

## The Métis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conference

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Saskatoon

Day 3 – Tape 2

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**Bradford Morse:** Let me just try and add a couple things. I mean, I think Jean's quite right when she says that the government's a bit like an octopus. It's also, I think, though, where it differs a bit is that an octopus does have a single core brain and people tend to assume that government has a grand plan. If they don't like it, it's a conspiracy. If they do like it, it's a positive policy or initiative. But that, in my experience, that's not often how it works in theory. That's how it works in theory. It's headed up by a cabinet and a premier or prime minister, and that's the core brain. But, in fact, that's not how it really works. That it is just too big. The people in different departments don't have a clue what each other's doing. Frequently, people within the same department don't have a clue what each other is doing. In my experience, people in, even down the hall and sometimes in the next desk don't have a clue what each other's doing. One of the interesting things we do when, when I was the Chief of Staff to Ron Irwin as federal Minister of Indian Affairs, starting having kind of private dinners between the Minister and the Department officials, and they were from secretaries up to director general. You'd just get a dozen people together and went off with the Minister for dinner, and one of the things I immediately discovered was he had to introduce each, the people to each other, and then they had to yak. Ask them, "Well, what do you do?" And all the people said, "Oh, is that what you do? Is that what you do?" Or, "Oh, it's nice to meet you," and, "How long have you been in the department?" "Oh. Twenty years," and, "Eighteen years." They'd never met each other. And this is sometimes even people within the kind of the same branch of the department. So there's not that kind of coordinated reality.

Now that doesn't mean the governments don't have broad policies of brushstrokes. They do, but it just doesn't always, always translate into this plan. Similarly, if you talk to one official, that does not mean that you've talked to government, even if you've talked to a, to some of the deputy ministers are here, doesn't mean that you've talked to government, doesn't mean, necessarily mean that you've talked to their department, doesn't necessarily mean that, that their views will be reflected by the, all of their own officials, let alone in other departments. So it is truly kind of multi-, multi-headed.

I also agree with, with Jean, it's important to, to keep in mind that the government does consist, in a sense, really, it's just like people here. They're human, flesh blood people. They're not *the* government, each one of them. They may work for the government, but they have their own views and beliefs, their own desires. They cry, they laugh. They all been born, they're all gonna die. That's the reality. Just like everybody else in the room. So appreciate that as individuals, they sometimes completely endorse what, what they're doing and what their government is doing, and at other times they don't.

So the political part of government comes and goes. Ministers come and go, parties come and go. In power, out of power, public service generally remains. So that they're, and we see the shifts the government, politically, their policies take. Well, the public service it's their job to carry out and carry at least what, what the ministers and the party in power of the day believe. So that sometimes they're gonna like what their directions are, sometimes they're not. Similarly though, of course, don't assume that all decisions are made either by ministers or by senior officials. In my experience, neither is remotely true. Ministers come in expecting that they now are in charge, they make the decision, and it will be done. Nah, sometimes, but often not. Similarly, though, frankly for senior officials, it doesn't mean it's done in the field. It doesn't mean that the individual minister, you know, Ministry of Natural Resources person out in the field or on the lake is going to be doing

precisely what the policy coming out of Toronto or Winnipeg or Edmonton or Saskatoon or Ottawa says. That's just not kinda the reality of it.

Let me suggest just a couple of quick things, and I, 'cause I want to hear other people talk. One flipside of that is the political leadership by the Métis organizations have gotta stop mouthing rhetoric and slogans. They've gotta speak to substance. They've gotta stop just speaking to their own supporters who put them in office. They've also gotta be talking to the public in general, and they've gotta be talking to government in terms of addressing the tough questions. They've gotta be building a base with solid answers for those tough questions and solid strategies so as to overcome government fears. The kinds of statistics that Andy and Evelyn ran through, those scare the hell out of people in most governments. They see an exploding Métis population and immediate response to that is to kind of hear, you know, the old cash register, the dollar signs, you know, the sounds, the bell ringing as the money is going up. Now I'm not saying that that is true, but that's a kind of instinctive response.

Similarly, it means, well, who are the, who are the Métis question. Suddenly now there are a hundred thousand more people than there were five years ago for who this question is, raises it, concerns in government. So that, that is real. Solutions have to be coming forward to that.

Flipside of that, also, is that governments have to confront a rights agenda, and on Métis that's just nothing there. The thrust has always been on programs, socio-economic needs. Now that's not that they're unimportant. They're vital. You know, you gotta have food on the table to survive to the next day. But those are easier for governments to deal with. They're easier to deal with particularly in a pan-Aboriginal sense, off reserves, to be able to deal with any, you don't have to worry so much about the boundaries and definitions. And they're also less threatening. Programs are something the governments are comfortable with, in part 'cause they know they come and they go. They can shrink, they can expand. There's maximum government flexibility when it comes to dealing with programs and services. You can alter them to some extent at will.

Rights agendas a whole different universe. We've been seeing that on the First Nations side over the last twenty years. We're just, perhaps, about to start seeing it on the Métis side. But that, but for governments to overcome their fears and be able to come to grips with the rights agenda, they need to be having pathways set out for them. And that's where it comes back, I think, to some of the challenges for Métis leaders and organizations. If they have kind of clear objectives and solutions that address some of those government fears. If not, it's tough to have a real meaningful negotiation, as opposed to dialogue or discussion, to really get into negotiation. And if we don't do that, then, well, people say, "Well, it's litigation." But if Jean says it's last resort and, furthermore, the outcome that the courts have been telling us, generally, in litigation, no matter who wins, is, "Okay, now go off and negotiate this stuff." Leave, the judges say, you know, "Leave us alone, leave us out of it. This is political. We've gotta make a decision, we do. We'll make it. Here's, here's a new yard stick, but now go off and negotiate." So it still needs getting us back to where we should be at.

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