

Cuthand: FSIN funding in question – drastic steps needed to protect credibility

Chief Bobby Cameron, and any other vice chiefs with ties to the decisions of administering funding in question, should resign

By Doug Cuthand · Saskatoon StarPhoenix

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Bobby Cameron, seen here in 2023 file photo, says the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations will work to ensure governments in Canada and the U.S. respect treaty rights. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BERG /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

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The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations is in serious trouble. The Chiefs will have to take control and make things right.

Indigenous Services Canada retained the consulting firm, KPMG to conduct a forensic audit on the FSIN's books for 2020-2024 and revealed \$34 million in questionable, ineligible and unsupported transactions during the time period.

It's very important to point out these questionable transactions are just that for the time being. There has been a lot of speculation, innuendo and gloating on social media, but to date, neither KPMG nor ISC have pursued charges for fraud or theft. It's premature to speculate without proper investigation.

It seems that far too many individuals are jumping to conclusions.

However, the FSIN must take drastic steps to protect what is left of the organization's credibility and remaining administrative structure. The questionable items relate to only part of the organization's structure — the remaining work done for research, organizing and policy development is untouched. So, what steps need to be taken to regain some credibility? First Chief Bobby Cameron should resign and any other vice-chiefs with ties to the decisions of administering funding in question should resign too. The chief is the head of the organization and the buck stops with him. Chiefs must take over the leadership and form an interim board of chiefs, senators and remaining vice-chiefs.

An emergency assembly should be called in December or January to hold a special election. The fall assembly must go ahead, and all the information must be made available, and the chiefs should discuss future action, in camera if necessary.

Make no mistake about it, this is the most serious issue the FSIN has faced in its 80-year history. There is loose talk swirling around that this means the end of the federation, but the organization is greater than any individual or group of individuals.

In 1982, when we were developing First Nations self-government, it became apparent the chiefs were a political body and couldn't continue to operate in the old structure as a nonprofit corporation. We needed to develop a vehicle that operated under the jurisdiction of the chiefs.

The result was a unique structure based on First Nations self-government and the primacy of the office of the chiefs. The chiefs are bound together by a convention in which they agree to share jurisdiction and work together for the common good and the protection of treaty rights.

The government wouldn't accept the convention because it didn't fall under their rules as a corporate entity. FSIN Inc. was established to sign contracts and serve as a legal entity. These two entities have been confused, and the forensic audit refers to the funds held by FSIN Inc. and not the chiefs' body. A seemingly small point, but it protects the individual First Nations from liability.

Article content

The FSIN executive are considering appealing the KPMG audit, but the audit only raises questions that need to be answered. You can appeal conclusions,

but you can't appeal the facts. The FSIN needs to address the questions raised by KPMG and either straighten things out or admit the mistakes and work toward a resolution.

The reaction from the FSIN has been to ignore the audit or discount its importance. They have run out of time and can't kick the can down the road any longer. Indigenous Services Canada has stated it will place the audit on their website by Sept. 30 or earlier. At that point all bets are off.

The media and public will have access to the information and the FSIN must develop a strategy as to how to deal with it.

We are at an important crossroads and our leaders must work with the new government and participate in the coming changes to the Canadian economic structure. Resources will be increasingly important and we must participate. We cannot allow the loss of this important institution. Instead, the chiefs need to take control and become the political powerhouse we once were.

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<https://thestarphoenix.com/opinion/cuthand-fsin-funding-in-question-drastic-steps-needed-to-protect-credibility>

Bobby Cameron should never have become FSIN Chief in the first place. A rule disqualifying him was used instead to disqualify a principal competitor in the first leadership contest he won. When this was later exposed, again, Cameron and the FSIN brazenly refused to do anything. They look like nothing other than a greedy, crooked elite using political office to feather their own nests. If Indigenous people want credibility with the larger Canadian public, they have to start reining in their own "leaders" abusing power. But I have seen this phenomenon in African countries after independence; elites are relentless in self-preservation. Even with the best constitution in the world, South African elites, existing and aspiring, White and Black, could not be stopped from corrupting institutions ("state capture"), extorting wealth, and thereby subverting their country and the dreams of the people they claim to serve. The worst temptations of human nature know no skin color. TJB