



SACHEM

New petition calls for Fantino inquiry

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"This is a very significant development Ken has initiated," said Haldimand Norfolk MPP Toby Barrett.

Ken Hewitt, Caledonia resident, has launched a petition both online and on paper "to request the Premier of Ontario to immediately launch a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the Commissioner of the OPP, (Ontario Provincial Police) Juilian Fantino, and impose his immediate suspension without pay and upon confirmation of facts, his immediate resignation," and also, "To request the Premier of Ontario to immediately launch a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the OPP with respect to Caledonia over the past three years," (quoted from online petition).

"It's really important that people realize this isn't about Native land claims, or the Native people. The action of the OPP and our governments clearly put Caledonia and Six Nations in a head-on collision," Hewitt stated Tuesday.

"I don't want people to read (the petition) and think that we're just trying to stir the pot. This is an OPP and management issue. This has nothing to do with the officers at the local level, or those who were told to come in and serve from elsewhere. This is a management and leadership issue. This is specifically aimed at that group."

"I have signed the petition online and the hard copy, as well," stated Haldimand County Ward 3 councillor Craig Grice.

"It's part of the psyche of Caledonia and the constituents, for those who feel that the OPP has failed to provide for the residents of Caledonia, and for those in Six Nations.

"The residents of Caledonia don't feel (Fantino) has stepped up for them. That goes to the animosity of the OPP and the residents of Caledonia in general. It's a sad state of affairs."

Grice stressed, "The officers on the front line will take direction from the superior officers; (their orders) comes from the top down."

"If you're the leader, you are responsible for the actions of the team, of those who you direct, of your own actions," said Hewitt.

"We've been collecting (signatures) for about a week and a half; since Christmas," said Hewitt. "The response has been tremendous. An online petition is a barometer; it helps people see the level of interest."

"The legal petition to present to Queen's Park has to be a signed petition with a valid signature and address. Currently, we have over 1,000 people signed. Our hope is that when we present it to the legislator, we will have over 10,000 signatures."

Barrett noted that while citizens can come to Queen's Park with a petition, they would need an elected official "to formally present a petition and the names before the Ontario Legislative Assembly. They could ask me to do so, or MPP Dave Levac (of Brant). If asked, I would read the petition into the legislature, and sign them as I hand them into the clerk."

Barrett has invited Hewitt to bring a hard copy of the petition to his levee at St. George Arms in Caledonia on Sunday, January 11 so that local residents will have an opportunity to come and sign it. Hewitt will be there

from 1 to 1:30 p. m.

"A petition is a very ancient procedure for people in a parliamentary democracy to influence their own representatives and government; to influence their assembly," commented Barrett.

"The big reason that I support initiatives like this, calling for an inquiry, is that we are the victims of government paralysis. Next month, we will be going into our fourth year of this paralysis, and that is downright dangerous.

"It is dangerous to drag this out for three years. It creates mistrust. It is destroying the area's economy, it is destroying the trust in the police, and it is destroying the trust in elected officials," he added.

"We called for an inquiry two and a half years ago," said Barrett. "It was formally presented on June 5, 2006. That was right after we watched Argyle Street get dug up by a backhoe."

"No one is asking the OPP to solve the land claim issue," stated Grice. "They are responsible to uphold the law and protect those they are paid to; that's Haldimand County residents."

"An inquiry is needed at some point in time to ensure the integrity of the position is upheld; to ensure that the residents' concerns are brought to the forefront of Canada."

"I wrote the petition, but this is a grass-roots effort and there is no group, per se, but a number of people who have thrown in their hand to support it. It's the people of Ontario. The petition is growing in Ottawa, Kitchener, North Bay, Thunder Bay, Hamilton, Niagara Falls... our hope is that it will continue to grow across the province," said Hewitt.

"It really is the people's agenda."

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