

Aboriginal political parties to run in next federal election

BY LEN KRUGENGA

A new aboriginal political party has been formed in Winnipeg with the goal of running aboriginal candidates in a widely expected spring election.

The People's Political Power Party of Canada president Shirley Roulette, who hails from the Sandy Bay

Ojibway First Nation, says the party is an inclusive one intended to campaign on universal principles of basic human rights, family dignity, universal health-care and traditional values.

The leader of the party, Roger Poisson, a Manitoba Métis, promises he will challenge the Paul Martin

Liberal government with a vigorous expose of its failure to meet the needs of the country's Aboriginal Peoples.

"This government's record on fundamental rights and providing a dignified quality of living standard for aboriginal people is a disgrace," said Poisson.

While membership in the party is small at present—currently less than 300 members—Poisson is optimistic aboriginal people and others committed to fundamental human rights issues will join.

"Our party offers some universal values that appeal to all persons who desire justice and honour in

their governments and leaders."

However another group of aboriginal Canadians is also poised to make history by launching its own federal political party.

The Aboriginal Peoples Party has signed up more than 150 members and is hoping to field a slate of candidates.

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didates in the coming election but its announcement has NDP MP Pat Martin questioning its authenticity because retired Liberal Senator Thelma Chalifoux is helping spearhead the party.

Martin was widely quoted over his concerns the new party could be designed to boost Liberal fortunes by filtering off votes in key tight ridings, and allow Liberal candidates to run up the middle and gain the seats:

"I fully support the creation of an aboriginal political party if they choose, but it's doomed to fail in our system because there's very few seats where even a unanimous aboriginal vote would result in an MP. If this is any way a front or any way connected to the Liberal party, then I have serious concerns about it... We know that Thelma Chalifoux was a Liberal chair of the Senate committee on aboriginal affairs until very recently. Has she torn up her Liberal party membership, or is this an extension of the Liberal party?" said Martin, in an Ottawa Citizen story.

But the former Liberal senator Chalifoux dismissed Martin's fears saying she was ap-

proached to help get the new aboriginal party off the ground and will let her Liberal Party membership simply expire

"I still support a lot of the Liberal philosophy and a lot of the policies, but a lot of the policies do not address the issues related to the aboriginals of this country," she told a Citizen reporter.

Bill Montour, a former chief of the Six Nations in Ontario and the interim leader of the APP, said the new party's goal is solely to give aboriginal candidates the ability to seek election free of the political constraints of the traditional party policies

"Blockades and demonstrations and protests are only effective to a certain point. We've got to start looking at getting our voice in Parliament, where the other parliamentarians have to listen to us," he said in the Citizen story.

And he stressed that the APP will focus on the environment, health and education issues and addresses the disproportionate number of aboriginals in correctional facilities."