

Tansi, Nina Gisgisskew. Nina Innu skew, Keewatin Aski niwiki. Hello, my Indian name is Greatwoman.

I was born up north at Fort Churchill, and was raised up north most of my life, and moved to Winnipeg when I was 14. I learned so much from my brothers and sisters who also came from all over this land, we all originate, we are not immigrants or settlers. We are the original Peoples of the land.

Much has changed over the years, but somehow there are some racist barriers that still prevent our People from having a good life. We are always looked down upon, and it more difficult to have the same quality of life, the same access to the economy, and the same rights and priviages that other People have. We live in a society that makes social policies to allow some help to those who are impacted by these deeply rooted discrimination practices. Our Indigenous Peoples have become a small proportion of the population, yet the most over-represented in the child welfare system, the penal system, the justice system and under the Income and social assistance programs. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is a organization that brings together 61 First nation communities, all which belong to a Treaty.

Manitoba Keewatini Okinamakinak is a northern organization, which was created because it aimed at drawing support to strengthen the communities that are located in the northern regions of Manitoba.

I want to bring the MKO Resolution #2014-09-16: MKO Collective Approach to Electricity Rate Mitigation and Bill Reduction. MKO passed this resolution for the concern that the annual 4 percent rate increases would further harm First Nation/Indigenous peoples and further impoverishing the already poorest of Manitobans. Further, the communities that are located along the Nelson River are even more impacted by Manitoba Hydro Development, that were supported by the selling pitch their lives would improve.

The communities most affected by these Hydro projects : Grand Rapids, Chemawawin, Norway House, Pimichikamak, Nichawayahsihk Cree Nation, Fox Lake, War Lake, York

Landing, and Tataskweyak.

According to the 2014 information these communities combined have 3491 accounts and are in arrears of a total of \$6 368 060. More specifically in Fox Lake, War Lake, York Landing, Tataskweyak Cree Nation are 619 accounts and in arrears of \$320 283. Yet these communities are directly impacted by these hydro development projects. (MKO NFAT May 2014, page 14 & 15)

I want to share with you my account details, with copies of my direct bills, a MB hydro print-out of these mailed out bills (scanned), so you have an idea of what I received. 2009-2012 my yearly income was below 32 000, even though I have my bachelor of social work, the federal government does not adhere to wage parity on-reserve. Then after being fired from Tataskweyak, I was on social assistance for 2013-2014, then relocating to Winnipeg in September 2014. And opening an account with MB Hydro in Dec, 2014. I am still receiving active billing from TCN from accounts I have no idea. This is the on-reserve creative accounting that eludes grassroots people, which is why we demand audits, forensic audits to know exactly how the transfer funds, or hydro funds are being used in the communities. We want to ensure these monies are being spent on the budgets they were intended for. Last year 56 band members passed away. Many band members are concerned that they are dying as a result of contaminated water. These audits would allow more information sharing and that the funds are improving the water treatment plant, as it was outlined in the Joint Keeyask Development Agreement, ratified in 2009.

Most first nation communities in Manitoba have an average 80 percent of band membership with incomes below \$29 000. This was already presented to the PUB in 2014. Yet no comprehensive studies have been done, to compare billing rates with homes similar on-reserve or off reserve. My bills show amounts excessive and how mismanagement can occur without much recourse for these situations.

If hearings on the billing and rates were held in the communities, you would hear the horrific stories of

Elderly financial abuse, being used to pay for the bills, or face disconnection. My ex in-laws were cut-off last spring. Left with no electricity for a week. Their grandchildren were dependent on them, with infants whose formula spoiled, 3 type II diabetics with no refrigeration for their insulin, and dirty laundry, no hot water tank, no place to cook. There were 4 families living in this home, and the grandparents used their pensions to pay for the bill.

Another Elder, paid her hydro bills, but the winter was so cold, her baseboard heaters weren't enough to keep her warm, and she caught double pneumonia . She is very elderly and after years of debating the hydro projects, agreed because she believed that hydro would not charge them the high rates they pay, and still tell them they have the lowest rates in the country.

Many of the on-reserve and northern communities don't even know (I didn't even know), that there are two other classifications of utility users in Manitoba, with lower rates.

1. Manitoba Gas rate payers, and these gas users pay significantly lower in rates than electrical rates created by the Dam Projects on the river. Gasoline customers have the privilege of lower rates, and live in the south. The northern communities do not have the same advantage of gas users, and then there are Diesel gas rate payers, which are even more higher than electric rates, because they are shipped into either remote communities, or communities that are not readily on the grid, or near the gaslines.

This complicates rate users, formulas are based on whether the accounts are on hydro electric energy, gas pipelines, diesel gas generators, and now geothermal.

2. The other classification of rate payers are Manitoba Hydro employees. MB Hydro employees have two meters. One meter calculates heating and the other calculates the other energy consumption, so they pay a flat rate which includes the usage of gas het users, and then reduced rates calculated for all Manitobans. So MB Hydro employees pay less for rates than others.

I have requested to make a presentation to the Public Utilities Board to be the voice for the people who live with low incomes, who are living in abject poverty, the working poor, and those who would be further harmed by increased hydro rates. The rates that are explained by Manitoba Hydro to the public would seem very clear and basic. But they are not. I have shown you at least 5 very different payment schemes - 1. The general low rate in the land argument, 2. The gas rate, 3. The Hydro employee rate, 4. The on-reserve rate 5. the geothermal rate which is still underway.

The payments rates are not uniform or experienced in the same way. But best explained by Michael Anderson of MKO who points out that First Nations people like myself are disproportionately at higher poverty rates, yet pay more from their incomes, than those who pay less in their higher incomes. Further the First Nations have entered into agreements where they believed that they would benefit from partnering with Hydro Projects, when in fact they have not. The water is polluted and cannot be digested, the dish from the river is contaminated and can increase the risk of cancer if consumed like they did in 1960. The roads that were made create more dust and people cannot be outside or they also become sick from the roads built to accommodate hydro development, and the cost of living is higher in northern communities, with having to buy bottled water, and spending money on medical trips.

In MKO's report (MKO NFAT May 14 2014 page 20), MB Hydro anticipates the poor's inability to pay the current rates when they respond to the question of what steps are taken when accounts are in arrears, with the expectation that they will use the children's money (child tax benefits) to pay off debts. So many children are being apprehended under the Family Services Act, when many situations are created by poverty. The quality of life is compromised when the poor are expected to pay for the corporate project like MB Hydro. First it was the Hudson Bay company that extracted the resources through the fur trade, and now it is the commercialization of water exploitation that our First Nations are once again imposed upon. The years of commercial and government exploits create layers of "economic growth", at the expense of our lands, families and treaties. These treaty agreements

were signed to share the land, to become a family that coexists in harmony with the land, and under our Creator's will. There isn't any humanity in this current situation with the increase of hydro rates, that will further impoverish the already oppressed population.

Tataskweyak Cree Nation has held two protests since the Keeyask Dam began its construction. In both protests, the band members stated that they did not want to pay for hydro electricity anymore. This request should be a reality and the numbers on-reserve are so few, it would not hurt Mb Hydro corporates business. The people would be freed to put their budgets back into community development and working with the people. We haven't begun to evaluate the housing, and seeing how many families live in one home, and live in poorly designed housing with poor financing.

Also, the poor and the lowest income earners should have a similar system as the hydro employees, with a separate meter that allows them to pay at a lower rate, making it affordable. But protecting the most vulnerable, the children and the elderly. Families would experience less stress and they can afford food and clothing, for our ever growing extreme weather changes in this climate change.