

Mayor's Musings

Ring Road

For those of you who are curious as to the defeat of the supposed tremendously favourable agreement between the Province and the Tsuu T'ina, it has come to my attention that there are a lot of misunderstandings about both the agreement and its value and impact on the Tsuu T'ina.

After the vote, I downloaded the agreement (which is available from the Provincial government website). It is a very long document and the dollars were massive.

However, rather than going into the boring details, let me use an analogy that will help make the point.

Imagine that we collectively own, say 50,000 acres of land (or hectares – take your pick). Let's suppose that the government comes along and says they want 1000 of those acres (hectares). Thereupon we say, "Ok, what are you going to give us for it?"

Now, bear in mind that we have special privileges guaranteed to us on our land. (In the case of the First Nations these were the "treaties" that were negotiated by our ancestors, both First Nations and "the Crown" or Queen. Why did our ancestors opt for treaties? To avoid bloodshed in the settling of the country! It is the Canadian Way.)

What are some of those privileges?

- A. Well for starters, in our example we own the mineral rights below the ground. Now for almost all privately held land in western provinces, the minerals are the property of "the people" – ie the government but for the First Nations which are federally mandated, minerals are owned by them. Minerals here in Alberta obviously include oil, gas and more often gravel.
- B. A second negotiated right is the fact that we don't have to pay income tax as long as we reside and work on our land.

(I am not sure what other rights and privileges are in those treaties but these two are huge.)

Mineral and Tax Rights (Treaty Rights)

So our first question would be: “We’ll get the same rights and privileges for the new land we are getting in exchange for the 1000 acres we are giving up – Correct?” The Government says: “We can’t guarantee that because it is a different level of Government (the Crown - Federal and England) that takes care of that. But we are sure you can get it and we’ll make strong efforts to help you get those rights and privileges.”

We say: “Hmmmmmmmmmmm – is this as good a deal as we first thought?”

Land to be granted in exchange

Our second question would be “We will get the 5000 acres you are promising, Right? Afterall, once we give up land, we can never get it back.” The government responds saying, “Well, we can’t guarantee that we can give you the land but if we can’t, you can back out of the deal or take another huge amount of money, in lieu”. (This in addition to the massive amount already being provided in the deal.)

Now you and I both know that money devalues over time. A home valued at, say, \$500,000 today was worth in the range of \$50,000 just 33 years ago (1976) and was perhaps \$5000, 33 years before that (1943).

Land is sort of like money / principal in the bank. Leave it in the bank and you can continue to receive a return on the investment of those funds. Take it out of the bank, and invariably, it will be spent.

In other words, money does not replace land.

Our reaction

Based on the above, our reaction to the government would be “Hmmmmmmmmm, should we give up our land and our rights if we are guaranteed neither?”

Now, I don’t know about you, but I find it difficult to trust government. Individual politicians and bureaucrats can be trusted but people change, governing parties and policies change, circumstances change, money and cash flow change – you get my drift.

So, I am sure that we would then say something like: “We, the people, need you, the Government, to provide these things GUARANTEED so that if circumstances and people / parties etc. change, we have a piece of paper, a contract, an agreement, that we can take to court to get enforced. And, until that happens, we

can't agree to give up those 1000 acres, even though all that money would be tremendous to have."

As you can imagine, the issue is more complex than that. There are First Nation attitudes about the sacred nature of land. I also believe there were concerns about how the money would be utilized and, of course, the Tsuu T'ina residents directly affected had issues as any of us would.

Nevertheless, **there was sincere good will and very hard negotiations on both sides for many years**. For their side, the Tsuu T'ina wanted the deal from the standpoint of commercial development on the east side of the reserve. I feel for the many Tsuu T'ina persons and Councillors that I have come to call friends over the years. Why - because they put their hearts and souls into bringing this forward. It culminated years and years (actually decades) of hard slogging work on both their side and that of the other stakeholders, the Province and Calgary. The Tsuu T'ina needed the deal for commercial developments, especially on the north east portion of the reserve, along with other initiatives. The City and Province needed a vital transportation route.

HOWEVER the issues here were similar to those made when the Province tried to straighten out and expand Highway 22 as it goes by Redwood Meadows back in the early 90's. Proper guarantees weren't in place, and like any straight thinking person, the Tsuu T'ina membership turned down that agreement.

If this doesn't make sense or you would like further discussions or information, please feel free to contact me.

Here's to a happy winter.
Tim Anderson
Mayor