



Fend for yourselves, aboriginals told Author says natives must overcome reliance on government support

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By Alexandra Paul

ABORIGINAL people need to get out and work for a living.

That's the message Calvin Helin, an aboriginal entrepreneur, is taking to Canadians.

The British Columbia scion of a hereditary chief is the author of *Dances with Dependency*, a book he wrote as a wakeup call to aboriginal people in North America.

He says aboriginal people can be rich if they return to their ancestors' values and start working for a living and helping themselves instead of depending on government handouts for a living.

Helin promoted his philosophy at a lunch Tuesday hosted by right-wing think-tank The Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

"The private sector is the only place you're going to get wealth," Helin, also a Vancouver lawyer, told a mixed audience of about 100 aboriginal and non-aboriginal business people at the Winnipeg Convention Centre.

"It's a law of nature that you have to look after your own interests," Helin said.

Frontier policy analyst Dennis Owens said Helin's growing celebrity in aboriginal circles has talk show hosts like Oprah Winfrey and Larry King casting their eyes toward the soft-spoken, trim lawyer. The invitations aren't firm yet but Helin may be on U.S. TV in the future, Tuesday's crowd was told.

Helin published his own book in the face of opposition from every publisher he talked to, the lunch crowd was told.

Dances with Dependency was published in 2006 by publishing firm Orca Spirit Publishing, a company Helin created himself.

In the last year, Helin and his wife Vernitah Helin have made back every penny of the \$100,000 it cost to bring the book to the public.

At nearly \$40 a copy, the 300-page book traces the history of aboriginal people in different parts of Canada and wraps up with profiles of communities turning a profit of millions of dollars through private business ventures.

Colonial attitudes and federal laws that assimilated aboriginal people have led to a "welfare trap," Helin said.

"How much self-government is there when somebody else is paying for it?" the author asked. Frontier's aboriginal spokesman Don Sandberg, from Norway House First Nation, said his take on Helin's message is graphic. "We've got to get up off our asses. I'm not the only one saying this," Sandberg said, endorsing Helin.

When a jug of milk in Northern Manitoba costs \$12, that means "I'd buy a couple of cows" to get a cheaper supply of steady dairy products, the plain-spoken Sandberg said.

Opaskwayak Cree Nation business consultant Daniel Paul Bork says Helin's message is coming at the right time.

"The leadership's been closed-minded about allowing people to stand up and speak their minds but now there's a new openness in Manitoba," said Bork, who runs Cook Consulting Inc. in Winnipeg.

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