

Forum held to discuss “working draft” of proposed tobacco law

By Johnna Martin

OHSWEKEN – On Wednesday approximately 50 Six Nations community members attended a public meeting held at Polytechnic to hear and provide feedback for the working introduction of the proposed Haudenosaunee at Oswe:ge Tobacco Law.

The event was organized by the Haudenosaunee Trade Delegation. This group has its origins in the Haudenosaunee Trade Collective [HTC], a group of business people involved in the tobacco trade who have been working to educate and inform both Ogweho:weh people and the general Canadian public about the “potentially devastating effect that Bill C-10 would have on our peoples and economies that depend on the tobacco industries in Ogweho:weh Territories.” Shortly after forming, the HTC went to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council [HCCC] for direction.

It was at this time that another organization – the Haudenosaunee Trade Delegation – was appointed with members from both the HTC and HCCC with Terms of Reference that included developing our own Tobacco Law.

The Kimberly Thomas Professional Corporation was retained by the HTC to develop a ‘Working Draft’ of the Haudenosaunee at Oswe:ge Tobacco Law for presentation to both the HCCC for approval, and to the community for input.

In February 2015, the document was submitted to the HCCC for approval. Community engagement sessions were then planned once approval was granted.

This community meeting was the first of three set up by the Haudenosaunee Trade Delegation that would allow for community awareness, questions and input. Kimberly Thomas was on hand to go through a PowerPoint presentation, and community members were provided with copies of the ‘Working Draft.’

Background information on the HTC was

also made available, with business cards to contact spokesperson Kris Green from the HTC. Kimberly Thomas also had her business cards on hand for people that may want to ask questions individually.

The meeting began

at 6 p.m. with a delicious meal prepared by Janace Henry. An opening was then given in the Cayuga language by Confederacy Chief Blake Bomberry. Introductions were made for the head table, which consisted of Kris Green from the HTC and Gary

Johnson, Chief Bomberry, and Aaron Detlor of the HCCC.

Thomas proceeded to go through the PowerPoint presentation, stopping every little while to answer questions or listen to input from community members. There

were a few concerns about history, such as: What are our inherent rights? How did we get to this point? How did this draft come to be? What are our treaty-protected economic rights?

Thomas had this to say: “The Great Law was

given to the Haudenosaunee from the Peacemaker. The sovereignty of our Nation comes from Shogwayadihsoh. Under the Great Law, we have the inherent and treaty-protected right to

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govern our people and to freely use and enjoy our lands to promote the prosperity of our people.

"The Two Row Wampum Treaty was created to protect our own laws and way of life. External governments have continued to put their laws in our canoe. At what point do we say enough is enough? Do we wait until our canoe sinks? Tobacco was given to us as a gift from Shogwayadisoh and has always been sacred to our people. Tobacco has always been an important part of our economy. Our greatest protection is to enact our own Tobacco Law established under our inherent and Treaty-protected right to exercise law making authority."

Thomas added that the Oswe:ge Tobacco Law was needed now because "Bill C-10 is a threat to



Kris Green of the HTC spoke to the crowd, asking for input, questions, any ideas or solutions that have not been identified and really tried to stress the importance of participation. PHOTO BY JOHNNA MARTIN

our economic rights and security. When it comes into force, it will criminalize our people involved in the Haudenosaunee tobacco industry."

Aaron Detlor stated, "We are trying to found this on something that existed before treaties. The Haudenosaunee have

been involved with commercial activity for thousands of years. Tobacco is a part of our business, commerce and industry. Really, what we are trying to do is grounded in the inherent authority of HCCC to pass laws and the inherent ability of Haudenosaunee People to go out

and do business. We are trying to move away to a certain extent from the treaty relationship with the Crown, whether it's the Two Row or the Silver Covenant or even more [specifically], the Treaty of 1701 in Haldimand."

The definition of Haudenosaunee at Os-

we:ge sparked a few comments and questions. Community members were concerned about inclusivity. The HCCC has proposed to use 'Fire' as a means to define Haudenosaunee Nations, and as such, "every individual that is Haudenosaunee at Oswe:ge will be able to trace his or her ancestry back to one of the Fires at Six Nations Grand River Territory with help from the HCCC."

Kimberly Thomas stated, "The definition of 'fire' in our languages and under the Great Law is the most inclusive."

Chief Bomberry agreed: "Every nation has a fire. The one we talk about here belongs to the clans."

Kris Green of the HTC spoke to the crowd, asking for input, questions, any ideas or solutions that have not been iden-

tified and really tried to stress the importance of participation.

She talked about the challenges in creating a document that is as inclusive as possible, a strong tool to exercise jurisdiction, rights and interests both now and in the future.

All were invited to the next community meeting on Wednesday, April 1, again at Polytechnic, and again with some great food. The meeting will start at 6 p.m.

As well, all Haudenosaunee are able to attend an open HCCC meeting on the 1st Saturday of every month, where the HTD will give an update. This meeting starts at 10 a.m.