

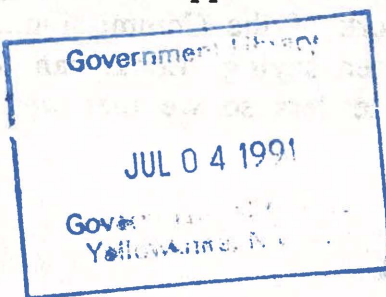
**CBC Mackenzie Radio**  
**Wednesday, July 3, 1991**  
**Judy McLinton interview with**  
**Stephen Kakfwi**



**Announcer:** The Western Constitutional Commission still doesn't have a woman on it and it doesn't seem likely that one will be appointed in the near future unless the Legislative Assembly demands it. At least that's the way the Minister of Aboriginal Rights and Constitutional Development views the situation. Steve Kakfwi tells Judy McLinton why he didn't appoint any women to the Commission.

**Mr. Kakfwi:** If you take it in historical context, the Western Constitutional Forum is basically what this Commission is replacing and the Western Constitutional Forum never did have any women on it. It's represented by the Aboriginal organizations and the Legislative Assembly. So when the idea of setting up a Commission came up, there was really nobody out there suggesting that whatever we do, we should make sure a woman is represented on this commission. We just took the safe road which is to let the Dene put somebody on there, the Inuvialuit, the Metis and the Legislative Assembly; largely the Legislative Assembly to represent the non-native kind of interests. And it's just in the last few weeks that the women decided they'd been left out. You know, I'd told them that, I mean, there's an argument to be made that where were they when I was looking for support for the idea of a Commission? Where were they during all the controversy in the March, April session? And now it's all set up, they're complaining because they've been left out. Given that, I still think they have a legitimate point, that the Commission will look partially handicapped if we don't let the women come in and help us with the work. It's not going to take away anything from Inuvialuit or the Dene or the Metis or the Legislature. I think it's going to only enhance and give credibility to the Commission.

**McLinton:** When you looked at the make up of the Commission, when you brought the nominees from the Dene Nation, the Metis Association and the Inuvialuit, did you not look at it and say "These are all men, maybe we should appoint a woman from the government"?



**Mr. Kakfwi:** Well, I've always personally been aware that the Metis Association has been largely represented by men only, so have the chiefs of the Dene Nation. There have been women chiefs in recent years, there have been a lot of women who were through the Metis Locals but by-and-large it's hard to come up with any major constitutional players that are women who have good experience and credibility to do the job. It really drives at the question of how much commitment is there to getting the Commission going and to get it finished. The people who are always saying that if they don't get their way, they might pull out are Roger Gruben and Bill Erasmus. If we put a woman in there, their ability to carry out that threat is going to diminish greatly. I think that's part of the problem, I think. It's not whether they agree to put a woman on there or not but that their ability to kill the Commission, if they want, is going to diminish greatly because they won't be that important any more.

**Ms. McLinton:** Then that, basically, what good is your Commission going to be then, if these two, whether there's a woman appointed or not, are out to kill it?

**Mr. Kakfwi:** Well, I'm not saying that they're out to kill it but, I mean, we have yet to see any enthusiasm from Bill Erasmus to say that the work set out for the Commission is important and he supports it whole heartedly. If anything, he's been dragged through this bitching and complaining from Day One. With Roger Gruben, he's been totally supportive but because they're a small group in the Beaufort and they want to keep their role to be seen as critical and that they may want to pull out of the Commission some time if things don't go their way. The idea of including a woman who would diminish the impact, I guess, of them pulling out later is, I think, the real reason for the concern; not that they think Roger Gruben represents all the Inuvialuit or that Billy represents all the treaty Dene women in the Mackenzie Valley.

**Ms. McLinton:** Are you going to appoint a woman to this Commission?

**Mr. Kakfwi:** Well, if there's any way that I could see it done, I would like it. This Commission is a political agreement, that's all it is, and if the leaders would see it as something to enhance the credibility and the work of the Commission... I mean, basically, we have a group of women saying "Look, can we get into the same room with you Aboriginal leaders so we that we can give some advice and

give some input?" How in the world can anybody say no? I don't understand it but that is the only way I that I could explain it is: that it threatens their power base.

**Ms. McLinton:** Are you still negotiating with them then to make that change?

**Mr. Kakfwi:** Well, the Legislature is in a position, I guess, if they want to push it and request changes to the terms of reference to get it done. The whole thing is incredibly sensitive because if the budget isn't approved by the MLAs because they don't like the terms of reference, there is no Commission. If the Legislature pushes it and increases the membership to include women, Roger Gruben may pull out and so may the Dene Nation. You know, we have all the makings of a birthday party, I guess, that's spoiled by a couple of brats.

**Announcer:** That was the Minister of Aboriginal Rights and Constitutional Development speaking with Judy McLinton. Steve Kakfwi plans to table the terms of reference for the Western Constitutional Commission in the Legislative Assembly either today or tomorrow.



