



Sol Mamakwa

Member of Provincial Parliament, Kiiwetinoong
Député provincial de Kiiwetinoong

Queen's Park

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November 6, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Premier's Office
Rm. 281
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

The Hon. Greg Rickford
Ministry of Indigenous Affairs Ontario
160 Bloor St. E., Suite 400
Toronto, ON M7A 2E6

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Rickford,

On September 14, I returned to the Ontario legislature as I have so many times since being elected MPP for Kiiwetinoong in 2018. But as you know, on that Monday morning, I chose not to stand for the singing of O Canada and God Save the Queen that begins the first day of legislative proceedings every month. By the time this letter reaches you, I will have done this again on Tuesday morning.

The reason I've chosen not to stand for these anthems has a lot to do with the stories I must tell as an Anishinaabe person, when I rise from my seat to speak in the legislative chamber.

I tell stories about the children who leave our communities every year at 13 and 14 to attend high school hundreds of kilometres away from their families, language, homes and way of life because most First Nations in our riding don't have their own high schools.

I tell stories of parents and grandparents who don't get to grow old, because they don't have access to health care and their homes are filled with mold.

And I tell stories of young people who died by suicide because they felt they didn't have hope.

This week, I held a press conference with Alex and Lawrence, two men from Neskantaga First Nation who came to Queen's Park in order to stage a sit-in protest

and demand action from you and your government.

Their story is one I know you have heard. For 25 years – an entire generation – Neskantaga has been without clean water, living under a boil water advisory. Then two weeks ago, dangerous hydrocarbons were found in the local water reservoir. Neskantaga went from having no clean water, to having no water at all – while also contending with the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire community was forced to evacuate.

Alex and Lawrence's story is far too common. In Ontario, 30 per cent of First Nations have drinking water advisories. That is 39 communities. 15 of them are in my riding of Kiiwetinoong.

In those stories it is painfully clear that the promises of Ontario and Canada that are celebrated in anthems and written down in treaties are not being met – that you are not meeting them.

Treaties are foundational to the creation of this province and this country. The lives and prosperity some of us experience today would not exist without them. Western thought understands treaties as a way to surrender land, but to our people they are so much more.

For Anishinaabe people, treaties are living documents between nations, made sacred through ceremony. Robert Williams, a Lumbee Indigenous law scholar, says that for Anishinaabe people, “a treaty itself was a special kind of story: a way of imagining a world of human solidarity where we regard others as our relatives.” This was the promise of Treaty 9, Treaty 5, Treaty 3, the Robinson Treaties and all the others that cover the land you now know as Ontario.

Our ancestors signed these treaties so that our territories across Ontario could be shared peacefully between settlers and the Anishinaabe people. We were all meant to prosper.

But I see no solidarity and no good relation in how Ontario is honouring the treaties.

We cannot be the only ones holding up our side of the treaties. The crown through Ontario has a role to play. Without honesty, fairness and respect from Ontario and Canada, what we have is not a relationship at all. It is abuse.

This abuse, which allows one standard of rights and living conditions for communities like Etobicoke North and next to no standard at all for First Nations communities like Neskantaga, is what brought Alex and Lawrence 1,100 km to sit-in at Queen's Park. And it is also what has led me to sit in the legislature.

And so, I will stand in the legislature and acknowledge these anthems – these stories about Ontario and Canada – when Anishinaabe people's stories are honoured.

I will stand when our people are treated equitably and our children have access to education, clean water and safe housing. I will stand when we have fair access to the job market and equitable health care as was promised in our treaties.

And to you, Premier Ford and Mr. Rickford, I will stand when your government honours the treaties Ontario has signed.

I am writing to you today to call on you directly to honour these treaties. You can begin by taking Alex, Lawrence and the people of Neskantaga seriously, and stepping in to end a quarter century of neglect, by bringing running water back to their community.

Given the considerable urgency of this issue, I and the people of Neskantaga would appreciate a response as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sol Mamakwa', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sol Mamakwa
Member of Provincial Parliament for Kiiwetinoong
Official Opposition NDP critic for Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation