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24 » 2009

## Passport cost hurts travelling natives

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The Times; with files from Canwest News Service

*Tuesday, June 02, 2009*

Crossing the border from Canada to the U.S. just became more restricted for both Canadians and Americans, but some Aboriginal groups are protesting the changes.

First Nations bands from across Canada have expressed varying degrees of opposition to the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) on June 1. Canadian travellers, and Americans returning home, now require a passport, an enhanced driver's licence or a "trusted traveller" card (NEXUS or FAST card) to enter the U.S.

Sto:lo Tribal Council leader Grand Chief Doug Kelly says the new rules will be a hardship for many impoverished First Nations band members.

"I understand the security concerns but I've not known any Sto:lo to be terrorists," he told the Times Monday. "And I've not known any Coast Salish to be terrorists."

Kelly said the Sto:lo people are a part of the larger Coast Salish Nation and many local Sto:lo band members have family in northwest Washington that they regularly visit.

Local Sto:lo bands haven't done so, but the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council (SNTC) has supported the Okanagan Nation Alliance in a show of opposition to the new border requirements.

"Prior to the establishment of the U.S./Canada border, Aboriginal people knew no borders, and despite the institution Aboriginal people continue to share bloodlines south of the border, as well as territory to which we have an indisputable right to use," said the SNTC in a press release.

Despite the rules taking effect on Monday, U.S. officials say they will be lenient, at least for a while. U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) will not refuse entry to members of First Nations who only have status cards.

"Canadian and American Indians who still only have their photo ID tribal card, we will still accept those through a modest but reasonable transition period," said Chief Thomas Schreiber, CPB public affairs officer in an interview with the Times.

Kelly said he does have a passport, and got one after a visit to the U.S. four months ago where the "very polite" border guard told him how much quicker his entry process would become. However, Kelly says many local Sto:lo don't have driver's licences and so won't get the enhanced one and many can't afford a passport.

"Our communities are impoverished," he said. "The cost associated with getting a passport is a prohibiting factor."

Some First Nations groups have said the new rule is a violation of the Jay Treaty between Canada and the U.S. (signed in 1795), which states that Native Indians born in Canada are entitled to enter the U.S.

The new law falls under WHTI, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Department of State anti-terrorism policy initiated after the 9/11 attacks. Given there have been various stages of increased border security since Sept. 11, 2001, Schreiber said the new policy should not have come as a surprise to anyone, including First Nations.

To date, 91 million Americans, or 30 per cent of the population, have obtained passports, according to Joanne Ferreira, spokesperson for CBP. Another one million have passport pass cards and half a million own NEXUS cards that allow quick passage. Fifty-four per cent of Canadians own passports.

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