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THIS WEEK



Calvin Helin

Author and CEO's campaign to help aboriginals and others shed chains of economic dependency

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By Joel McKay

Independence day

One of B.C.'s most progressive aboriginal business leaders is criticizing economic dependency again, but instead of focusing on First Nations he's targeting society as a whole.

In his latest book, *The Economic Dependency Trap: Breaking Free to Self-Reliance*, Calvin Helin has declared war on welfare dependency and poverty.

The Richmond author, entrepreneur and self-reliance activist has laid out a "declaration of independence" to help individuals of all race and colour rid themselves of the sense of entitlement that he believes saturates North American society.

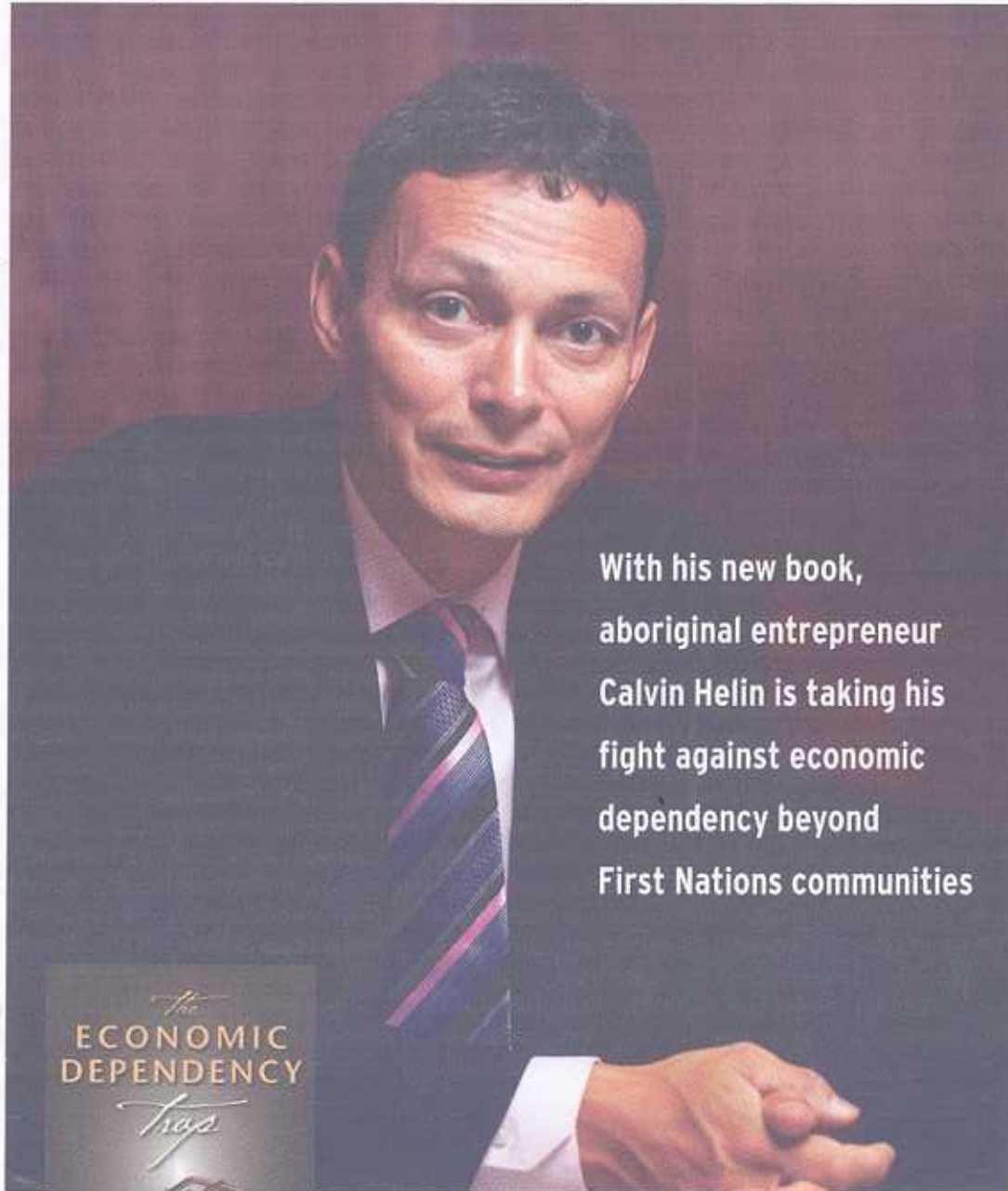
The book, which launched at Richmond's River Rock Casino last month, is a followup to his 2006 bestseller *Dances with Dependency: Indigenous Success Through Self-Reliance*.

In that book, Helin used the metaphor of a canoe journey to trace the history of First Nations as a once proud and self-sustaining people to one that now relies on government handouts.

While he wrote that book, Helin said he recognized that many of the same economic traps that paralyzed First Nations are now evident throughout society.

Renowned Canadian journalist Peter Newman edited Helin's latest tome, and told *Business in Vancouver* what it was like working with the fast-paced aboriginal leader.

"I wish he could slow down so I could call him a work addict," Newman said. "He would go to China for three weeks and come back with a new book, the same book, but it was a new book. This is his energy, and it's amazing."



With his new book, aboriginal entrepreneur Calvin Helin is taking his fight against economic dependency beyond First Nations communities

The
**ECONOMIC
DEPENDENCY**
Traps



BREAKING FREE TO SELF-RELIANCE

Calvin Helin, author and Eagle Group of Companies CEO: "you validate your sense of self-worth by working for what you get"

happens with the middle class. And

Mission: To rid society of

this, but it's the truth. If you look at the United States, as an example, they were the most powerful economic force in the world, and in a very short time this "me have to have it right now here generation" has borrowed so much money that they've literally given away the keys to the empire. Remember all those lectures the U.S. was giving to China on human rights? You don't hear them now do you? That's because the greater the dependency you have on someone for your sustenance the less control you have over your destiny.

Are you hopeful we can get out of this trap?

The whole book is an appeal to wake up, right? It starts with individuals, and that's why there's such a large section aimed at individuals. When I was a kid, my grandmother used to kick me outside and tell me to do something to make me feel better. That's something quite profound, and it's at the heart of why welfare doesn't work. A famous psychologist said one of the deepest cravings of human nature is the need to feel wanted and valued. When someone gives you something like a welfare cheque you get your material sustenance but it bypasses the most important thing people need to have – a sense of self-worth. You validate your sense of self-worth by working for what you get.

What can the business community do to help?

You have to recognize how all this works, which I've tried to do in this book, because if you don't you're just

the same book, but it was a new book. "This is his energy, and it's amazing."

In a recent interview, Helin shared some of his thoughts about the book and economic dependency.

Your first book focused on the plight of First Nations, but this book is for everyone. Why?

The issue is universal. The reason the book's statistics focus on the U.S. is, even though the U.S. has had a fairly precipitous fall from economic grace, it's still considered the centre of the financial world. It's a good way to launch what I'm doing on a worldwide stage.

Why did you take the time to write a "declaration of independence"?

I thought it would be useful for people to be able to refer to the principals of economic dependency. Peter Newman referred to it as the bible of economic dependency and those really are the 10 commandments of it. They apply to everybody, everything and are universal principles.

BREAKING FREE TO SELF-RELIANCE
CALVIN HELIN

Are there two or three that are useful to highlight?

The more dependent you are on any entity for your sustenance the less control you have over your life or destiny. That applies to anybody, whether you're being financed by welfare, a sugar daddy or your parents. That principle is entirely universal. The other one is, whoever you are, wherever you are, the results of economic dependency are universal and almost always result in the economic dependency mindset. You can take an aboriginal person off a reserve in Canada that has been on welfare for generations and you can start to see the same mindset in people in Cuba under communism or East Germany or African Americans in inner cities. It's a mindset that also governs what

happens with the middle class. And then there's the idea of affluenza.

You spend a lot of time talking about "affluenza" in the book. Is this sense of entitlement in the middle class one of society's most pressing issues?

It sure is. This is the first time in the history of civilization that we've had so much wealth as a society either in the form of cash or access to credit, and it's now we're starting to see the results. What people are doing is they're giving their kids material things they felt they were deprived of or living vicariously through them, and they're doing it with the unwitting result that the kids are ending up with what psychologists are calling "affluenza," this mindset where they are unable to cope because they've never had to do anything for themselves. It's not that much different than an aboriginal person on welfare. It sounds paradoxical to say all

Mission: To rid society of economic dependency

Assets: Business acumen and a new take on aboriginal issues

Yield: A self-made author, lawyer, entrepreneur and president and CEO of the Eagle Group of Companies

book, because if you don't you're just a tree in the forest. I felt the same way as an aboriginal kid growing up on a reserve. I could see all of these awful things that were happening to aboriginal people. Once you see how it works, you can make a plan and think about what people need to get satisfaction out of their work. Our society focuses on material things and money, but more often than not most studies point out that people value other things more highly. People want to know they're a valuable part of their organization, so you can reward and structure things in such a way that makes [work] a much more satisfying experience, and they feel it's a much more natural part of life rather than drudgery. Since it's such a large part of your time we've forgotten that it really determines, to a large extent, the kind of person that you are. ■

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