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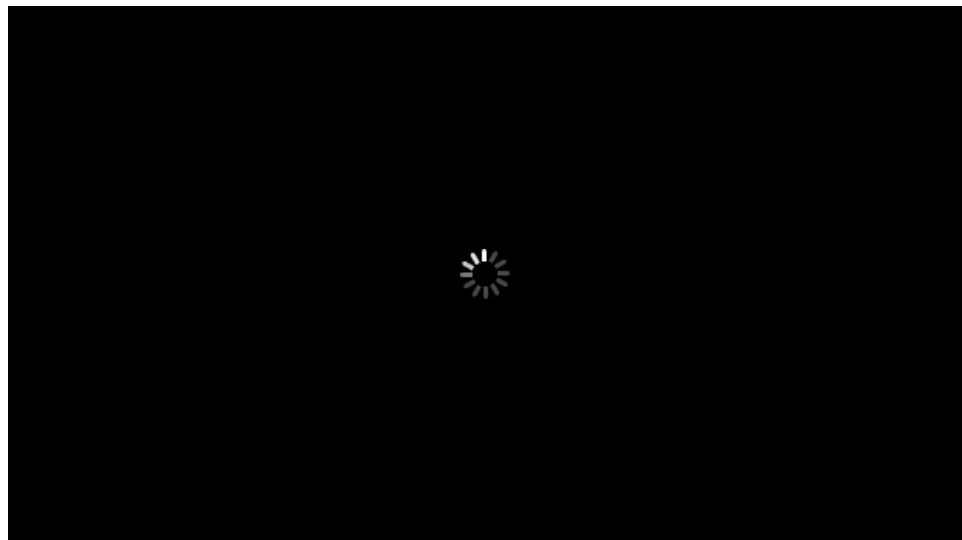
Mandryk: Wall right about lack of leadership

BY MURRAY MANDRYK, THE LEADER-POST MARCH 6, 2015

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Earlier this week, Kimberly Jonathan, interim chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), took aim at Premier Brad Wall, accusing him of exploiting the toddler deaths. Wall shot back, telling reporters that Jonathan's suggestion was "ridiculous."

Brad Wall is certainly not the kind of politician who avoids a race-related issue if it means scoring a few political points.

Consider the Saskatchewan Party political advertisement in the fall of 2013 that took aim at NDP leader Cam Broten for being part of Dwain Lingenfelter's 2011 campaign, which dared mention revenue-sharing with First Nations.

"It is almost always First Nations people against everyone else in Saskatchewan," a disheartened Perry Bellegarde, then-chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, said in October 2013.

Wall contended the ad was about how Saskatchewan resources were for everyone. But, it sure seemed like a silent dog whistle meant for the province's majority of white voters, some of whom already question subsidies for First Nations.

Nor is Wall exactly a saint when it comes to manipulating First Nations issues for his own political benefit. Consider his backroom deal with Bellegarde to sell the

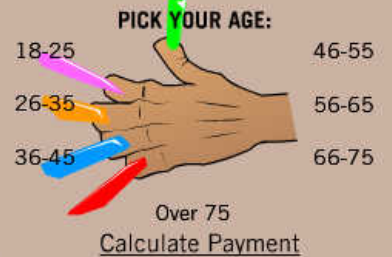
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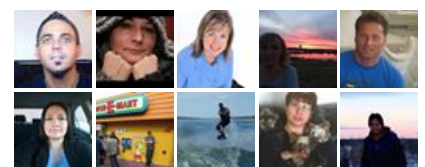
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Regina and Moose Jaw casinos to the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA).

That Wall seemed so eager in January 2014 to portray Broten as blocking the "sale" of casinos that make \$50 million a year for \$100-\$200 million says much about the political games the premier sometimes plays.

So if First Nations leaders are somewhat suspicious of Wall, maybe he has himself to partly blame.

But does it mean he exploits First Nations tragedies for his own political gain? No. That's insulting nonsense that shouldn't be tolerated. And being suspicious of Wall - and the rest of white Saskatchewan society, for that matter - is unhelpful and even rather destructive. About the only thing worse is deliberately spinning what Wall actually said for your own political gain.

This takes us to accusations from current acting FSIN Chief Kimberly Jonathan.

She says Wall is exploiting the deaths of two toddlers in a house fire on the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation, because the premier - when asked by reporters - said the incident "underscores the need for leadership".

"That any leader would exploit the deaths of innocent children and use a tragedy such as this to attack all First Nations leaders is inherently wrong and truly unfortunate," said Jonathan in press release that also categorized Wall's comments as a "paternalistic approach" that has not improved "our collective health, well-being or quality of life in the past century and a half".

Jonathan is expected to have more to say on the matter at press conference in Prince Albert today.

Given the absence of malice in Wall's remarks, he seemed taken aback. But, rightly, he didn't back down. Instead, he issued a written statement saying he would "never exploit" loss of life and called Jonathan's assertion "ridiculous."

The premier was being too kind. The first thing out of Wall's mouth to reporters was congratulations to Saskatoon Tribal Council Chief Felix Thomas for reviewing fire service. It might have been a backhanded compliment, but it's likely the kindest thing Wall could have said.

Yes, the Loon Lake fire department should have attended the fire. You don't ignore a neighbour in need in Saskatchewan and you surely don't put life at risk because of a squabble over a \$3,000 bill.

But Makwa Sahgaiehcan Chief Richard Ben should have paid the bill.

He should have ensured his reserve had a fire protection agreement with Loon Lake and he certainly should be more forthright about his signature on a document acknowledging that he knew there was no longer a fire protection agreement. Ben should account for the \$40,000 the reserve was given by the federal government for fire services.

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That money should have been used to pay fire protection bills and should have ensured the reserve's fire truck was working. And if the issue was maintenance or storage of the fire truck, for the \$102,155 Ben receives in salary and expenses, he should have attended to that, too.

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