

# Local News

## Tribal Council Member Doug Smoke

April 17, 1996



Pictured: Tribal Council member Doug Smoke

Akwesasne -- Catching up with Tribal Council member Doug Smoke, we asked him to provide us with an update on tribal issues.

Smoke said the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Police are negotiating with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service on an agreement to have the Akwesasne Mohawk Police travel through the New York portion of the reservation unescorted.

These negotiations have been on-going for sometime and Smoke says he feels they are close to reaching an agreement.

"There will be some restrictions placed on the Canadian officers," said Smoke.

"This agreement is a step towards gaining trust between the two Councils," added Smoke.

The big question on everybody's mind these days is whether the tribe's agreement with *Soaring Eagle* will be affected by Hart's Enterprise name appearing on the list currently being investigated with the Northern Currency case. Smoke said, "I don't think the investigation will have any affect on our agreement at all. The role of *Soaring Eagle* will be an advisory role only."

According to Smoke the National Indian Gaming Commission should be returning their decision on the Hart/Astri Gaming contract very shortly.

In recent weeks there has been controversy concerning the proposed tuition Mohawk parents residing on the Canadian portion of Akwesasne will have to pay for their children to attend school in the Salmon River School District.

"I think this is an issue between Salmon River and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. My personal view is that children should be able to attend school where ever they choose," said Smoke.

When talking about the tribal deficit, Smoke said, "The community economy is down in general. In the past we fatten-up our staff and thought we would be able to sustain it. That didn't prove to be the case. Now we have to look at generating funds or start trimming down where we can. The Executive Branch must take a close look at where we are at financially. All programs fall under the Chief Executive Officer.

The taxation issue was briefly touched on by Smoke. He said there are a few convenience stores that border reservations that are badgering Pataki to initiate taxes on reservations. "In reality 99% of businesses are not affected by the tax status of Indians," said Smoke. He adds, "Indians pay taxes for all the goods and services they purchase off-reserve. So, in that sense we are paying taxes. Besides, what money we earn from our businesses is spent in off-reserve businesses who prosper when we have money to spend," Smoke said.

In addressing the St. Regis Road re-construction Smoke said the Tribe's Planning Division is responsible for road repairs, etc. Any concerns people have about the current re-routing of traffic should address them to that department.

In closing Smoke said there will be a Tax Rally in Albany on May 14. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Mr. Harry Benedict  
FIRST NATIONS BUSINESS LEAGUE  
Hogansburg, New York 13655

Dear Harry:

Thank you for providing us with a copy of the Mission Statement for the First Nations Business League. I, along with my colleagues on Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, are fully aware of the difficulties currently being faced by the business community on the so called American portion of Akwesasne. Specifically I refer to the difficulties with the State of New York and their attempts at imposing a scheme of taxation, particularly on purchases made by non-Mohawks.

On review of your Mission Statement, I have noticed that the position you have taken is common to the position of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne in that we feel that external governments do not possess the authority to come in and impose their governments on the Mohawk people. There is, however, one marked difference in that my belief is that the Mohawk Nation Council is the only Council which would have the standing to represent Mohawk people as the sovereign and distinct Nation against either Canada or the United States. If you review the facts, you will find that the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council are creations of their respective external governments and therefore, their standing as independent and sovereign is clouded by this very fact. On the other hand, the Mohawk Nation Council was in existence prior to European contact and they have maintained their independence throughout their long history and can easily maintain the position of sovereignty.

The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne has maintained a watch over the current developments relating to taxation and there is general agreement that much of the difficulties could have been avoided if there had been an agreement worked out between the business community and the Mohawk Nation Council and the Tribal Council. This type of agreement could have effectively warded off any attempts by the State government to impose their taxation regime by simply establishing a tiered pricing system within Akwesasne which would have maintained the tax benefits for the Mohawk people and not passing them along to non-native people. It is my understanding that there is some semblance of this type of arrangement currently being worked out, I would urge you to continue in that direction. I would also urge that you not exclude the Nation Council for they will be your greatest ally in your disagreement with the State and U.S. federal government.

In conclusion, I would like to state that we are supportive of the actions being taken by the First Nations Business League and we look forward to working with you in attempting to resolve the difficulties that may lie ahead.

Yours sincerely,

MOHAWK COUNCIL OF AKWESASNE

Russell Roundpoint  
Grand Chief.