

Ontario chief assault charge dismissed

By Pearce Bannon

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SARNIA, Ont.,- Ontario Regional Chief Tom Bressette blamed politics for a January 1998 assault charge against him which was dismissed in court here last Friday.

"I believe it was a political charge as far as I'm concerned," Bressette told reporters minutes after Judge R.G. Hunter dismissed the case. "People wanted to discredit me politically is what the motive was."

Kettle and Stony Point residents making unfounded accusations about band council operations, Bressette explained, were behind the confrontation that led to his

being charged with assault.

The charge stemmed from a late-night clash between factions at the Kettle and Stony Point band office on January 18. Prior to being elected Regional Chief in June 1997, Chief Bressette served as Kettle and Stony's chief for eight years.

Christine Bressette, who said she

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was assaulted by Chief Bressette, told the court he grabbed her right wrist and squeezed it after she blocked his attempt to open the reserve's council chambers. Ms. Bressette is no relation to Chief Bressette.

Ms. Bressette testified that after she yelled in pain from the squeeze, the Chief laughed and said, "Why don't you fall down?"

Court heard that earlier that evening, at approximately 8 p.m., Ms. Bressette led a group of five women and three children in what she described as a peaceful occupation of the band office.

Ms. Bressette testified that the occupation was to protest the misuse of funds and authority by the reserve's band council. The women were calling for a forensic audit of band business that Ms. Bressette said will uncover corruption and fraud.

Ms. Bressette told the court the chief walked away from her after another protester told him her children were inside the council chambers.

Testimony from two women present during the occupation supported Ms. Bressette's claim that Chief Bressette grabbed her and then made the remark about falling down.

Chief Bressette agreed he said that, but only after Ms. Bressette blocked his hand from grabbing the door handle with her hand. She then complained out loud he was pushing her.

"I figured she would accuse me of assaulting her so I said, 'Why don't you fall down and make it look good,' he told the court.

Chief Bressette testified he got involved with the protest because, even though he was no longer the reserve's chief, residents asked for his help saying there was a lack of



Tom Bressette says politics to blame for charge

leadership in the community.

In his ruling, Judge Hunter said Chief Bressette had no intention of assaulting Ms. Bressette in his attempt to try and open the council chamber doors. Any contact that occurred between the two was minimal, he said.

He also rejected testimony from the two women who said they witnessed an assault, saying they did not have a clear view of what happened.

Judge Hunter also turned down Ms. Bressette's application for a peace bond against Chief Bressette.

Speaking outside the courthouse, Ms. Bressette said she was not surprised by the judge's ruling.

Tom Bressette's position as Ontario's highest ranking chief, she said, helped sway Judge Hunter's decision. "It seems to be like the more power and the more politically involved you are in things," the more pull you in court, she said.

Far from giving up her protest, Ms. Bressette said she still wants a forensic audit of the band council's operations. But, she said, Kettle and Stony Point band council recently decided to take money earmarked for an audit to use for road improvements.

Ms. Bressette also accused the federal government of ignoring residents' concerns about the band



Christine Bressette, says she was assaulted

council.

"It seems to be the Minister of Indian Affairs is not interested in what's happening here." Only the Reform Party is concerned, she said.

Chief Bressette told reporters anyone is welcome to audit Kettle and Stony's books providing they do so without wearing a mask over their face.

He said most Kettle and Stony residents are tired and angry with a small disgruntled minority trying to force their views by occupying reserve facilities.

"The whole council who (protesters) are calling corrupt were all elected," he said.

In turn, Kettle and Stony Point has always registered "clean" audits with Indian Affairs, said Chief Bressette.

Tensions at Kettle and Stony Point over the last 18 months have led to three protests for band council accountability at the band office.

There has also been a long-time rift between Stoney Pointers, who say they are a separate group, and the Kettle Point band. Stoney Point families were moved to nearby Kettle Point in 1942 when the federal government appropriated their land to build an army training camp.

The Kettle reserve was eventually renamed Kettle and Stony Point with the "e" dropped from "Stoney."

An agreement in principle for the return of Camp Ipperwash to the Kettle and Stony Point band was signed in June. The camp, however, remains occupied by descendants of Stoney Point members.