



Statement of Chief Gary Quisess, Neskantaga First Nation On the Occasion of the Visit of Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé on Sept 16 & 17, 2025

Neskantaga First Nation welcomed Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé and his staff to the community to see firsthand the realities faced by our people. Their visit included the old site at Lansdowne House, the water treatment plant, the school, the nursing station, the arena, the airport, and other critical infrastructure.

At Lansdowne House, Ombudsman Dubé saw the remains of the church and mission house, reminders of a time when our people lived in tents and shacks without running water or services, while institutions such as the mission and Hudson Bay Store were given basic amenities. The relocation to Neskantaga that followed was poorly planned and underfunded. Ontario, despite being a Treaty partner, did not contribute to the relocation, and the federal government imposed the Indian Act, which stripped away rights and forced our children into residential schools.

Today, the legacy of these policies is visible across our community. The graveyard tells the story of too many lives lost too young, often to suicide. The arena remains an empty shell without ice or programming because of lack of funding and Hydro One's outdated diesel system. The proposed Cultural and Youth Centre, identified in 2013 as a priority to empower and support our youth, has yet to be built more than a decade later.

Our school has not been upgraded in over 30 years. Students as young as 13 must leave their families and community to pursue secondary education in distant urban centres, too often with tragic results. Requests for portable classrooms to begin a Grade 9 program in Neskantaga have been ignored.

Our health care system is in crisis. The original nursing station, 37 years old, is boarded up. The temporary replacement—a converted duplex—has displaced families and cannot accommodate health professionals, programs, or modern telehealth technology. Despite repeated calls, no financial commitment has been made by Canada or Ontario to plan for future health services.

Other critical infrastructure sits unused or inadequate. A new Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service station cannot open because no telecommunications carrier will provide service. The airport cannot host larger fuel containers, forcing reliance on costly short-haul flights that lengthen travel and burden those with medical needs.

Neskantaga continues to live under a boil water advisory that has now lasted more than 30 years, the longest in Canada. Bottled water rations—1.5 litres per day for adults, 1 litre for children—are insufficient, while plastic waste fills our homes and landfill.

No other community in Ontario lives under these conditions. Yet governments are prepared to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure for the Ring of Fire and other resource projects. Where is the investment in the people and communities whose lands are being targeted for development?

This visit is a beginning, not an end. Ombudsman Dubé has now seen the reality on the ground in Neskantaga. We urge all levels of government to act so that our young people can thrive in dignity, safety, and hope.