



First Nation governments to face human rights challenge (April 15, 2011)

"Hi, I'm Joseph Quesnel. In a few months, First Nation citizens will be able to file human rights claims against their own band governments. Why is this significant? Find out on today's Frontier Centre commentary.

In 2008, the federal government passed a law allowing First Nations access to human rights legislation for the first time.

The Canadian Human Rights Act, a law passed in 1977, excluded First Nations who lived under the Indian Act from accessing human rights protection like every other Canadian.

The new legislation, however, did not effect Native band governments right away as they were granted a three-year transitional period before it came into effect.

Come June 18, 2011, however, that transition period ends and First Nation citizens can file claims against their own governments.

This is significant as the law will affect band elections, bylaws made under the Indian Act, band membership, program service delivery, as well as management of moneys held for bands.

In other words, it would affect many areas of governance on First Nation communities. Unfortunately, it appears most band members are unaware of the coming legislation and the rights it will provide for them.

It is hoped the legislation will advance governance reform on many reserves as band leaders will have to revise their bylaws and policies to meet its requirements. It should also give band members a sense that they are protected by universal human rights standards.

I'm Joseph Quesnel. Join the prairie's only independent think tank next week for more thinking on the Frontier. For more about Aboriginal policy, please visit our website, at www.fcpp.org

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