

HST compounds poverty and impacts on First Nation sovereignty

Submitted by the Union of Ontario Indians

Anishinabek leaders and citizens demonstrated at the constituency office of Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty April 30th to voice concerns about the proposed Harmonized Sales Tax. The new federal tax system is now beginning to be implemented across Ontario despite time-lines committed to by government to have the HST implemented effective as of July 1, 2010.

The Minister's office was closed for business and there was nobody there to take a letter requesting a meeting with leadership led by Anishinabek Nation Grand Council Chief Patrick Madahbee.

"The lights were on but no one was home," says Madahbee. "Minister Flaherty refuses to meet with us and continues to ignore us. I stuck my letter on his door and we plastered protest signs all over the building."

Leaders in attendance represented the Anishinabek Nation from the South East, South West, Superior to the Lake Huron Region.

Lake Huron Regional Chief Isadore Day says that another major impact that is of primary interest to the federal government is forcing its jurisdiction on our Citizens who hold sovereignty and inherent rights that have never been relinquished – the treaties are living proof.

"What's troubling about this HST policy is that it will continue to marginalize and impact the poorest of the poor – First Nations in Ontario," says Chief Day.

Southeast Regional Chief J. R. Marsden says that the demonstration got

support from people passing by honking their horns and the Metis Federation came out in support.

"Flaherty doesn't want to hear about the study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which says First Nations citizens are the only population in Ontario which would bear the full impact of the proposed HST," says Chief Marsden.

Superior Regional Chief Peter Collins says that Minister Flaherty doesn't seem to care that thousands of First Nations families – to whom his government publicly apologized and promised a better future – would be further impoverished by \$100 a week by this immoral and illegal tax proposal.

Southwest Regional Chief Chris Plain is concerned about the impact HST will have on Casino Rama revenues.

"The Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation – a provincial government agency – tells us the HST will reduce Casino Rama's net revenues by \$13 million in its first year," said Chief Plain. "That's an average \$100,000 less that each First Nation in this province will have to buy computers for students, or build cultural and recreational facilities for their community members," says Chief Plain.

Chief Day says that citizens off-reserve will be clearly impacted and discriminated against by this policy. He says "our Anishinabek youth, Elders, single moms, and those on fixed incomes are tied to a double jeopardy of poverty when they are forced to live off reserve due to education, lack of housing or when they seek a better quality of life off-reserve."

Leadership suspects that the costs to maintaining the point-of-sale for off-reserve purchases is not so much a valuable money-grab to government, as it's more of an erosion and assault on First Nation Sovereignty.

"Our Young People are coming out and voicing their anger and are clearly aware of the financial bottom line, as well, they know their rights and are saying that treaties must be honored," concludes Day.

It is anticipated that more targeted political action will take place in the days and weeks to follow as First

Nations across Ontario are clearly not being heard by the federal government regarding its role on HST in the province of Ontario.

The Anishinabek Nation established the Union of Ontario Indians as its secretariat in 1949. The UOI is a political advocate for 40 member communities across Ontario, representing approximately 55,000 people. The Union of Ontario Indians is the oldest political organization in Ontario and can trace its roots back to the Confederacy of Three Fires, which existed long before European contact. ▲