

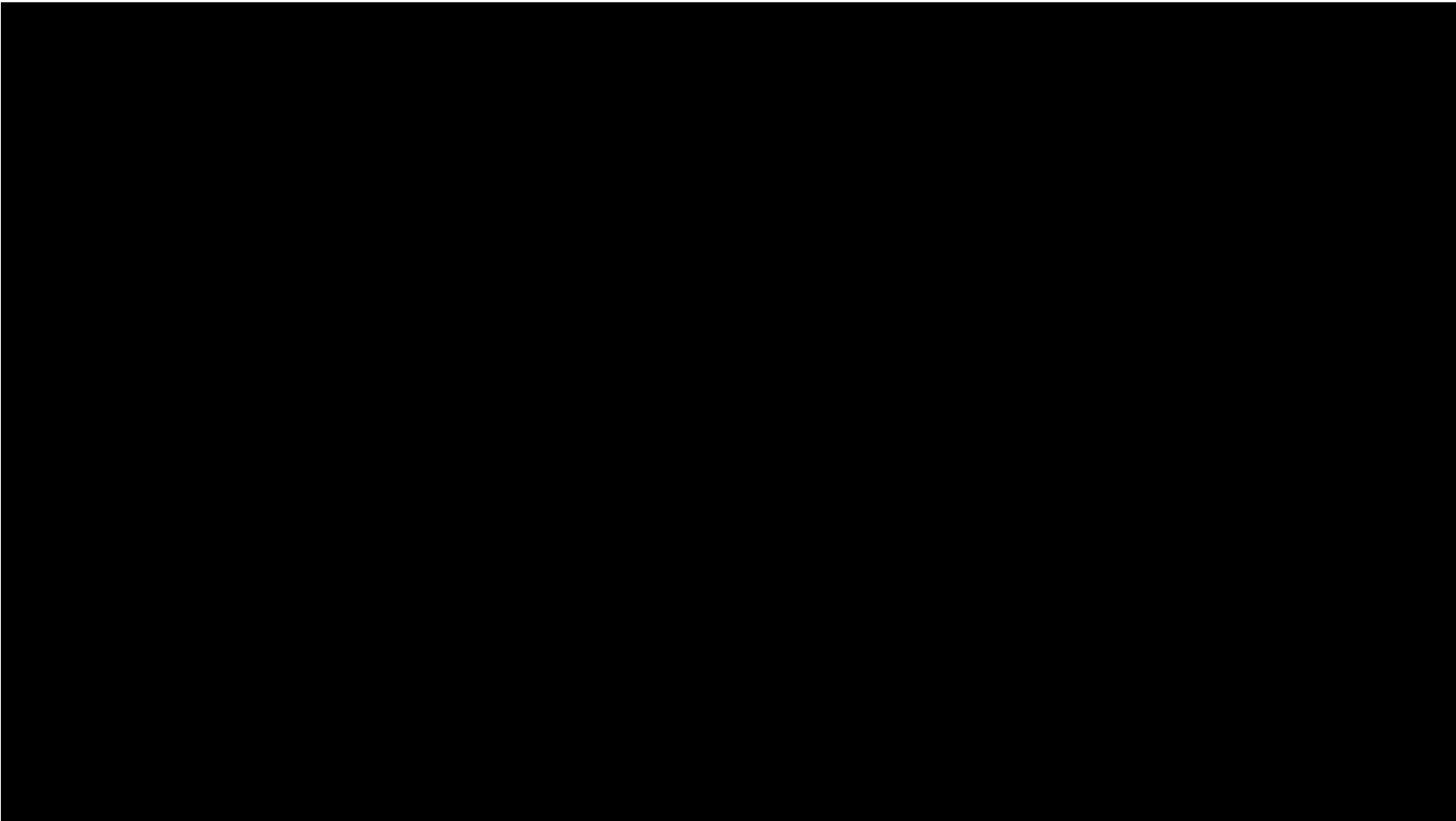
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Landback Lane organizer receives absolute discharge on all charges

By Jeff Pickel

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Almost 3 years after his arrest, the public face of the occupation will not be facing any charges. Jeff Pickel explains.

Nearly three years after a land dispute near Caledonia boiled over, leading to the arrest of several Indigenous demonstrators, one of the leaders of the occupation has received an absolute discharge on all charges.

Six Nations man, Skylar Williams, was facing multiple charges for his role in the 1492 Landback Lane movement.

Speaking to CTV News on Thursday, Williams said after hearing from experts about the historical context, the judge ruled his actions were not criminal.



Landback defender Skylar Williams is seen on July 13, 2023. (Jeff Pickel/CTV Kitchener)

“The system is so broken that we have, on one side, civil court judges that are listening to these million-dollar lawyers that these developers can get, then you’ve got criminal court judges that are saying ‘Of course they stood on the lands, that’s their lands,’” Williams said.

The charges against Williams date to the summer of 2020.

In late July, a group of Six Nations members set up camp at the site of a proposed housing development outside Caledonia, naming it 1492 Landback Lane.

Williams became the public face and voice of the movement.

“When our people say no to development this is what it looks like, it’s not an armed occupation its not a violent protest,” Williams told CTV News at the time.

On August 5, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) raided the site.

“Standing on this road reminds me of watching that line of 15 passenger vans, [police] coming out of the cars with great big guns,” Williams said Thursday.

“You know, you think you’re a big tough guy until you hear those rubber bullets go by your ears and you don’t know what it is, you don’t know that it’s a rubber bullet, it’s just bullets whizzing past you.”

Williams, a union iron worker and father of four, was one of several people arrested that day.

He faced charges of mischief, intimidation of an officer and two counts of failing to comply with conditions.



People camp out at a construction site at the centre of a land dispute in Caledonia, Ont., on Thursday, October 29, 2020. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Nathan Denette

Despite pleading guilty to several counts, the judge gave Williams an absolute discharge.

“We pleaded guilty to the ones that we didn’t think there was going to be a chance to fight,” he said. “We were looking for a conditional discharge and the judge decided to go above both of those and say that an absolute discharge was warranted.”

Williams said the occupation was the result of frustration over encroaching development and the inability of Six Nations to grow.

“Every other community across the country has had the ability to grow and thrive and expand ... that’s what this is about, is having a place where our community has an opportunity to grow,” he said. “Six Nations has never grown – ever.”

Williams said his people intend to continue to stay on the land they call home.

“We don’t live like our western brothers and sisters, we don’t cover everything in concrete, and asphalt and call that progress, that’s not what that looks like for us.”

Free from criminal charges, Williams is looking for a brighter future.

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