



Algonquins of Ontario

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Anthony Dixon
Managing Editor
The Daily Observer
100 Crandall
Pembroke, ON K8A 0B1

BY EMAIL ONLY

ADixon@Postmedia.com

Dear Editor,

The Algonquins have sought justice and recognition from the Crown for over 250 years when the first petition for a Treaty was submitted in 1772 pursuant to the terms of the Royal Proclamation and were thereafter studiously ignored by the Crown until recently.

Negotiations that began in 1991, falling apart ten years later because of Algonquin disunity, have been rebuilt – and we have reached a proposed Agreement-in-Principle (AIP).

The Algonquin negotiation team has pushed the governments of Ontario and Canada as far as possible. Between February 29 and March 7 Algonquin Voters will decide whether or not to ratify the proposed AIP. If Algonquin Voters choose to ratify the proposed AIP, we will proceed to negotiate towards achieving a Treaty that will be constitutionally protected.

During this next phase of negotiations, we will continue to strive to improve the AIP to create a stronger Treaty. The current political situation presents a unique opportunity, in that it is rare to have both a federal and a provincial government expressing their sincere commitment to justice and reconciliation for Indigenous peoples.

If ratified, the AIP remains **non-binding**, contrary to some people's beliefs. A positive AIP vote will not affect any Algonquin rights in any way; rather it will set the table to continue negotiations towards a Treaty.

Then, once again, Algonquin Voters will decide if the negotiated improvements are adequate. A Treaty cannot be imposed on the Algonquins. Rather, consent to a proposed Treaty must be provided through another future Ratification Vote, at which time all Algonquin Voters will have the opportunity to cast a vote.

Although Canada takes the position that an Algonquin Treaty is dependent upon a self-government agreement with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation (Pikwakanagan) that would take the First Nation out of the *Indian Act*, the Chief and Council have taken no position

on any self-government arrangements. Some exploratory discussions have taken place – but these have been specifically at the request of the Members of Pikwakanagan.

If the AIP is ratified, the Chief and Council have indicated that they will continue to engage the Pikwakanagan Membership in discussions on self-government. If a self-government proposal materializes out of these negotiations, it will be up to Pikwakanagan Members to decide whether the proposed self-government agreement is acceptable. This assessment will take place on the basis of many considerations, including the possible loss of reserve status for the existing Pikwakanagan Reserve and the additional governance powers and funding opportunities that would result from a self-government agreement.

This decision must be made by the members of Pikwakanagan – and no-one else - with all of the relevant facts, and based on a draft agreement that has yet to be developed – and not on the basis of speculation and innuendo.

The Algonquins are at a decisive moment in their shared history.

A “Yes” vote will mean that we will continue the negotiations leading to a Treaty.

A “No” vote will put us in a position of uncertainty. We may be able to restart the negotiations. On the other hand, we may not. It is difficult to speculate on what may happen until we can assess the results of such a vote and determine the reasons for it.

The negotiation parties have made ongoing efforts to share information so that all interested parties can learn about this important historical initiative and to better understand these complex negotiations. We encourage those who are interested to read the materials that are publicly posted, including the complete proposed Agreement-in-Principle, at www.tanakiwin.com.

Algonquin Voters will now decide whether we have achieved a framework for moving forward.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Potts', with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Robert Potts
Principal Negotiator and Senior Legal Counsel
Algonquin Treaty Negotiations