

Letter to Editor  
Charlottetown Guardian  
From Chief Brian Francis and Chief Matilda Ramjattan

After reading Keptin John Joe Sark's letter to the editor ("Terrible Insult to Mi'kmaq", *the Guardian*, October 5, 2017), we felt it necessary to set the record straight on a few of the matters he raised. Regarding the proposed Port-la-Joye-Fort Amherst name issue, Mr. Sark incorrectly stated that "Parks Canada's decision not to remove the name of General Amherst from the National Historic Site at Rocky Point" was defended. It was not about "defending" a decision, it was about finding a path forward that promotes reconciliation over revenge. We do understand Mr. Sark's sentiment and the outrage of some of our Mi'kmaq community members on the naming issue, they are justified, but the constant back and forth was becoming increasingly divisive and ineffectual. Contrary to Mr. Sark's assertion, there is no known historical evidence indicating that Amherst played any active role respecting cultural genocide of the Mi'kmaq, including the Mi'kmaq of Prince Edward Island. However, there seems to be clear historical evidence of General Amherst's shameful treatment of the Indigenous Peoples in other parts of North America. As we outlined in our public statement on the issue weeks ago, the attempted annihilation of a segment of the population because of a perceived cultural superiority is never excusable – regardless of the time period. Further, the fact that there is no evidence of atrocities against the Mi'kmaq does not exonerate Amherst for his overall attitude and actions. Notwithstanding this, we stand by our earlier statement that the seemingly never ending debate is interfering with what should be a concerted effort to promote Indigenous history and culture. As previously set out, we have been guided by the wisdom of Senator Murray Sinclair on this issue, a man whose reputation in the Indigenous community is beyond reproach. Senator Sinclair, the former Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, has stated that tearing down tributes to historical figures is counter-productive. "It is not about taking names off buildings, it is about whether we can find a way to put Indigenous names on buildings." We also advocate that there be plaques associated with historical figures which allow for the full truth-based history to be known. Such plaques would educate the public as to the shameful deeds of colonial figures, and thereby serve as a permanent reminder of the unconscionable treatment that the Indigenous Peoples had to endure, including by General Amherst. We see this as being preferable to erasing the name and issue from the social consciousness. Mr. Sark has a strong view on this, to which he is fully entitled, and we applaud him for his passionate stance; however, it is his personal view. Contrary to Mr. Sark's assertion, the Mi'kmaq Leadership has actually consulted with many of our community members on this matter. We have listened, and the prevailing view is to take a different approach to that of Mr. Sark and move toward reconciliation and creating a balance in the relationship between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples instead of the revenge motivated action of tearing down and stripping of names. Further, we continue to hold that, contrary to the Doctrine of Discovery, the Mi'kmaq have been here for 12,000 years, and that is worthy of celebration and commemoration. The additional Mi'kmaq name for the area at Rocky Point, once decided upon through consultation with Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq People, will reflect the millennia of Mi'kmaq history in that area.

With respect to the proposed new building on the Charlottetown waterfront, the signing of the Accommodation Agreement by the Mi'kmaq and Provincial Governments in August was an historic day for all the Mi'kmaq of PEI. It is a testament as to what can be accomplished by the assertion of constitutionally protected rights and by working in cooperation and partnership with the other orders of government. The funding set out in the Agreement will provide for First Nation land ownership and the construction of a multipurpose building on the historic Charlottetown waterfront. The building will generate stable, long-term income for both First Nation governments, through the leasing of office space to the Mi'kmaq Confederacy and other tenants. This revenue will be used to support sustainable housing and to help fund our chronically underfunded social programs. The excellent location of the building, close by both cruise ship passengers and other tourist areas, also creates a unique opportunity for the selling of Mi'kmaq crafts and will provide a tremendous opportunity for our Mi'kmaq artisans to share our culture. The project will also generate opportunities for employment for our community members. Finally, the building will serve as an urban Indigenous centre to expand, improve and enhance much-needed programs and services for the urban Indigenous community. We do not understand how Mr. Sark can be opposed to the advancement of the Mi'kmaq People through economic development initiatives such as this, or improving outcomes for all Indigenous People. However, we hope that Mr. Sark will come to recognize that we are all working towards the same goals – improving outcomes, preservation of culture and reconciliation - and that unfair attacks on good faith efforts by the Mi'kmaq Governments serve only to diminish us all.

Yours in Spirit,

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