

AFN assembly wraps up with positive energy for new leader

By Lynda Powless and Donna Duric

Writers

WINNIPEG - The Assembly of First Nations has wrapped up its gathering in Winnipeg with a new national leader. National Chief Perry Bellegarde thanked delegates for their support during the closing ceremonies of the three-day meeting.

He also thanked interim chief Ghislain Picard for leading the organization after the resignation of former chief Shawn Atleo.

Bellegarde says the assembly is relevant and will be responsive going forward. He says the assembly is moving ahead united and it's time to get down to work.

Bellegarde was elected national chief Wednesday, beating Picard, who came in second with 29 per cent of the vote and Ontario Chief Leon Jourdain.

Mississaugas of New Credit Chief Bryan LaForme said no one was really surprised Chief Bellegarde won the election, just that he won it on the first ballot.

"Yeah well I think a lot of people had that same response on the same first ballot. We were all surprised. It wasn't any surprise that Perry (Chief Bellegarde) would get it. Just that he did on the first ballot. That 63 % that's good. We were all settling in to at least go to round two on the ballots but he made it in, and a lot of people seem to be pleased with the selection."

He said "Chief Bellegarde has a big job ahead of him if he is going to accomplish what he says he is going to accomplish. He will have to work hard."

Chief LaForme said he didn't vote for Bellegarde on the first ballot. "No our council



National Chief Perry Bellegarde

had our discussions around the table and decided not to support him."

But he said. "We would have been satisfied with either candidate. Perry or Ghislain. I think either would have served us well."

He says he believes Chief Bellegarde will do a good job. "I think Perry will move forward with the agenda he has in mind, but I think he wants to work with the chiefs not only the executive. That's been his style for a long time so he will continue with it. There has been a lack of that kind of representation on the national organization's level. I think that's what has been the problem. The national organization has lost focus as a national organization. It has not been doing what we, the grassroots' chiefs, wanted them to do. When Shawn (former chief Atleo) was

Continued on page 3)