



GITKSAN CHIEFS' OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 3, 2011

LIBERAL LEADERSHIP CONTENDER IS MET BY CROWD OF SUPPORTERS IN NEW HAZELTON

January 3, 2011, New Hazelton, BC. The residents of the Hazelton area last evening showed up to greet Liberal Leadership hopeful George Abbott during his tour of northwestern BC. He was met by several Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs along with Hazelton Mayor Alice Maitland in the New Hazelton Meeting Centre, and spent 90 minutes listening to the concerns of local residents, talking to attendees informally, and making some brief remarks.

New Hazelton, 65 kilometres northwest of Smithers, on Highway 16, and 130 kilometres northeast of Terrace, is located in the traditional territories of the 13,000 strong Gitksan people, about 6000 of whom live on reserves in the area, and in the municipalities of Hazelton and New Hazelton.

Hereditary Chief Elmer Derrick, says that he had been very impressed with Mr. Abbott in the dealings he had had with him over the past several years and urged the others attending to support Mr. Abbott.

“We Gitksan have been making some progress in trying to negotiate our way out from under the federal Indian Act. We want to be like all British Columbians, pay income and other taxes like everyone else, and be free to live our lives without the very destructive Indian Act oppressing us. We are hoping that the pace of progress will pick up under a new Premier. George Abbott, in his time as Minister responsible for Aboriginal reconciliation, has really demonstrated an understanding of how important the treaty process is, and how important it is to the future of resource development in BC that these issues be fairly and comprehensively settled,” said Derrick.

“Mr. Abbott is the only Liberal Leadership candidate to seek to meet with us and to hear what our community had to say to date. This is consistent with the attention he has given our case over the past 18 months and the interest he has shown in the broader concerns of all people outside the Lower Mainland,” said Gwaans (Bev Clifton-Percival), Negotiator with the Gitksan Chiefs Office.

Gordon Sebastian, Executive Director of the Gitksan Chiefs Office, added that there have been too many delays in sorting out this 100 year old problem, even 13 years after the Delgamuukw court case. “George Abbott is the one Minister we have seen dedicated to making headway. The economic future of our northwest community, which is generally depressed, depends on giving investors and resource exploration companies faith that, if they want to come into this area and create opportunities, they will get support and encouragement from the Gitksan people, and security of tenure.”

Alice Maitland, Mayor of Hazelton, also attended, along with Hazelton Councillor Nick Marshall. Both spoke of the ongoing efforts to build a new ice arena in the Hazeltons to replace the ageing Ken Trombley Arena. “ I've had the pleasure of dealing many times with George Abbott in my many years in municipal politics”, said Maitland, “He has always proven himself to be a man of his word who works hard for the people he represents. I am certain communities such as ours in the north will benefit from his leadership.”

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