

Victoria News

Aboriginal figure opening economic doors abroad

By Patrick Blennerhassett - Victoria News

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Calvin Helin is battling a cold and jet-lag.

He admits the side effects are a small price to pay for the potential impact of the trip he had just returned from.

The aboriginal lawyer, activist and author of *Dances With Dependency: Out of Poverty through Self-Reliance* was in China for 12 days as part of the RCI Aboriginal Business-China Trade Mission.

Helin and other Canadian aboriginal business leaders signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese minister of foreign relations, a move he says declared aboriginal Canada “open for business” with China in terms of natural resource development – everything from oil and diamonds to iron ore.

Aboriginal groups in Canada control close to one third of the country’s land, most of it rich with natural resources.

“In the past aboriginal people have not had the capital or expertise for economic leadership like this. This is a sign of things to come in the future for us,” says Helin, who speaks about his recent experience tonight (Nov. 19) at Camosun College’s Interurban campus. The talk is part of the joint Camosun business school-Indigenous Business Leadership program.

The trip to China is essentially Helin putting the mantras he speaks about in his self-published first book *Dances With Dependency* into practice. In the book he illustrates how First Nations in Canada have become dependent on handouts from the provincial and federal governments. To break this cycle, he said, aboriginal communities across the country need to start becoming business savvy, joining the economic world on all levels – local, provincial and international.

“This is a big favour for not only Aboriginal people in terms of helping them,” he says of the change in approach. “But all of Canada as well.”



Calvin Helin and Chinese Foreign Relations Minister Chen Haosu. pic submitted

While in China he had a formal dinner with the Foreign Relations Minister Chen Haosu and visited such cities as Shanghai and Beijing. Helin, who was invited back next spring, hopes the trade mission is the start of a business relationship with a country looking to fill the needs of a growing population.

His book has drawn fire from some aboriginal leaders, who charge him with promoting neo-assimilation of First Nations cultures and beliefs. Helin takes the allegations in stride, instead focusing on a positive outlook for the future of aboriginal peoples in Canada. He cites an H. L. Mencken quote “the only freedom is economic freedom.”

“The more dependant you are, the less control you have,” says Helin, who is about two-thirds through writing the follow-up *Surviving Dependency: Empowerment through Self-Reliance*. “We need to get to the point where we’re generating our own income and educating ourselves to the same level of the rest of the population.”

Helin speaks at the Interurban Campus Centre Building, room 124, from 7 to 8 p.m. The campus is located at 4461 Interurban Rd. For more information please call 250-370-4165.

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