians to discuss Bill C-10.

In an interview with the *Two Row Times*, Hill stated that when she, along with band council representatives from Kahnawake and Tyendinaga were meeting with Opposition leader Thomas Mulcair, they had heard that the Assembly of First Nations leader Shawn Atleo was downstairs giving a press conference on the newly tabled education Act.

Hill said they went downstairs to listen in on the press conference. One of the biggest questions concerning Six Nations Elected Council right now is how much of a role the AFN and Atleo have played in the making of this new Act. Repeated attempts by Hill to contact Atleo have been unsuccessful which is leading her to believe that he may have something to hide. "When we were at Parliament last week and we got wind of

the AFN press conference, we crashed it. APTN was there and I asked them when they interview Atleo to ask him if he co-drafted the FNCFNEA and he never really answered the question," Hill told Council on Monday morning.

In an interview, Six Nations community member Amber Skye stated, "I don't think having more educated children will help our people unless they know who they are and who their people are. There's a lot of educated people in the world but not a lot of people who have good minds. Our children really need to know who they are. Having a strong cultural foundation facilitates resilience but resilience is one of the best measures of success and not just in education but in just about every other issue we see in our community.

"I also think success is something culturally defined. What is success for our children may not be the same as success for others. Success for me is that my children know who they are and they use whatever gifts they have to help their people."

Skye attended immersion school and went on to graduate from university and currently teaches at McMaster University. What concerns her the

most is the standard provincial curriculum that is taught in the schools on Six Nations. "We have known for a long time that the current system doesn't work for our children. Many indigenous education scholars have demonstrated the flaws of the system and the need to indigenize our education for our children to succeed and at the same time challenge assimilation."

Asked about what worries her the most concerning education, Skye stated, "I'm most worried that we are moving in the wrong direction. I've asked myself what good my children will be to the community if they are highly educated but don't know the culture or the community? What will they be able to offer that the current system doesn't? We all want the best for our kids and we've been told too long that Euro-western knowledge is superior. We need to change our curriculum and delivery methods also."

On what her advice would be to those who are in control of the funding dollars and the curriculum for schools on Six Nations, Skye explained, "We need to recognize our right to provide education as we see fit for our children. That is what our immersion schools did in the be-

ginning. Culture should not be a lesson it should be centralized. It should guide how we teach and what we teach.

"We can still meet requirements and I think we will excel if we take this approach. We also need to utilize our people both in the schools and in higher-level positions. We have so many very qualified people in our community that we should be drawing on. Again we tend to consult outsiders about what is best for our children."

Elected Chief Ava Hill told the *Two Row Times* that the newly tabled

FNCFNEA has two small clauses that stipulate that language and culture 'may be taught' in the schools but English or French are to be the main languages spoken. If the FNCFNEA gets passed through Parliament, the Minister of Indian Affairs will still be in control of schools on Six Nations and what is to be taught in the schools.

In response to the

FNCFNEA, the Chiefs of Ontario have sent out emails to all First Nations in Ontario asking councils to send letters to the AFN stating that they were never consulted on the education act and that the AFN does not represent the best interests of First Nations and to also send a letter to the Minister of Indian Affairs stating the same thing.