

HAMILTON REGION

Six Nations, Caledonia residents push Ottawa for action on land dispute

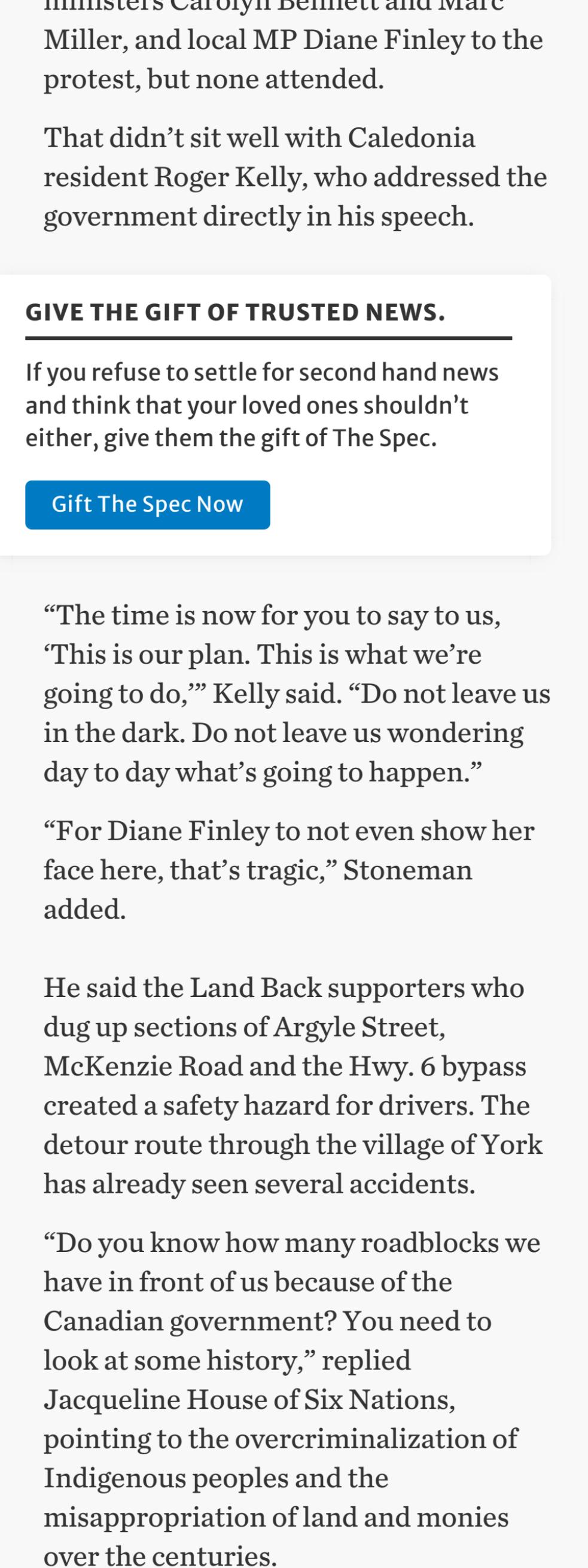
By [J.P. Antonacci](#) Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

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While some Caledonia residents are focused on getting the town's blockaded roads reopened, others are pushing the federal government to commit to a road map that will end the centuries-long land dispute with Six Nations that flared up again this year.

"I'm here for public safety," longtime Caledonian Bill Stoneman said Saturday at a protest held near the Argyle Street barricade, which has been up since Oct. 22 while the McKenzie Meadows construction site remains occupied by Six Nations land defenders.



Skyler Williams, left, embraces Roger Kelly, right, a Caledonia resident at the government barricade on Argyle Street during a rally Saturday. JOHN RENNISON

"I'm looking for resolution, and the first step to resolution is opening the roads," Stoneman said.

"Tell the government to open the talks. That's all you've got to do," replied Ga'nogae, a Seneca chief from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council. "That'll get a lot of things to open."

The chief was referring to restarting land-claim negotiations between the federal government and Six Nations leadership over the territory near the reserve, part of the Haldimand Tract along the Grand River.

Ga'nogae told the crowd of about 40 people that the developers are "squatting" on Haudenosaunee land, dismissing the argument that the land was surrendered in the mid-19th century and Foxgate Developments has the right to build a planned subdivision there.

"When I went to the archives, there was no found surrender," Ga'nogae said of a research trip he made to the National Archives in Ottawa in search of any historical documentation that the McKenzie lands were ceded by the Confederacy chiefs, as the province contends.

"I drove a long way for something I knew I wasn't going to see," the chief said.

The costs are accumulating: Caledonia's McKenzie Meadows developer, contractors take financial hit amid construction delays

Organizers say they invited Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, federal ministers Carolyn Bennett and Marc Miller, and local MP Diane Finley to the protest, but none attended.

That didn't sit well with Caledonia resident Roger Kelly, who addressed the government directly in his speech.

"We're here to call on the federal government to show some good faith," said co-organizer Mike Henderson.

"The government does not live here. People do. And we are fed up."

Local realtor Kim Smiley Wiley said the dispute is hurting businesses in Caledonia and Six Nations alike, adding that residents want to return to their normal lives.

"I think that both communities, Six Nations and Caledonia, are stuck in the middle of something here," agreed Skyler Williams, spokesperson for the land defenders occupying McKenzie Meadows, which they renamed 1492 Land Back Lane back in July.

"I know for me anyways, I did not want to spend all of my summer and now all of my fall in the middle of a desert over there."

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That didn't sit well with Caledonia resident Roger Kelly, who addressed the government directly in his speech.

"If there wasn't injustice, this wouldn't be happening," she said. "Our government would have said, 'No, you guys are wrong, here's all the proof. Go away, you're done.' But obviously, there's a lot of injustice."

"Do you know how many roadblocks we have in front of us because of the Canadian government? You need to look at some history," replied Jacqueline House of Six Nations, pointing to the overcriminalization of Indigenous peoples and the misappropriation of land and monies over the centuries.

She said peaceful demonstrations over Indigenous land rights have been met with state violence.

"How many times has the OPP attacked our people?" House said. "You don't like these people? Block us, say more than you like. They're an inconvenience to us, too. But what do we have to defend ourselves?"

Stoneman told House he has "compassion for this situation," but said the land defenders have picked the wrong place to make their case to the federal government.

"Do your protesting in front of the Parliament buildings, then leave us alone."

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"The time is now for you to say to us, 'This is our plan. This is what we're going to do,'" Kelly said. "Do not leave us in the dark. Do not leave us wondering day to day what's going to happen."

"For Diane Finley to even show her face here, that's tragic," Stoneman added.

He said the Land Back supporters who dug up sections of Argyle Street, McKenzie Road and the Hwy. 6 bypass created a safety hazard for drivers. The detour route through the village of York has already seen several accidents.

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