

Keynote speech delivered at the Manitoba Liberal Party AGM on April 5, 2008

Economic Opportunities (International)

‘One person’s trash is another person’s treasure’ –Is the export of rough fish to China a pipe dream or is the opportunity real?

I am really honoured to be with you today. I don’t have all the answers, but I want to challenge our conventional way of thinking. I have a compelling business case to make, but more importantly, I feel compelled to speak on behalf of the many aboriginal men, women and children who are not able to speak for themselves.

Two years ago, I started asking questions about the rough fish that gets thrown away in our lakes. It does not make sense to me that such a valuable resource, right here in our own backyards, can go to waste when China does not have enough food to feed its people.

Supply and Demand

Do you know that the average Chinese person consumes 26 kg of seafood per year, total fish consumption has increased more than 10-fold since 1960 and more than half the lakes in China are heavily polluted? The Chinese eat 5 times more seafood than we do. 5 million tons of low value trash fish, including carp and mullet, were consumed in China in 2005. Here in Canada, every year, we have access to millions and millions of pounds of rough fish in our freshwater lakes.

The Paradigm Shift

Attitudes are changing and we see this paradigm shift. The opportunity to export rough fish could not have come at a better time. Consumers all over the world are now reconsidering the place of meat in their diets and the health and environmental benefits of eating more fish. We have to educate consumers to explore eating fish species that are lower on the food chain. The carp and mullet are less endangered and fished in a less destructive way than the larger carnivorous species. The beauty is that the Chinese already

eat carp, just that the carp there is a 3-pounder whereas our carp is a 10-pounder with lots of roe inside and can be marketed as a gourmet item. Walmart announced that in 3 to 5 years, it will be certifying that all its seafood for the North American market will be raised sustainably. Its stores will introduce a new label to distinguish sustainable seafood. We do not want to be left behind.

The History

The First Nations peoples have had 150 years of negative history behind them. In 1994, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs signed a framework agreement with the federal government to do away with the Indian Act and put the First Nations Peoples on the road to self-government. In 1999, a progress report found dismal results. In 2007, the initiative was abandoned. 13 years and \$55 million later, it proved to be a total failure. My question is this: what is the use of self-government to the aboriginal communities when there is 90% unemployment rate on the reserves, people live hand to mouth and have to rely on government handouts? It is not about who governs who. It is about giving our First Nations Peoples the respect they deserve by helping them bring fishing back as a way of life. I think it was the same framework report that said it would take two generations to help the First Nations peoples stand back on their feet again. Two generations is approximately 50 years and unfortunately, I don't have another 50 years. I want to see it happen in my lifetime.

The Solution

In Prime Minister Harper's election campaign 2 years ago, he had this to say. A Conservative government would have a '*fundamental obligation*' to improve '*the educational and economic opportunities of all aboriginal Canadians*'. We don't want to be part of the problem. We want to be part of the solution and give the First Nations peoples an economic base where there was none before. Let us stop whining about the rail cars and containers that go back to China empty. I have fish factories waiting in Hong Kong and China that are ready, willing and able to take a trial load of fish. They want to experiment with the fish and see what they can do with it. It is not going to cost us \$55 million. It is not even going to cost us \$1 million. It may cost \$20,000 to move a container or two, something perhaps less than the cost of a business plan. And don't study it to death either! We talk about making Manitoba a 'have' Province by 2020. Here's an opportunity of a lifetime to

reverse the trade imbalance, which is currently 4:1 in China's favour and stop the bleeding.

I can't talk about opportunity without sharing this wonderful story. There are two men who sell shoes in the desert. One man said, "this is a disaster; no one wears shoes". The other man said, "this is a gold mine; no one wears shoes." You know which side I am on. To my fellow Liberals and others who are here today, I say let's just do it...let's make it happen. Thank you.

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