

SENATOR SOLOMON (SOL) SANDERSON

Cree Nation Leader · *Constitutional Architect* · *Sovereign Rights Champion*
Chakastaypasin Band · James Smith Cree Nation · Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatchewan

PERSONAL PROFILE

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| Born | October 18, 1941 — James Smith First Nation, Saskatchewan |
| Nation | Chakastaypasin Band, Cree Nation (James Smith First Nation) |
| Treaty | Treaty 6 Territory |
| Career Span | 65+ years in First Nations politics (began age 15, c. 1956) |
| Languages | Cree, English |
| Status | Senator, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) |

“We are at the stage in our developments where it is vital to our interests and survival to maintain authority by bands. They are, after all, the legal parties to the Treaties.”

— *Senator Solomon Sanderson, FSIN Convention, April 16, 1982*

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Senator Solomon Sanderson is one of the most consequential Indigenous leaders in Canadian history. Beginning his political life at age 15 — at a time when it was still illegal under federal law for Indigenous people to assemble — he has spent more than six decades building the constitutional, legal, educational, economic, and governance foundations of First Nations sovereignty in Canada and on the world stage.

As Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) from 1979 to 1986, Sanderson orchestrated the political and legal campaign that secured Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 — the first and only constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights in Canadian history. His London lobby of the British Parliament proved decisive. He then served as the senior First Nations spokesperson at all four First Ministers’ Conferences on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters (1983–1987), pressing for the full entrenchment of Indigenous self-government.

In 1982 he chaired the inaugural World Assembly of First Nations, convening delegates from 33 countries on the global stage of Indigenous self-determination. In education, he established the first First Nation-controlled school in Canada (James Smith, 1973), co-authored the landmark “Indian Control of Indian Education” policy (1972), and was the driving force behind the creation of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations University of Canada), the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

His comprehensive governance framework — spanning inherent sovereignty, treaty law, judicial systems, fiscal relations, economic development, and the full portability of First Nations rights — continues to guide First Nations communities, governments, and scholars across Canada and internationally.

LEADERSHIP & POLITICAL POSITIONS

Chief — Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) • 1979 – 1986

Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (now Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations)

- Elected Chief on October 16, 1979 at the Annual All Chiefs Conference, Saskatoon, succeeding acting leadership following the passing of Chief Albert Bellegarde.
- Led the FSIN through its most transformative era, dramatically escalating First Nations political assertiveness in asserting treaty and inherent rights provincially, nationally, and internationally.
- Orchestrated the constitutional lobby — including a landmark campaign in London, England — that resulted in the entrenchment of Aboriginal and treaty rights in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.
- Senior First Nations spokesperson at all four First Ministers' Conferences on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters (1983, 1984, 1985, 1987), representing First Nations interests at the highest levels of Canadian governance.
- Founding leader of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), established when the National Indian Brotherhood was reconstituted in 1982.
- Oversaw the signing of the Declaration of First Nations and the Agency/District and Provincial Conventions of the FSIN on April 16, 1982.
- Exposed major land frauds resulting in significant settlements for affected First Nations communities across Saskatchewan.
- Instrumental in establishing the framework for the Treaty Land Entitlement process in Saskatchewan, culminating in the 1993 agreement (\$440 million).

Chief — James Smith First Nation (Chakastaypasin Band) • Three Terms (prior to 1979)

James Smith First Nation, Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatchewan

- Served three consecutive terms as Chief of his home community.
- At age 31 (1972), passed the community's own Finance Administration Act and personally drafted the first government-to-government fiscal agreement between James Smith Cree Nation and the federal government — successfully defended against federal lawyers and signed on the spot.
- Under that fiscal agreement, accessed funding from Canada Manpower programs, growing the band from 2 employees to 165 employees in six weeks.
- Established the first First Nation-controlled school in Canada at James Smith in 1973, setting a national precedent for community-based Indigenous education.
- Introduced a Teacher Education degree program and Social Work degree program directly within the community school — a mother and daughter graduated together in social work in 1972.
- Resisted INAC's punitive funding cuts (three times in one year) for daring to implement Indian control of education and community-based governance.

Senator — Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) • 1986 – Present

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Saskatchewan

- Continues to serve as a senior senator of the FSIN, providing institutional memory and strategic guidance on sovereignty, treaty rights, governance, and self-determination.
- Has testified before the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples (Parliament of Canada) on nation-to-nation, government-to-government treaty relations.
- Consistently advocates for First Nations governance rooted in inherent sovereignty, operating under First Nations laws and jurisdiction — not delegated authority under the Indian Act.
- Has met with the Privy Council of Canada to present a comprehensive budgeting strategy demonstrating that Parliament holds 100% of the funding required to properly finance First Nations governments and communities.

Note: Both Senator Solomon Sanderson and his late wife Carole Sanderson were offered appointments to the Senate of Canada. Both declined — a principled decision grounded in First Nations sovereignty and accountability to their people.

CONSTITUTIONAL & LEGAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Section 35 — Constitution Act, 1982

- Chief architect of the First Nations constitutional lobby that secured Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights for the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.
- Led the FSIN delegation to London, England to lobby British Members of Parliament and the House of Lords against patriation of Canada's Constitution without First Nations consent or constitutional protections — a campaign widely credited as decisive.
- Coordinated 28 hours of evidence presented to Parliamentary Committee Hearings in Saskatoon, mobilizing chiefs, elders, veterans, women, and community members to speak to their treaty rights.
- Established the foundational legal-political argument that First Nations are sovereign nations with pre-existing inherent rights — not a disadvantaged minority — permanently reshaping the terms of Canadian constitutional discourse.

First Ministers' Conferences on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters (1983–1987)

- Senior First Nations spokesperson at all four conferences mandated under Section 37 of the Constitution Act, 1982 to define and expand Aboriginal constitutional rights.
- Pressed at every conference for constitutional entrenchment of Indigenous self-government and formal recognition of Indian Governments as a distinct, sovereign order of governance in Canada.
- Helped achieve the 1983 Constitutional Accord on Aboriginal Rights, which expanded the definition of treaty rights to include land claim agreements.

Treaty Law & International Status

- Worked with Cree elders and chiefs to bring Treaty 6 before the United Nations, which declared Treaty 6 an international treaty under international treaty law — establishing that all numbered treaties (1–11) carry international treaty status.
- The UN also examined the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (NRTA) of 1930 and declared it invalid and illegal, as Parliament and the Crown did not obtain consent from the Indian Nations party to the international treaties.
- Has consistently argued that treaty provisions (including agricultural, education, health, and economic provisions) are treaty annuities — not claims — and therefore cannot be extinguished through specific claims processes.
- Warned First Nations leaders against signing “cows and plows” (agricultural) settlement agreements that contain release clauses, which would terminate their own treaty rights under agricultural provisions of treaty.

- Articulated the principle that Nations make treaties — treaties do not make Nations — establishing the primacy of inherent sovereignty over and above treaty-making itself.

WORLD ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS & INTERNATIONAL WORK

Chair — World Assembly of First Nations • 1982

International Forum on Indigenous Self-Determination and Sovereignty

- Chaired the inaugural World Assembly of First Nations, convening representatives from 33 countries to collectively address Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty on the global stage.
- The Assembly provided an international platform for First Nations to advance their case for sovereignty and rights recognition beyond Canadian borders, amplifying domestic constitutional efforts at a critical moment.
- Represented First Nations at the United Nations in both New York and Geneva, engaging with international human rights mechanisms on Indigenous peoples' rights.
- Contributed to the long arc of international advocacy that led to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007.
- Engaged international religious and political leaders on the 1493 Papal Bull and the Doctrine of Discovery, arguing that the Papal Bull must be formally terminated — not merely denounced — before the Doctrine of Discovery can be effectively ended.
- Commissioned by the Navajo Nation and Six Nations elders' conferences to develop a framework for the protection of Indigenous intellectual property — establishing the principle that Indigenous knowledge belongs collectively to all peoples and cannot be privately owned or monetized by institutions.
- Engaged the Organization of American States (OAS) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a complementary international framework alongside UNDRIP.

EDUCATION POLICY & INSTITUTION BUILDING

Policy Victories

- 1969: Organized First Nations leadership in Saskatchewan to resist and defeat the Trudeau government's White Paper Policy, which sought to assimilate all First Nations peoples, abolish treaty rights, and terminate the special status of Indians.
- 1972: Co-authored "Indian Control of Indian Education," jointly endorsed by the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the National Indian Brotherhood — the foundational document of Indigenous educational self-determination in Canada. At the time, only six Indigenous teachers were employed across all of Saskatchewan.
- 1973: Established the first First Nation-controlled school in Canada at James Smith First Nation, introducing community-based teacher education and social work degree programs on-site.
- Documented the transformation from 6 Indigenous people employed in Saskatchewan education in 1972 to over 15,000 by the time of his teachers' address — a direct result of the Indian Control policy.

Post-Secondary Institutions Founded or Advanced

- Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (SICC) — established to preserve and promote First Nations languages, arts, and cultural knowledge.
- Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) — a First Nations-governed polytechnic institution; now used as a governance model by Indigenous peoples worldwide.

- Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), now First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv) — federated with the University of Regina; internationally recognized as the leading model of Indigenous university education grounded in First Nations knowledge systems.
- Pioneered the concept of Multiversity campuses embedded directly in community schools, providing trade, skills, and professional development certified under First Nations jurisdiction and laws.

THE SANDERSON GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Over six decades, Senator Sanderson developed a comprehensive, interlocking framework for the full implementation of First Nations sovereignty. The framework covers seven interconnected domains:

1. Inherent Rights & Sovereignty

- Inherent rights are granted by the Creator to Nations and peoples — they come from no other source, not even from treaties. They pre-exist, persist through, and survive after treaty-making.
- Inherent rights include: sovereignty of Nations; national powers of self-determination and governing; national powers of treaty-making; rights by sector (health, education, social development, child care, economics, justice, shelter, hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering); and inherent title to lands, resources, water, and jurisdiction for airspace.
- First Nations must formally list, define (in their own languages, based on their own worldview), and identify duties and responsibilities for each inherent right — not leave that definition to federal, provincial, or international governments.

2. Treaties & Treaty Rights

- Treaties 1–11 are international treaties — confirmed by the UN — not domestic agreements. Both parties are required to give them legal effect under their own jurisdiction and laws.
- The FSIN is a Federation of Nations — those Nations made international treaties with the Crown in right of England and Ireland. It is Nations that make treaties; treaties do not make Nations.
- Treaty rights by sector must be implemented through First Nations laws, not surrendered through specific claims processes designed to extinguish them.
- The portability of sovereignty, inherent rights, and treaty rights — confirmed by Section 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982 and by UNDRIP — means there can be no on-reserve/off-reserve distinction in the recognition of rights and benefits.

3. Laws & Jurisdiction

- First Nations must occupy the field with their own laws in every sector — not wait for federal or provincial authorization. The Crown has no jurisdiction to accept or reject laws made under First Nations inherent legal systems.
- First Nations laws, once made under the inherent legal system and ratified by membership, have legal effect for implementation and enforcement across traditional and treaty territories — not only on reserves.
- The FSIN Convention and Convention Act — a political agreement ratified by member bands — provides the governing authority for all bodies of the Federation of Nations and must be implemented, not replaced by FSIN Inc. under provincial corporate law.

4. Judicial Relations

- First Nations require their own traditional-contemporary justice systems, including tribunals, courts, and a Tribal Police Force with national powers equivalent to the RCMP — applying First Nations jurisdiction and laws across traditional territory, not only on reserves.

- The inherent legal system does not stop at the boundary of a reserve. It is a national power of governing that applies throughout traditional and treaty territories.

5. Economic Relations

- First Nations must implement their own economy — not indigenous partnerships under Canadian law. Requires: a Trade and Commerce Act; a Land Titles Act; a Resource Act; and corporate laws certifying First Nations corporations at every level.
- First Nations are entitled to assess a First Nations fee on all resource development throughout treaty and traditional territories — not limited to reserves, and not dependent on provincial royalty frameworks.
- First Nations have the right to international trade and commerce; to issue their own passports; and to establish their own data and information systems.
- Gaming is an inherent right, confirmed by treaty. White Bear's Bearclaw Casino (1990s) demonstrated that First Nations can import gaming equipment under their own Trade and Commerce Act and trade agreements with US tribal governments — successfully defended at Customs Canada before being raided by the RCMP without jurisdiction.

6. Fiscal Relations

- Move from contribution agreements to government-to-government fiscal agreements with direct transfers from the federal government to First Nations governments, institutions, and individuals — bypassing provinces.
- Parliament currently holds 100% of the funding required to maintain the standard of living and finance the governing systems of First Nations. Only 17% of that money currently reaches First Nations nationally.
- First Nations are entitled to access the same federal transfer streams provinces receive: social transfer, health transfer, post-secondary transfer, and income security.
- Every First Nation requires its own Finance Administration Act, its own auditor general, and its own budgeting, accounting, and auditing systems under its own jurisdiction and laws.

7. Colonial Genocide Policies — The Code of Silence

- 500 years of colonial policy continue to be implemented today — not only by federal and provincial governments but by First Nations governments and organizations themselves, operating under colonial frameworks without awareness.
- The chain: 1493 Papal Bull → Law of Dominance → 1830 Detribalization Policies → 1947 Plan to Liquidate Canada's Indian Problem → 1969 White Paper → 1974–76 Native Policy → 1980 Buffalo Jump → Bill C-31 (creating two tiers of Indians — one with rights, one without).
- These are the Codes of Silence: the things not debated, not taught, and not acted upon — but which determine the trajectory of First Nations sovereignty.

LEGACY & IMPACT

Impact on Canada

- Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 stands as Sanderson's most enduring contribution. Without the FSIN's mobilization and London lobby under his leadership, Section 35 may not have survived the patriation process. Every subsequent First Nations land claim settlement, self-government agreement, and Supreme Court victory — from Sparrow (1990) to Haida Nation (2004) — rests on this foundation.
- The 1993 Treaty Land Entitlement Framework Agreement (\$440 million) in Saskatchewan directly reflects the political and legal groundwork laid during his tenure as FSIN Chief.

- The 1995 Saskatchewan gaming agreement created an economic foundation for First Nations communities through the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA), distributing revenues directly to bands and urban centres.
- His concept of treaty relations as nation-to-nation and government-to-government has become the central framework for all Crown-First Nations negotiations in Canada — adopted by the federal government and endorsed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- His Finance Administration Act model (James Smith, 1972) and government-to-government fiscal agreement template have been cited as models for First Nations financial governance across the country.

Impact on Indian Country & the World

- As Chair of the 1982 World Assembly of First Nations — 33 countries — Sanderson helped create a unified international Indigenous political voice at the pivotal moment when Canada's Constitution was being repatriated and UNDRIP was still 25 years away.
- His representation at the UN in New York and Geneva, and the successful international treaty status confirmation of Treaty 6, established legal and political precedents that strengthened the foundation for UNDRIP (2007).
- The educational and governance institutions he built — First Nations University of Canada, SIIT, SICC — are now studied and replicated by Indigenous communities in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and across the Americas.
- His intellectual property framework, developed at the request of the Navajo Nation and Six Nations elders, established a collective, non-proprietary model for the protection of Indigenous knowledge that challenges the commodification of traditional knowledge by universities and corporations worldwide.
- His articulation of First Nations inherent sovereignty as portable, pre-existing, Creator-granted, and not contingent on the Indian Act continues to be the philosophical foundation upon which the next generation of Indigenous leaders, lawyers, educators, and community members builds.
- His call to the Seventh Generation — made directly to teachers, students, and young leaders across Canada — carries the conviction that the constitutional, legal, and institutional foundations have now been laid and it is the responsibility of today's generation to implement them fully.

HONOURS & RECOGNITION

- Honorary Doctorate, First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv), 2026 — Senator Sanderson's first honorary doctorate, awarded by the institution he helped found, in recognition of extraordinary contributions to Indigenous education and his lifelong dedication to the advancement of First Nations rights and sovereignty.
- Recognition by the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC), representing over 44,000 people across 12 First Nations in Treaty 5, 6, 8 & 10 territories, for pioneering contributions to education and governance.
- Entry in the Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan (University of Saskatchewan / University of Regina Press) recognizing his foundational role in First Nations constitutional history.
- Recognized by legal scholars, constitutional historians, and Indigenous leaders across Canada as one of the most significant First Nations political strategists of the twentieth century.

Traditional Names Bestowed by Elders

Senator Sanderson has been honoured by Elders across multiple Nations with traditional names, reflecting his spiritual standing, his role as a leader and protector, and his identity within the communities that have claimed him as their own:

South Thunderbird Walking • Old White Bear • Brave Spotted Eagle

These names were given through traditional ceremonies. Full documentation of each name, the Elder who bestowed it, the Nation, and the ceremony will be recorded separately.

Traditional Adoptions Across First Nations

Senator Sanderson has been extraordinarily fortunate to be adopted through traditional ceremonies into many First Nations communities across Canada and internationally. These adoptions reflect the depth of respect and kinship he has built across Indigenous peoples over six decades of service. Nations into which he has been traditionally adopted include:

Dene Nations • Navajo Nation • Salish Nations • Mohawk / Six Nations • Mi'kmaq • and others

These adoptions reflect enduring kinship obligations and relationships of mutual responsibility between Senator Sanderson and the communities that have claimed him as family. They speak to the breadth of trust he has earned across nations, languages, and regions throughout his lifetime of work.

SELECTED SOURCES & PRIMARY MATERIALS

Primary — Transcripts & Speeches

- Sanderson, Sol. Video interview series, Sessions 1–12 (transcribed). Covering inherent rights, treaty law, governance framework, judicial relations, economic relations, fiscal relations, gaming, Code of Silence, colonial genocide policies. c. 2024.
- Sanderson, Sol. Speech to Indigenous Teachers and Education Students, Saskatoon. c. 2018. (Transcribed.)

Government & Archival

- Canada. Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples (42nd Parliament, 1st Session). Testimony of Sol Sanderson, Senator, FSIN. Ottawa: Senate of Canada.
- Library and Archives Canada. Saskatchewan Indian (newspaper), October 1979. FSIN election of Sol Sanderson as Chief.
- Canada. First Ministers' Conference on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters — Constitutional Accord on Aboriginal Rights, March 15–16, 1983. Ottawa.
- Constitution Act, 1982, s. 35. Aboriginal and Treaty Rights. Ottawa: Department of Justice.

Academic

- Sanderson, Sol. Entry in Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan. University of Saskatchewan / University of Regina Press.
- Cassidy, Frank (ed.). Aboriginal Self-Determination. Oolichan Books / Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1991.
- Asch, Michael. Home and Native Land: Aboriginal Rights and the Canadian Constitution. Methuen, 1984.

Media

- CBC News. "They've Lost Their Vision: Some First Nations Leaders Pan FSIN." Jason Warick, October 21, 2018.
- Global News. "Indigenous Leader Calls for New Reconciliation Agreement with the Monarchy." September 11, 2022.
- Prince Albert Grand Council / NationTalk. "Senator Sol Sanderson Honoured by First Nations University of Canada." June 2024.
- Treaty Walks Blog. "FSIN Senator Sol Sanderson on Structuring Our Organizations." October 2012.

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