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# Paul Martin says Idle No More needs more awareness

'Canadians would be 100 per cent behind them,' former prime minister says

CBC News Posted: Jan 16, 2013 12:02 PM ET | Last Updated: Jan 16, 2013 6:34 PM ET



Idle No More needs more awareness: Paul Martin 8:49

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Former prime minister Paul Martin said today on the Idle No More movement's national day of protest that he backs efforts to make Canadians more aware of the unique issues facing First Nations.

Martin, speaking in an interview with CBC News Network from West Palm Beach, Fla., also urged aboriginal leaders to better help Canadians understand what they're fighting for, saying "that the biggest most important thing right now is to get Canadians onside, and they will get onside if they are aware of the fact."

On Wednesday, First Nations chiefs and activists who are part of Idle No More have promised to stage a series of rallies and demonstrations across Canada to raise awareness about aboriginal issues.

Traffic disruptions are expected as demonstrators promise to march through the streets of a number of cities, while simultaneously blocking some major highways and railway lines.

The activities and rallies are linked to protests against the federal omnibus budget Bill C-45. Aboriginal interests claim the bill gives federal authorities more control over reserves and violates treaty rights.

"Canadians are fair people," Martin said in the interview. "If Canadians were aware of the terrible tragedies in terms [of] the underfunding of education and health care, there's no doubt in my mind that



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Canadians would be 100 per cent behind them."

Paul Martin, shown in May 2012 while receiving a Companion of the Order of Canada honour, said Wednesday that First Nations leaders need average Canadians to understand the lack of prosperity faced by aboriginal communities. (Adrian Wyld/Canadian Press)

## Martin urges both side to work together

Aboriginal leaders are upset over a lack of prosperity among First Nations communities, where they say many people live without adequate education, housing, health care or drinking water.

"The issues that they're talking about are the same issues we dealt with in Kelowna," Martin said. "Their education, their health care, their economic development, and those are, in fact, the fundamental issues that make any society healthy."

As prime minister, Martin helped negotiate the Kelowna Accord with First Nations people in 2006. The accord set aside \$5 billion to improve education, health-care, housing and economic development for First Nations communities.

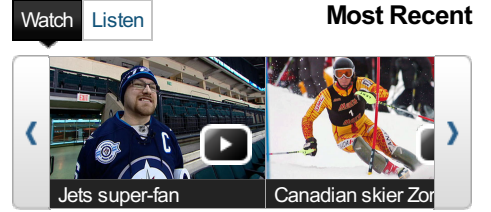
However, Martin's minority Liberal government fell to the Conservatives in the 2006 election, and while the Tories said they were committed to meeting the targets of the Kelowna Accord, only \$450 million were set aside for aboriginal issues in the Conservatives' first budget.

Martin said the government can't impose a solution on aboriginal leaders. Rather, both sides need to work together as partners to find a solution.

"I don't think that's too much to ask."

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