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**Phoney letter claims to offer Native status for \$350**

**By Ryan Paulsen**

As discussions surrounding the 36,000 square kilometre Algonquin Ontario land claim continue through their 20th year, with principal negotiator Bob Potts hopeful that involved parties are getting ever closer to reaching an agreement in principal (AIP), someone has resorted to fraud in an apparent attempt to rock the boat.

In recent weeks, individuals from Mattawa to Golden Lake have received letters in the mail that claim to come Potts himself.

The letter purports to announce an opportunity for "enrolment" into The Algonquins of Ontario, "for a nominal one-time fee of \$350," adding that new members "will receive all benefits available to a first nation [sic], including free dental, housing, tax exemptions and the right to hunt and fish."

The letter continues to say that "your membership 'yes' vote will guarantee you full Indian Status. You will be entitled to a \$10,000 payment, a land allocation as well as complete benefits."

No detail is provided as to where the \$350 "membership fee" should be directed, and the only contact information on the letter is that of Potts, who sees only one reason behind the misinformation in the document.

"The point is to destabilize," he said in a telephone interview with The Daily Observer. "When people are desperate, and they're feeling that they need to strike out at somebody, they resort to bizarre and rather sad means, and this is one of them. It's filled with inaccuracy, it's erroneous, it's fraudulent, it's all kinds of things and it's very sad that somebody would resort to something like that."

The land claim itself dates back as far as 1983, when the first claims were brought forward, but the governments of Ontario and Canada officially entered negotiations on the claim in 1991 and 1992, respectively.

After two decades of discussion, Potts believes that the three negotiating parties are approaching a milestone, and that that may be what has led to the distribution of the letter.

"If you really want to get down to it, what's happening is that we're getting closer and closer to what we think will be an AIP of some consequence for everybody, and I think what's happening here is you're seeing some folks who are just desperate not to see any change trying to subvert and destabilize. That's not surprising, if you take the people who might be doing it, but it's really sad, is what it really comes down to, that you can't have

an open debate and discuss meaningful matters in a conscientious way as opposed to using all kinds of dirty tricks like this."

For more information on the land claim or the ongoing negotiations, visit the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs website at [www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca](http://www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca) or contact the Ontario Information Centre for the Algonquin Land Claim, located in the Government Information Centre at 31 Riverside Drive in Pembroke. The office can also be reached by phone at 613-732-8081.