

Alberta Metis get historic land

EDMONTON (CP) — Alberta Metis leaders left the legislature Thursday with a preliminary land agreement they say will pay them at least \$250 million over the next 17 years.

The agreement in principle to protect and develop the 50-year-old settlement lands came during a meeting with Premier Don Getty, whose Conservative government is seeking re-election March 20.

"What it means is the people on the settlement level can get up off their knees and not depend on hand-outs anymore," said Randy Hardy, president of the Federation of Metis Settlements.

The deal gives the Metis control of about 520,000 hectares of land in northern Alberta. Getty called the tentative pact a landmark.

"Some of the Metis elders have been working on this for 20 and 30 years," Getty said. "There will be territorial integrity for them."

Getty refused to say how much the agreement will cost Alberta taxpayers. He said details will be released later but would not say whether Albertans will know the cost before they go to the polls.

The agreement must still be approved by the provincial cabinet and in a vote by Metis settlers.

Hardy acknowledged the Metis will get no less than \$250 million, to be used to improve their communities and overcome an 80-per-cent unemployment rate.

"I thought rather than make it all public now and somehow influence in a negative way on future cabinets, we'd keep it to ourselves for now," Hardy said.

He said the cash is to be paid over seven years and the province will pay a set amount for another 10 years to keep up maintenance on the eight settlements.

Hardy said the Metis are willing to drop a \$250-million lawsuit against the government for lost oil

and gas revenues that has been bogged down in the courts since 1967.

Getty said the agreement was not motivated by the current election campaign.

Three of the settlements which are part of the deal sit in the riding of Lesser Slave Lake, where Tory Pearl Calahasen is in a tough fight to replace Economic Development Minister Larry Shaben.

Hardy said he believes Getty's commitment is sincere. "We have a firm confidence he will keep his promise." *MARCH 1989*

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