

*Government Orders*

making a presentation on behalf of all First Nations people in British Columbia.

We know from research that if all parties do not get involved in the decision making and searching for information processes, the picture will be tainted, tainted because a person at the top, if he has the responsibility for giving the information, has a very slim chance of presenting a real picture of what is happening at the grassroots.

Let me give an idea of what I am talking about here using a board of education as an example. It could be any institution we have created in the country. The chief executive officer will have a chain of command. The information will be coming from the grassroots up this chain to the office of the chief executive officer. The chief executive officer is paid a very grand salary and is responsible for all operations within his institution which might encompass thousands of people. He is responsible for their behaviour and actions and the outcome. Do you think for one moment that chief executive officer will be presented a true, accurate picture of what is happening at the grassroots? Of course not.

All research reveals that as information flows upward to the pinnacle, to the top of the pyramid, it slowly but surely takes on a new meaning, a new perspective, a new perception. Whatever the motivation might be, whatever the reasons might be, the information reaching the top is not the truth. This is one of the major reasons why this model introduced by the government of British Columbia has all the partners and all of the participants partaking in a variety of ways with a multitude of strategies. They are contributing at the grassroots and affecting the people who are making the decisions at the top end as well as middle management. This model is dynamic. It is one of the most fruitful models we have at the present time in our democratic society.

These community events begin with an informal open house. This is crucial. People must come into an atmosphere and environment where they feel at ease. It has to feel as if they are coming into a family reunion where they can openly and honestly discuss their concerns and perceptions with each other. It must not have the atmosphere of a formal meeting dictated and controlled by one chairperson.

After the presentation, the floor is open to questions from the audience. That is another crucial stage of this process. The people that are asking the questions may not have the same perception as a chairperson or any other of the major players has in this session. The person asking the question may have a completely different background which in turn affects how he or she perceives what is being presented in this meeting. If this person's perception is off balance or it is not in harmony with the

perceptions and actual concepts that are being presented by the leaders of these groups then I think we have a problem.

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However, in this model the people who are responding to the concerns and to the questions must have the background to understand the people who are asking the questions. It is absolutely essential that in this model we have representatives of the First Nations people who have a very in depth, comprehensive understanding of what this treaty and this model are all about and what the process is all about.

I would rather see someone from the First Nations who is capable of handling that role presenting an information package or responses to questions raised by First Nations people than someone coming from the department of Indian affairs in Ottawa telling the people in British Columbia that this is the way it is and these are the answers to the questions.

My perception will never be the same, no matter how long I work with First Nations people. I could work with them for years and I would never have the same type of perception of any situation as they have simply because I have not been raised in that culture. I have not been raised in their environment. Therefore, their experiences would be far different from mine.

The forums are moderated by a high profile member of the community. As more First Nations groups move into stages three and four of the treaty process, TPEC is expanding its activities to include issue oriented forums, with more focus on what is happening at the negotiating table and workshops for the media. The first media workshop was held in Nanaimo last week and was extremely well received.

A second level of public information activity takes place at the regional and local level. As part of the readiness preparations, the three negotiating parties establish a tripartite public information working group to support the negotiations. This is critical. We may have some of the most dynamic, shattering, exciting, zestful kind of experiences within that public forum but if the information that is being shared and generated is not shared with other people in the community who could not be in that public hall, all is in vain. All we are doing it helping to develop a gap between those who know and those who do not know.

Therefore, it becomes much more difficult to convince the public who do not have the first hand knowledge to really and truly comprehend what is going on. If they are making judgments based on ignorance then we have trouble. We then have negative reactions to anything that is being proposed in the media.

It is critical how the information is handled, the media that is involved, their perceptions and the kind of interpretations they give.