

AFN votes for National Chief: SNEC endorses Picard

By Nahnda Garlow

WINNIPEG – This month, the Assembly of First Nations 2014 Election for the Office of the National Chief will take place on December 10th in Winnipeg during the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly.

Three candidates have come forward in the running: Perry Bellegarde of the Little Black Bear First Nation – Treaty 4 Territory in Saskatoon, Leon Jourdain of the Lac La Croix Annishnabe Territory in Treaty 3, and Ghislain Picard – Innu of Pessamit, Quebec. Each of the candidates have more than 20 years of leadership in the indigenous communities they serve.

Six Nations Elected Council has sent a delega-

tion to the Special Chiefs Assembly and they carry one of the 639 eligible votes to elect the new AFN Grand Chief. Yesterday they released the following statement:

“Six Nations Elected Council have mandated Chief G. Ava Hill, Councilors B. Darryl Hill and Terry General to attend the Special Chief’s Assembly of the Assembly of First Nations in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This Special Assembly was called to gather the Elected Chiefs across the nation to vote for a new National Chief, after the abrupt departure of former National Chief Shawn Atleo. This election is a unique situation as a newly elected National Chief will be elected for 3 1/2 years.

“Three candidates have put their name forward for the position, Ghislain Picard, Perry Bellegarde and Leon Jourdain.

“Six Nations Elected Chief and Council have determined to support Ghislain Picard for National Chief.

“Picard brings with him 22 years of experience as Regional Chief of Quebec and Labrador. Picard has had success working to unify the 10 different Nations within his home region. This experience will be fundamental to providing a strong advocacy voice for the diverse Nations across Turtle Island. Six Nations Elected Council believe that Ghislain Picard’s stance against

Bill C-33 with the people is an important indication as to how he will act as the National Chief.”

This new AFN National Chief steps in after the sudden resignation of former National Chief Shawn A-in-Chut Atleo last spring. Atleo was heavily criticized by First Nations leaders for his involvement in the Conservatives’ proposed reform to education for First Nations communities. When explaining the purpose behind his abrupt resignation Atleo stated that he did not want to become an obstacle to the work of being national chief and that he did not want to become a “lightning rod distracting kids from their potential” – presumably referring to the

proposed Bill C-33, better known as the FNEA (later FNCFNEA).

The AFN has not elected a person in the leadership role of National Chief since Atleo resigned. However in the interim current candidate Ghislain Picard was appointed to lead the organization and has acted in the role since the summer.

Many critics of the AFN have stated that they are not an effective leadership body representative of the indigenous people of Canada because grassroots indigenous people are not permitted to participate in the elections.

In order to be eligible to run for the AFN Office of National Chief

each candidate must be of First Nations ancestry and have at least 15 First Nations Chiefs endorsing their candidacy.

The AFN currently represents 639 First Nations communities spanning the territory of the entire nation-state of Canada. The victorious candidate requires a majority vote of 60% to be successful; approximately 380 votes – those do not come from the indigenous people themselves but rather from elected/appointed leadership from the 639 communities represented at AFN. The successful candidate will take the position of National Chief of the AFN for three and a half years.