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## Patrick Brazeau is on the long road to redemption

The 43-year-old Independent Quebec **Senator** knows he's been given a second chance and says he's going to try to do the right thing over the next 32 years in the **Senate**. But one Indigenous source said it will 'take years and years of quiet, dedicated hard work at the grassroots level' for Sen. **Patrick Brazeau** to redeem himself with First Nations.

Kate Malloy

**Patrick Brazeau** wants to redeem himself, and he has 32 years left in the **Senate** to do it.

After facing a charge of sexual assault, angering First Nations leaders, getting permanently kicked out of the Conservative caucus, facing charges of breach of trust and fraud, getting suspended from the **Senate** for nearly three years over his Upper Chamber expenses, and attempting suicide, the 43-year-old Independent Quebec **Senator** said he is trying to clean up both his personal and professional life and wants to be a better **federal** legislator.

He's been given a second chance in life and he knows it.

"On the personal side, there are some things I regret but, having said that, it's done now and I'm lucky to be alive," he said.

The former head of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, who was appointed to the **Senate** by **prime minister Stephen Harper** in 2009, arrived in the Upper Chamber under a cloud of controversy. Once he was sworn in by **governor general David Johnston**, there were subsequent media reports that he was facing a sexual harassment complaint from a former female staffer at the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, that he condoned heavy drinking during office hours, and that he was wanted to keep his job at the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, a six-figure public **salary**. He resigned as chief of the CAP and acknowledged the conflict, but dismissed the other allegations as "100 per cent false."

An Algonquin from the Kitigan Zibi reserve near Maniwaki, Que., Sen. Brazeau was an outspoken advocate for tighter control of Indigenous funding, which angered chiefs on reserves, and he was critical of the Idle No More movement. He was seen as **prime minister** Harper's "attack dog" in the **Senate** on some Indigenous issues until he was kicked out of the Conservative caucus in 2013.

His personal problems nearly destroyed his life.

Sen. Brazeau's expulsion from the **federal** Conservative caucus came after he was arrested for domestic and sexual assault. He said he learned he was kicked out while sitting in a jail cell in Gatineau. He was suspended with pay from the **Senate** on Nov. 5, 2013, over his **Senate** expenses. He pled guilty to simple assault and cocaine possession on Sept. 15, 2015, as part of a plea deal, and his other assault charges were dropped. He was later acquitted of sexual assault. On Oct. 28, 2015, he was granted an absolute discharge and will not have a criminal record.

When he was suspended from the **Senate** over his Upper Chamber expenses, he worked for two months as a day manager at Barefax, an **Ottawa** strip club. On Jan. 18, 2016, he was found seriously injured in his home after a suicide attempt and was hospitalized in critical, but stable condition. He was put into a medically induced coma for two days. While he was suspended from the **Senate**, his **salary** was clawed back by an estimated \$50,000 in disallowed housing expense claims, but the Crown later withdrew the charges of fraud and breach of trust on his expense claims and he returned to the **Senate** on July 13, 2016. He can sit in the **Senate** until he's 75 years old, which will be Nov. 11, 2049.

He described those three years during his **Senate** suspension as a living "hell," and said his father, Marcel Brazeau, got him through it, along with his five children-aged 23, 17, 11, eight, and two-who inspire him to get up every morning.

Asked after the interview with The Hill Times if he still drinks or does drugs, his office said he "enjoys the occasional drink."

He has no real friends on the Hill, except for his staffers, including Debby Simms, and Independent **Senator Mike Duffy** who

was also temporarily suspended from the **Senate**.

"You find out how many friends you really have, and that's not even a handful. There's a lot of hypocrisy and a lot of people who essentially stabbed me in the back because, before the suspension, I had met with my former colleagues and was led to believe by some of them, without naming names, that I had nothing to worry about and I felt quite comfortable, but when the vote came for the actual suspension, those same people who I had spoken to prior to that vote were the first ones to stand up to suspend me," he said in an interview in his Victoria Building with The Hill Times in the fall. "I quickly saw how this place works, which is unfortunate, but let's just say I'm not going to make the same mistake twice."

[caption id="attachment\_129869" align="alignleft" width="800"] Sen. **Patrick Brazeau** pictured with **prime minister Stephen Harper** who officially apologized to Indigenous people on June 11, 2008, for the **Indian residential schools** system which AFN national chief Perry Bellegarde has called 'a genocide.' The Hill Times file photograph [/caption]

Now that he's no longer on the attack, Sen. Brazeau said he's chosen the "informative side."

"I have the perfect opportunity being an Independent **Senator** and I'm not going to be whipped on how to vote on anything. So now I can take the time to properly read pieces of **legislation** and make up my own mind and my own views and vote accordingly, for the benefit of First Nations people and on other bills as well," he said.

Sen. Brazeau said he wants to correct mistakes he made with First Nations leaders who he angered when he was part of **prime minister** Harper's Conservative caucus. He said he was too partisan and relied too heavily on talking points, which didn't necessarily reflect his own personal beliefs then or now.

"I'm cognizant that I have a second chance here, but I'm going to take my time because one of the problems that I did have was that I was an impatient person. I wanted things done yesterday and obviously in **Parliament** things don't happen that way, and now I have time before me and I'm going to take advantage of it and try to do the best job I can," Sen. Brazeau said. "Now I have the opportunity to do the right thing."

But one Indigenous source, who did not want to be named in order to be candid, said he's not sure Sen. Brazeau will ever be able to redeem himself with First Nations leaders.

"**Patrick Brazeau** has worked to undermine and denigrate First Nations leadership as corrupt, incompetent, undemocratic, or all of the above," said the source. "He was an active and vocal champion for the Harper agenda, which is fair to say was not an agenda seen as positive or progressive by the vast majority of First Nations citizens, not just the leadership. He supported **legislation** that was colonial, and, in areas like drinking water and matrimonial real property, would be ineffective. It was clearly convenient for the Harper government to have a supposed First Nations puppet to parrot their agenda, and, having played this part, he was awarded a **Senate** appointment."

[caption id="attachment\_129870" align="alignleft" width="800"] **Liberal MP Justin Trudeau** and Sen. **Patrick Brazeau**, pictured March 31, 2012, at a charity boxing match in **Ottawa** which Mr. **Trudeau** won. Some observers have said the boxing match helped Mr. **Trudeau** win his party's leadership. The Hill Times file photograph [/caption]

Declared the source: "As a **Senator**, he continued his appointed role as an attack dog against First Nations and an advocate for the Harper agenda. He did not support a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, was dismissive of Idle No More, and all the thousands of Indigenous men, women, and children who took part in marches, and publicly questioned Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike, noting that when he got the flu he lost 10 pounds."

Sen. Brazeau only turned his back on the Harper agenda once he was kicked out of the caucus, said the source.

"He is proven amoral, opportunistic, and Indigenous people will not forget this anytime soon," said the source. "What would he have to do try and redeem himself and regain trust of Indigenous people? I don't know that it's even possible. Women went missing and murdered while he was pushing the Harper agenda. Children were apprehended by agencies and taken from their families while he was advocating against chiefs and leaders. I don't know if it's possible, but it would take years and years of quiet, dedicated hard work at the grassroots level, in **communities**, and on the streets, with the very people he sold out for a sinecure."

Others on the Hill, however, are willing to give Sen. Brazeau a second chance.

[caption id="attachment\_129871" align="alignleft" width="800"] Sen. **Patrick Brazeau**, pictured on **Parliament Hill** at the height of the **Senate** expenses scandal. The Hill Times file photograph[/caption]

**Liberal Senator Lillian Dyck** said after watching Sen. Brazeau's work in the **Senate** on Bill S-3, which removes gender-based

barriers to status registration in the Indian Act, she sees that he's genuinely trying to make a positive and powerful difference for First Nations.

"He made some very personal and heartfelt remarks about the bill. If you listen to what he actually said, you could hear the emotion in his voice and, to me, it indicates that he's probably on some of kind of healing journey because when we do that sort of thing, then it becomes much more real in your work," said Sen. Dyck. "I don't recall in the past hearing him speak that way. To me that was a good sign."

Nunavut Conservative **Senator Dennis Patterson** echoed that sentiment. He said Sen. Brazeau has "been very active" since he returned to the Hill and played an active role in the **Senate** Aboriginal Peoples **Committee** even before he was made a full member of the **committee** recently.

"I would think that by actively participating in the challenges that are facing aboriginal peoples in **Canada** and the efforts to reconcile with them, which is the very subject our **committee** is studying, I think playing a constructive role, would be a very good opportunity for him," said Sen. Patterson.

Sen. Brazeau is now a member of the **Senate's** National Security and **Defence Committee**, the Aboriginal Peoples **Committee**, and the **Human Rights Committee**.

Sen. Brazeau has also publicly challenged **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** (Papineau, Que.), who beat Sen. Brazeau in a celebrity boxing match in 2012, to live up to his "narrative" on reconciliation and to start delivering on Indigenous issues. He has spoken with the **PMO** about Bill S-3.

Sen. Brazeau said he is still concerned about the bill's lack of a fixed end-date for the consultations and full implementation and last month he tried to **amend** the **legislation** by calling for the consultations to be done before the 2019 election. He said Indigenous women are still denied their rights "due to the imposed colonialist sexism of the Indian Act," including his youngest daughter.

"As we look back on the decisions made by those who created the Indian Act, surely most **Canadians** can agree that the party with power-the government-imposed a destructive, colonialist policy upon Indigenous women. We can see this clearly when we look far backwards in time, but can we see it when we are enacting the same dysfunctional patterns today," he said in the **Senate** last month.

"So, like I said, **Trudeau** has the opportunity to right those wrongs."

Meanwhile, he's still considering filing a lawsuit over being suspended from the **Senate**, but wants to do what's right for his **health** and for his family. His primary residence is in Maniwaki, Que., and he rents a second residence in the National Capital Region, which came under scrutiny after the RCMP alleged it was actually his primary home.

"Professionally, I don't regret anything because, with respect to the whole quote, unquote, '**Senate** scandal,' I had asked permission prior to submitting claims if I was able to do so and I was told in black and white that I could," Sen. Brazeau said. "I've always maintained that I did nothing wrong. Obviously the charges were dropped, but my reputation was tarnished, but having said that, I haven't closed the door on anything, but no final decision has been made as of yet."

Sen. Duffy launched a lawsuit in August against the **Senate** and the **federal** government, seeking \$6.5-million in general damages, \$300,000 for loss of income and benefits and \$1-million in punitive damages after an Ontario judge dismissed all 31 criminal charges related to Sen. Duffy's **Senate** expenses in April 2016.

"Hopefully in the future, regardless what it looks like, or how it unfolds, I will have those answers and so will **Canadians**, because it's just unjust, and people can claim they have **parliamentary privilege** and they're the masters of their own House, but the Charter of Rights and Freedoms still applies and should apply to **Parliamentarians**. We're also **Canadian** citizens, so hopefully that will be dealt with in the near future so that it never happens again unjustly for anybody," he said.-With files from Abbas Rana

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