

Let's Have a Conversation – Bev Sellars

Elections! Elections! Congratulations to Kukpi7 Sheri Sellars in her bid for office. Thank you to Tony Mack and Cheryl Chapman for stepping up to the plate. It is courageous to be willing to take on such responsibility. The pressures of being in office are heavy. Not only do you have to make sure you have the right people hired and allow them to do their jobs, you also become a political spokesperson for our community.

I firmly believe that you do not have to be elected to be a leader. We have many different types of leaders in our community and we need to utilize them all. Elections always bring out tension in the community and then some who are not happy with the results withdraw until the next election. That reminds me of someone who told me, "You can stand on the outside and rant and rave all you want. That will not work. Or you can become part of the solution by getting involved." I want to remind everyone that we all have a stake in this community and it doesn't matter who is in office, our duties as a community member should never be dismissed. This is our community and those we put in office are there to carry out the direction of membership. This was said very clearly by **all** candidates at the Open Forum. So let's organize ourselves to give that direction.

To begin with, let's look at the way we govern ourselves. The Department of Indian Affairs forced this election process on us. We have been trying to upgrade this for some time now. We need to examine what is not working and put forward an alternative process that works for all of us. As it is now, in the end it's just a different set of people operating the same flawed system. This system creates lateral violence.

At one time we had our whole territories to sustain us. Now we have a few acres on a reserve that has so many restrictions and a few resources that are not enough to sustain everyone. This eventually developed into families fighting for the scraps thrown to us from the Department of Indian Affairs and we still have family divides today. We will never get to where we need to be without common goals and everyone working towards it. We have to overcome our differences within the community. We need to quit being colonized and be kind to each other.

I believe the 'old way' of operating suited our purposes. I have been doing some research on this topic and would like to have a conversation about it. We obviously can't go back but we may be able to incorporate some of it into present day.

And we still need to have conversations about other issues that affect us. As I said before, this is not a Chief and Council or staff bashing session. This is to examine our issues/problems and put forward solutions to help us move forward in a positive way.

Issues we can examine:

- What are your rights as an Indigenous person?
- What is UNDRIP? What is FPIC?
- What does Section 35.1 and 25.1 of the Constitution mean to me as an Indigenous person?

What do the many court cases Indigenous peoples have won mean?

- What is the Indian Act and how does it differ from Indigenous rights? What 'powers' do Chief and Council have?
- What organizations work for us and how do we become involved?
- What can we do to protect our rights?
- The Canadian Human Rights Code only became applicable on reserve in 2008. What does that mean?
- What is our role as a community to the environment?
- Anything else that might come up that members want information on.

We can become a powerful force in our territory if we work together. In order to do that, we have to provide direction for our Council.

And please do not feel intimidated because you have never been to University or College. Some of the smartest people I have met did not finish elementary school. James and Joe Gosnell of the Nisga'a Nation only went to Grade 4 and yet they could go head to head with the best lawyers. Learning doesn't happen only in schools, learning happens by talking about issues and getting everyone's input. And I should also say that some of the most uniformed, close-minded people I know have university degrees. Having a piece of paper does not make you smart.

If anyone has ever studied the 'Quiet Revolution' in Quebec you will know that the leaders in the 1960s decided to educate their people. Until then the English dominated the French people and even though they did not like it, they could do little about it until they got the grassroots people involved. Now Quebec is strong and very outspoken on issues that directly affect them.

There is a lot that I do not know but I am willing to learn alongside you. I do not get paid for this. The community has supported me in so many ways over my lifetime and I would like to contribute back in whatever way I can. I know others are interested because I have been asked when I am going to have more 'discussions'. We have had two sessions now and the response has been positive. I have been working on getting our first guest speaker in. Grand Chief Ed John has agreed to come to our community. It is just a matter of finding a date that works for both the community and his busy schedule. I had meant to have at least 5 sessions before the election for those wanting to run but my work and availability became an issue.

Together we can make our community strong and make it easier to those elected who act as our spokespeople. All I can offer is a meal and some good discussion. I hope you will join me.

The next session is: May 6, 2019 @ 5:00 p.m., Soda Creek Gym.

Everyone welcome but remember, no personal issues with Chief, Council or staff. We just want to improve communication and the way we operate. We can do this without putting any community member or staff down. What are the core issues? That is the question.