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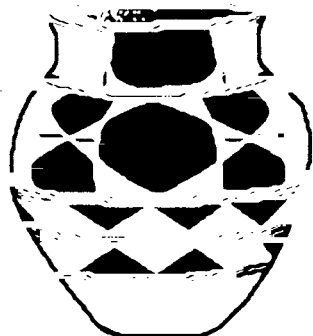
Layout Artist/Design Artist: Dave Fadden
Typesetting: Carrie Jacobs & Debbie Cook-Jacobs

Distribution: Brenda Thompson

Printed at Winchester Press, Winchester, Ontario

Indian Time is published weekly. Subscriptions to Indian Time: \$50.00 US per year. Cover price - 50 cents. Bulk order of Indian Time: 40 cents per copy on consignment. Call our office for set up. Send all letters and subscriptions to:

Indian Time
Akwesasne Mohawk Nation Territory
P.O. Box 196
Rooseveltown, New York
13683-0196



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter To The Governor of NY State From MCA Grand Chief

April 29, 1996

The Honourable George E. Pataki,
Governor

Executive Chamber
State of New York
Capital Building,
ALBANY, New York 12224

Dear Governor Pataki:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Mohawks of Akwesasne and we send greeting and hopes that this letter finds you in good health.

The purpose of this communication is to express our dismay and disappointment over the attitude and actions of the government of the State of New York towards native people, in particular the Mohawks of Akwesasne. As you know, I previously sent correspondence to you concerning vital elements of policing, however, you chose to ignore this letter and have failed to even acknowledge receipt of same. Fortunately, your in-action prompted two of the community governments at Akwesasne, this Council and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council, to work out a solution which is satisfactory to the people of Akwesasne.

In this communication I must draw your attention to the issue of education for Akwesasne children. Your government is currently in the process of instituting massive cuts to the education programs for native students and I, along with the leaders of other native communities, find this practice to be offensive and in violation of the treaties concluded by our forefathers. In order to assist you I will go into a brief background of the situation at hand.

From an internal perspective and also for non-government purposes, Akwesasne is a normal community with aspirations of growth and a brighter future for our children. However, from the outside and in government circles, Akwesasne is a community like no other. The primary factor in our distinction is and will be the arbitrary imposition of the various international, provincial and state borders and claims to jurisdiction on our lands.

These external acts served to artificially divide Akwesasne and to create a quagmire of conflicting government interests. Over time, this division extended even to the Mohawk's themselves with bitter feelings based on Canadian vs. American occasionally surfacing. I am proud to state that this nonsense is disappearing and we now reaffirm the fact that we are one. Nevertheless, jurisdictional issues continue to plague us and a review of recent history reveals increasing problems with transborder issues and I must remind you of the fact that the external governments, including the State, are not faultless in these issues.

With this in mind, I must question the tactics of your government where you are using the artificial border to charge a tuition fee on a group of students who live a few yards north of an imaginary line. Let me remind you that treaties and court decisions uphold the fact that Mohawks have cross border rights and we are entitled to the rights and privileges accorded to New York State residents regardless of our place of residence. Obviously these rights include access to education. In addition, I must point out the fact that the parents of the students in question were previously students of the Salmon River School system and are now working and contributing to the tax scheme of New York State. This fact alone lends itself to the argument that they have paid for this education and if it is not provided, then they are entitled to a refund of their state income taxes. Of course this argument is secondary to our cross border rights, but the point is made to show that we make many contributions to current state budgets on top of the supreme contribution of natural resources including the very land upon which your institutions are built. It is ironic that you seek to take more from native peoples before you pay for past "acquisitions".

I must question the wisdom of continuing to follow your current path and I urge you to do a thorough review and accounting of contributions and services provided by the different governments. If you take a real look you will find that the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne provides funding and services to so called "American" Mohawks to an

extent which is well beyond the scope and value of service provided by American sources. These funds and services are provided in the areas of higher education and increasingly in the health fields. By covering these needs we are effectively lessening the burden on State and U.S. federal sources. I cannot guarantee the continued payment and provision of services if there are no reciprocal acts in kind.

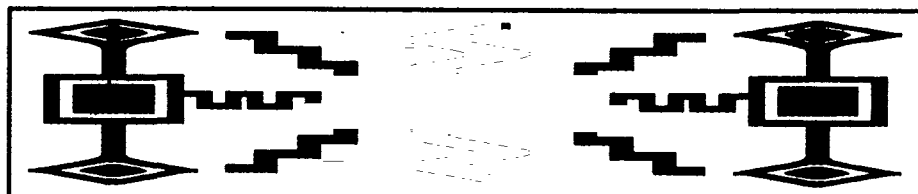
In an effort to maintain stability in the lives of the affected students, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne has agreed to enter into negotiations with the Salmon River School Board to provide for our students attending Salmon River and St. Regis Mohawk Schools. To avoid future confusion, I will tell you directly that the Mohawks of Akwesasne maintain and reserve our right to challenge the imposition of tuition in whatever forum is required including courts, and on victory, we will recover all the tuition fees paid.

In closing I would like to point that this and other issues affecting Akwesasne are complex in nature and to address them properly requires a face to face meeting. Such a meeting could take place either in Albany or Akwesasne and I will await your earliest response to the items in this letter and to the proposed meeting.

Yours sincerely,

MOHAWK COUNCIL OF
AKWESASNE

Russell Roundpoint, Grand Chief
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