

## Forging Linkages & Finding Solutions A BC Treaty Commission Conference for First Nations

### Chief Sophie Pierre, St. Mary's Indian Band Workshop Facilitator Presentation (Economic Development) – October 28, 2008

Thank you. I bring you greetings from the Ktunaxa Nation. On behalf of my colleagues that are in the room, Kathryn Teneese and our next chief, Cheryl Casimir, we bring you greetings and thank you very much for inviting us to participate with you today. I first of all want to congratulate and to acknowledge the good work of the BC Treaty Commission in putting together this forum.

It is very important times and very hectic times usually, but it is really very important because the times are changing as we move forward, and we really need to have these kinds of forums where we have these types of discussions, discussions around governance, around rebuilding of our economies and around our own developments within our communities, the very hard work that we have within our own communities to look after our own capacity building.

First of all, before I get started, I must acknowledge the great Coast Salish nation on whose lands we are meeting today and say thank you very much for allowing us to be here and say thank you, Leah, for leading us in the prayer this morning. It helps us all start in a good way.

The vision statement for the Ktunaxa Nation ends with the words “as a self-sufficient, self-governing nation.” We have worked on the vision statement for a number of years with all of our people in all of our communities. We accomplished that by going to meetings at the band level, but also sitting across kitchen tables with people, going to meetings where there were youth and elders and we reached, as a nation, the vision statement that ends with that self-sufficient self-governing nation.

That means that we have made a commitment to creating wealth. I think it is something that we all want for our nations, the creation of wealth. In order to do that, we have to first of all re-embrace the idea of rebuilding our economies. Every one of our nations had thriving economies that over the years have been broken down, just like everything else, within the definition of who we are as a people. And thriving economies are definitely a part of it.

I don't know where that idea came from. Well, I was raised a Catholic so it must have come from the Catholics or maybe it was the Anglicans. I don't know, but it seemed to be this Christianity thing that creating wealth or being able to be self-sufficient was not good.

My mother used to tell me the story about our family. Our family was always independent and we had the – when the reserves were created – we had land which I still hold a CP on that piece of property, but we were always self-sufficient. We had cattle, we had chickens and grew our own food, looked after ourselves. But my mother tells the story about the priest constantly hounding her father about making donations to the church until he got to the point where he had sold off just about everything to give money to the church.

That left us in a situation where my grandparents and my parents could no longer support ourselves. It seems that type of thing, maybe it wasn't necessarily the church, but there were a lot of other factors that have impacted our people over the years. That has brought us to a place where our little reserve communities – my grandmother used to call the reserves where we live “living inside the corral” – these little corrals we that live on, it is almost impossible to sustain an economy within those corrals.

We have the opportunity through the treaty process where we are going to get beyond those corrals. But the purpose of doing that is to re-create the economies, to re-create the independence of our people. That is why I am really pleased to be here.

We re-create an economy within our communities, but we need good strong governance to do that. It was a good segue for me to be coming in after the descriptions that Robert has talked about and that Chief Louie talked about in his community. That is the kind of planning we all need to do to ensure that we have the laws that are in place to ensure that we have our people's support, and to support good governance in our communities because it is very hard to attract. Rebuilding economies, it is very hard to attract good business to our communities if we don't have good governance in place first of all. It's kind of like the chicken and egg, what comes first is it going to be the good governance we put in place. In order to have good governance you need to have a source of revenue. So how do you put that in place? That is where we talk about business development or economic development.

I really want to use the words rebuilding our economies. It's not just economic development. It is not just a one-off project somewhere. We have with the Ktunaxa nation – of course many of you are aware that we have the St. Eugene Mission development that didn't start out as an economic development project. Slowly we have pursued our discussions around the treaty table about rebuilding our nation and we have started to see that as being one part of rebuilding our nation through rebuilding an economy.

I'm going to talk just a little bit about what we are doing at the Ktunaxa Nation and in particular around our treaty table. Kathryn Teneese is our chief negotiator. We have been, from the beginning, talking about this treaty process not simply as an exercise with an end state where we are going to sign a treaty with governments. Whether or not we sign a treaty is kind of secondary. What is very important to us is the journey; is rebuilding our nation as we are moving along. We have taken a very strategic approach. I am going back again to our vision statement and I am going to take parts of it and explain how we have that as our strategic approach and how that all ties in with rebuilding the economy that we all need to do within our communities.

First of all, we talk about building strong healthy families, not just getting rid of problems. If you look at what you have at the community level, what we have in terms of the programs that come into our communities, they are all to address problems. We need to stop doing that and start looking at how we create strong healthy families, not concentrate all of our efforts on getting rid of problems. We need to be – and this is what we are doing at home – implementing value-based governance, not just adopting the status quo or taking a template from somewhere else. We are looking at what is going to fit for ourselves. I know that you are thinking the same thing, because what necessarily will fit say for Sto:lo will not necessarily fit for Ktunaxa or what is going to fit for us may not necessarily fit for you.

We are talking about balancing interests across the sectors, not competing with each other so that we are not putting all of our eggs in the economic development basket. We also need to be doing the social development, protecting our lands and resources, protecting our language and culture, all of those things. They need to be balanced; they need to be helping each other not competing with each other.

Having ecosystem-based land use planning, not just resource development. We are in a big fight right now with a developer back home. There is a project called the Jumbo development and this has been going on for about 15 years, something like that, 12 or 15 years. The people in the region, including the Ktunaxa Nation have been saying no to that development almost since the beginning. I don't know what the percentage is – about 80 per cent of the people that live there have been saying no to this development, because they are talking about building a ski resort on a glacier. In today's environment with global

warming, with all of the things that are going on in the environment, these people are talking about putting millions of dollars into building a ski development with 5,000 rooms, if you can imagine, on a glacier. Good God, you look at pictures of what that glacier used to look like just 25 years ago to what it looks like today – you can see that the poor thing is disappearing. But these people, they have got this money invested and be damned what is going on with the environment; they are going to build a ski resort.

This is where we cannot get caught up. I personally don't think that as First Nations people because of the way that we have been brought up and because of the connection that our language and our culture gives to the land where we live, I can't imagine that we would ever do that kind of development. But you know, they come along and they have one of our communities that have bought into it because they waved a little bit of money in front of their noses. So it can't be just about the money, it can't be just about economic development. It has got to be about rebuilding us as a nation, including rebuilding our economies so that whatever land use planning we have is going to be sustainable, not just developing a resource because the government happens to have it as part of their plan right now or some industry comes forward that has a little bit of money in their hands that they want to wave that in front of you.

These are hard decisions to make, because when all of us back home are dealing with poverty in our communities I know that those decisions are hard to make. We have to talk about managing an economy, not just managing economic development. I think that we've probably talked that one to death. We also talk about clarifying the relationship of people to the land, the relationships, including possession, occupancy and use, tenure, not just developing the land. All of us know that we are stewards of the lands where the Creator has placed our nations. We are going to be there forever. So it is with that kind of thinking that we pursue development, that we pursue rebuilding an economy.

So what is that? What is an economy? It is a system of producing, distributing and consuming wealth. So it goes back to my opening comments, what I am interested in in our communities is creating wealth so that our people become independent the way that I believe we all should be.

And economic development, it is the development of certain aspects within our land base whether it is going to be mining or tourism or independent power. Brian Mitchell handed me an article I think he said was in the Sun about the independent power producers and that they need to go through First Nations lands, pretty much. Well, yes, that makes sense because all of BC is in some First Nations' traditional territory. Judith Sayers is talking about how in pursuing this as an economic opportunity for her community that the development of independent power could put her community in a position where within a few years they are going to be creating more wealth than the programs that they are bringing in today to keep their community operating.

I think that is what we all want for our communities, so that we have the ability to start talking about things like an internal economy and the redistribution of wealth within our communities rather than just pushing around the programs that continue to maintain our poverty.

So how do we prepare for that? Some of the things that Robert had mentioned earlier and clearly, those are the types of steps that we need to take. But just think about your own community. I know I think about St. Mary's. If we have a young person that comes forward with an entrepreneurial idea and they want to start a business in something or other, they come to the band office. We are not set up at the band office to deal with that. If that same young person went into the City of Cranbrook they would have all kinds of support. They have licenses they can get, they can hook into water, power, sewer. There is an infrastructure there. At St. Mary's we don't have an infrastructure to support that same business person in their business development. We recognize that and we are working on that and we are working on the community development plans. We are working on land zoning.

It wasn't easy. We have some of our band members that still shake their heads and say that all of the land needs to be shared with everyone; it is to be used by everyone. Well, that is true, but you can't do it in a way that isn't sustainable, in a way that isn't done so that it can be long-term, so that people can depend on it. It has to be done in a way that is well thought out.

We are looking at doing the land zoning and going through an Indian Affairs process of land designation so that when we have a business opportunity we are prepared for that. In fact, about five years ago we had a developer from California, an Indian fellow came up here - and they have all kinds of money down there that they are looking for places to invest.

By the way, if anybody has a development plan, I have somebody's business card that he gave it to me in Phoenix last week. He said they are still looking for places to invest their money - Californian Indians are looking for places to invest their money and they want to invest in BC. I just had to throw that in before I forget.

But we had this opportunity about five years ago. He came to our reserve and looked at this one area and said he was picturing this development. We were not able to move on that. We hadn't had any discussions in our community as yet about where we wanted development, where we wanted commercial development, residential development, and where we wanted areas that were going to be protected or no development. So we are starting to put that into place now. Other opportunities are coming forward. Our airport was just recently expanded. We are looking at designating land around the airport for commercial development, for a business development area.

Those are the kinds of things you need to have done ahead of when a business opportunity comes because we all know that if we wait until the business opportunity comes Indian Affairs just sits back and it takes them five years to move on it and the business opportunity is lost. This is when we still have to deal with our own little corrals in our own little reserve lands.

We all have different opportunities that are available to us. Some of us have opportunities for large-scale, commercial residential developments like they have in Westbank. Others of us have IPPs (independent power projects). Others have maybe mining opportunities or oil and gas.

But all of it needs two things; business anywhere needs two mean things. It needs capital and it needs credit. And that is always the stumbling block. I find that when you are talking about a particular economic development, business development in our communities we stumble on that - capital and credit.

How do you attract capital? In order to attract capital, you have to have all those infrastructures in place that I talked about, and you also have to have your own equity. In order to attract credit you absolutely must have your own equity because we all know that banks don't loan you money unless you don't need it. That is when they loan it to you. So you have got to have that equity.

This comes to my next pet project that I have really been pushing for. In this province there is an industry that is growing, and it is growing just incredibly. It is called the gaming industry. Last year alone, the provincial government took in almost \$200 million in excess of what they took in the year before. It is reaching a \$2 billion industry. We have been pushing the Province to start sharing some of that revenue with us. We are saying every other province in this country has some kind of agreement with their First Nations where they share gaming revenues, either by allowing them to have their own casinos and they keep the money. Not like our little casino - St. Eugene's - where every dollar that is taken in, every single dollar, goes back to the Province at the end of the day. Four times a year we get a little bit of it back. But

the money we get back we have to pay for the operation of that casino and we also have to pay for the development of the casino. It is not money that goes into our pockets to develop the infrastructure that we need in order to develop businesses in our communities. That is not the way it is in every other province in this country. They either have casinos where they can use the money for their own development or they get a direct share of revenue, like they do in Ontario.

This is what we have been pushing for with the Province, that we have an opportunity here. If you think of that \$200 million, which was money they did not budget for because they did not know how much more money they were going to be making in gaming. What we are saying is a percentage of that goes directly to First Nations and I am talking specifically First Nations – not sort of the pan aboriginal agenda across this province. Because we have the proof that from every dollar the Province takes in, one half of one per cent goes back to our communities; the rest of it goes to everywhere else in this province. So why is it that everybody else in this province is going to benefit from gaming revenues except our First Nation communities?

If we were looking at having a specific percentage amount that would go to each and every First Nation, there is your equity. When you go to the bank to borrow \$2.5 million dollars to put in a water system so you can attract a commercial development in your community, the bank is going to want to know what your equity is. Where is this money going to come from because they are going to want to know the debt ratio – that does not apply to the development – but where is the money going to be coming from otherwise other than the development that is going to pay for that?

This is the proposal we've been putting before the Province and I have been very encouraged in the last little while because the Leadership Council has appointed our vice chief, Shawn Atleo, to work with us on that. So I think we have got to keep pushing. It is just perseverance. We just keep pushing and we will get there, because there is no way that anybody, any industry in this country and particularly here in this province – when the Premier is talking about how our economy – the world economy right now we all know it is pretty shaky, is going to do that. Things are not good in the United States. Things are not good in lots of parts of Canada. We are still kind of hanging on by fingernails in British Columbia except for First Nations communities.

So at this time where we have an opportunity to move forward, where rebuilding our economies is going to help the whole province, we have an opportunity where we can have access to capital and to credit by having a revenue source that is a revenue-sharing service coming from the Province. We can sign 10-year or 25-year agreements with the Province and then we can all go off and do business.

I know it is not going to be that easy, but it certainly will help. I've probably been talking long enough. I know I get kind of carried away, but I just want to bring up a couple of other things.

We have some tools out there that we need to start making use of. As leaders in our community, it is our responsibility to be aware of these tools and to know how we can use them. First and foremost is the tool we created ourselves as First Nations across this country. It is called the *Fiscal Statistical Management Act* – FSMA – and within that is the First Nations Finance Authority, which I chair. So I'm beating my own drum. This is a really, really excellent and very important way that our First Nations can start accessing the capital and the credit that we need in order to build the infrastructure in our communities.

So make yourself aware of that, FNFA or the FSMA, you could Google that and get the whole background, but really look at the FNFA, because through the FNFA we are now talking to government about other revenues, other sources so that it is not just taxation. I know that taxation is a really, really good opportunity for some First Nations but it is not necessarily the best opportunity for other First Nations.

It isn't for us at St. Mary's. We are never going to have the kind of tax revenues that a Westbank or a Squamish has, but we have other revenues and other sources we are looking at now.

Some of the other tools, for example, are in terms of training at the community level. We have something through the Sauder School of Business with UBC which I am really, really proud of. It's called the Chinook program. It's an opportunity to train people, our people that are working at the community level to bring them together once a month and put them through a training program that has been put together by the Sauder School of Business to help the business development in our communities. Look that up, the Chinook program with UBC.

Lastly, one of the things I encourage all of us to do is to look around and applaud each other once in a while when we know that somebody has done well. Like Chief Robert and what Westbank has done, it is phenomenal. I give you a pat on the back on that; you guys have done an awesome job. Other communities within our province, within our country, we don't often enough recognize the good things that we have done. There is an opportunity for you to do that right now.

We have a new initiative going on with the BC Business Council which I think is kind of a breakthrough for us as First Nations people to be having the support of the BC Business Council for recognition of business success within our communities. All of you at your community offices, band offices or wherever you are you should have received - and if you haven't please get in touch with me and I will make sure you get the information - you should have received information about the business award that is going to be given. I think there were five categories and that is going to be just in the new year.

In order to make that successful, we need to have you recognizing other First Nations people, business people in our province and nominating them. The idea is to have a big party some night in January or February where we are going to have a gala event to recognize these people. I think it is really important that we do that once in a while, pat ourselves on the back, pat each other on the back.

With that, I look forward to working with you for the next two-and-a-half days. Thank you.