

<e-notes> from [fourarrows@rogers.com](mailto:fourarrows@rogers.com) 21 June 2013 Edition



## ***Valcourt Chastises Atleo for Being Ungrateful; 50% of First Nation Children Live in Poverty***



**Anishinaabe Agowidiwinan  
(Treaty 2) August 21, 1871**

Dauphin River First Nation • Elk & Bow First Nation • Kaministiquia First Nation  
Lake Manitoba First Nation • Lake St. Martin First Nation • Little Saskatchewan First Nation  
Ojib-Chipewyan First Nation • Pemmican First Nation • Assiniboia First Nation



**A Four Arrows Summary of What's Happening  
prepared for Treaty 2 and Treaty 8 Alberta First Nations for sharing**

***Atleo: 'There's Been No Real Change';  
Valcourt: 'You're Out of Touch with Reality'***

*With special thanks to Tim Harper,  
National Affairs, The Toronto Star  
and CBC News whose articles are combined here*

Ottawa, 15 June 2013 – And it all happened on Father's Day Weekend.

It was on national TV. There's been "no real change" in the federal government's approach to First Nations issues, said Shawn Atleo, national chief for the Assembly of First Nations, five years after the residential schools apology.

Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Indian Affairs, suggested Atleo should not be so impatient: "Of course there is impatience out there but there is also a lot of realization that progress is being made and accomplished."

It was appropriate the public exchange took place on the day before Father's Day. In an interview aired on CBC Radio's *The House*, Shawn Atleo described the Harper government's approach to decision-making as "top-down, unilateral, government-knows-best," saying that "in my personal reflection, since the apology, there has really been no real change in the approach."

Atleo warned of the potential for further confrontation, the like of which has not been seen since the crises of 1990s.

"Without a shift in the pattern of the relationship, we're going to continue to see a cycle of conflict that's not just more recent. It goes back to the days of the Oka crisis, of Gustafsen Lake, of Burnt Church, of a gap that seems to continue to deepen between First Nations and Canada," Atleo said.

Shawn Atleo spent much of last week marking the fifth anniversary of Stephen Harper's apology for the residential schools system that took such a physical and emotional toll on this country's aboriginals.

But he also was marking the five-month anniversary of a Langevin Block meeting with the prime minister, a meeting fuelled by an Idle No More movement, a chief fasting on nearby Victoria Island, tension on the streets of downtown Ottawa and a sense that treatment of aboriginals in this country had reached some type of tipping point.

At that meeting, Prime Minister Stephen Harper committed to "high-level" treaty talks following a working meeting with Atleo and a delegation of First Nations leaders last January 11 in the midst of hunger strikes and demonstrations.

In that meeting, Harper agreed with Atleo there was a need for political oversight.

Whatever. Instead, the advocates of parity in funding of First Nations child and family service agencies are challenging Ottawa at a human rights tribunal over the gap in child welfare funding between aboriginal and non-aboriginal youth, in Tobique Indian Affairs is defending itself over cuts in income assistance. Countless other legal challenges to Conservative policy and decisions are going on across the country.

Ottawa has allowed a visit this autumn by the United Nations special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous people, James Anaya.

"A mirror has to be held up to this country," he says.

The federal government has had an uneven relationship with independent observers, whom the Conservatives see as UN interlopers. Mr. Valcourt has also said he wants a meeting with Anaya to ensure any criticism of Canada is based on facts.

Parliament recessed for the summer on 18 June after ramming through legislation which was widely condemned by First Nations leaders and vehemently defended by Conservative MPs reading scripts written for them by the Prime Minister's Office.

Mid-June now, National Aboriginal Day coming up, and the meeting promised in January hasn't happened. Atleo said the words spoken by the prime minister have to be met with action that includes "time frames and targets for treaty implementation of major important priorities like education."

Atleo speaks of the need for transformative change in this country, an end to nibbling on the margins and slow, incremental developments, but he has little to show for the dramatic mid-winter turn of events.

The Conservative government passed two more pieces of legislation in recent days that are viewed as paternalistic, top-down dictates and were vigorously opposed in committee hearings. For both bills, debate in the House of Commons had been severely limited by the government members imposing closure.

The two bills were, Atleo said, top-down Ottawa-knows-best initiatives. He said the AFN opposed Bill S-2, the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act*, and Bill S-8, the *Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act*, because the federal government had imposed its own agenda and ignored First Nation witnesses who appeared before parliamentary committees.

"In some respects it seems that the government is really more interested in covering its own liabilities than working with First Nations on delivering real solutions," Atleo said, referring to the Bills which specified that the federal government was not to be held liable for any problems caused by bad water problems on reserves, but that chiefs and councillors could be held liable and receive fines and jail if safe drinking water was not provided.

Atleo said he was complaining of "the imposition of rules that don't offer a way to resolve the core issues."

Mr. Valcourt vehemently denied that accusation, calling Atleo's basis for opposing the two bills "completely out of sync with the reality."

As well, despite a unanimous call from the provinces and national organizations of indigenous people for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women, the call has been ignored by the Harper government.

The result is that while Atleo may not have much to show for his efforts, Stephen Harper has even less to show for his leadership on "the Indian agenda:"

In a separate interview on *The House*, Mr. Valcourt did his best to praise his boss. He acknowledged the frustration expressed by First Nations, but he defended the federal government's handling of the issues.

The federal government is making 'serious invest-ments' in First Nations' reserves, he said. "I will not apologize for wanting to spend more on housing, for child and family services, for water and sewer, for infrastructure and education," Mr. Valcourt told *The House*,

The only example Mr. Valcourt pointed to of the Harper government's commitment to improving the lives of First Nations people was the federal government's nearly \$3-billion investment into infrastructure for safe drinking water on reserves.

"This is not peanuts, this is a serious investment which I think and suggest and attests to our resolve to work with First Nations in order not only to alleviate but ensure that they have access to safe drinking water regardless of where they live," Valcourt said.

According to Valcourt, the federal government's agenda with respect to First Nations "was not pulled out of thin air." "This is an agenda that has been agreed upon with the First Nations leadership," Valcourt said.

In turn, Atleo pointed to the lack of progress on First Nations education – to which Mr. Valcourt says all will be fixed by a new *First Nations Education Bill* the government will table in 2014. First Nations across Canada have been boycotting or protesting at meetings called by the Minister.

Then there have been the recent severe cuts to First Nation, Metis and Inuit representative organizations who once were invited to First Ministers Conferences televised nationally or prominent meetings such as that for the *Kelowna Accord*. National Chief Atleo said these were examples of the disconnect between what the Harper government says and does.

"It's alarming that these cuts really contradict what we're hearing are the government's commitment to First

Nations," Atleo said, adding that the cuts "have the potential to undermine progress."

"Some of the organizations impacted may be delivering direct services on health, safe drinking water, infrastructure, Atleo said.

Mr. Valcourt described the Assembly of First Nations and other regional or provincial assemblies of Chiefs as mere "advocacy groups". "I will not apologize for shifting scarce resources to essential needs," naming housing, child and family services, and education. "We are shifting, yes indeed, money from advocacy groups to basic essential needs on reserves." No details were provided.

This same week, the Harper Government made announced a program that would put \$50-million a year for five years into training programs for young aboriginal people on income assistance. To access the program, a community would have to agree to discontinue social assistance payments for young people.

NDP Leader Tom Mulcair had denounced this "workfare" program as "insulting" and "paternalistic" since it implied the only way First Nations youth would accept opportunities to advance is if welfare payments were cut.

In this mix, the AFN holds its annual national assembly in Whitehorse next month simultaneously with a meeting of Treaty First Nations at Onion Lake who intend to pursue a treaty-based agenda and action plan outside the AFN. .

Atleo is warning of a bigger picture than Chiefs; meetings. As summer looms and the weather warms, "be clear there is frustration," he said.

The flashpoint, or as Atleo calls it, the "perfect storm," is his peoples' determination to exercise free, prior and informed consent on more than 500 natural resources projects the Harper government has valued at \$600 billion over the next 20 years.

So in the spirit of paternalism and the historic Great White Father of the Queen's Red Children, Happy Father's Day, everyone!

*Thanks also to 'The House'  
and Sean Kirkpatrick, The Canadian Press  
Tim Harper writes on national affairs for the Toronto Star.*

---

## **Indian Affairs Media Release** ***Harper Government Delivers Results To Aboriginal People and All Canadians! Happy Aboriginal Day!***

*Ottawa, Ontario, 19 June 2013 (Marketwired)* – Today, the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, welcomed Royal Assent of four key pieces of legislation that clearly demonstrate the Harper Government's commitment to increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people and Northerners in Canada. A fifth bill, Bill C-27, the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, received Royal Assent in March.

"Our Government and Aboriginal peoples are aligned in our goal of seeing the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people closed when it comes to living standards, quality of life and economic opportunities," said Minister Valcourt. "We are proud of the legislation that received Royal Assent today. These laws are historic achievements that will bring real change and improvements for people living in Canada's Aboriginal and Northern communities."

The five pieces of legislation that have received Royal Assent to date in 2013 are:

*The Northern Jobs and Growth Act* - which brings increased predictability to regulatory & environmental review processes for major northern projects;

*The First Nations Financial Transparency Act* - which strengthens transparency and accountability for community members by requiring First Nations governments to publish financial statements;

*The Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act* - which aims to enhance the rights and protections offered to First Nations;

*The Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act* - will enable safe on-reserve drinking water and wastewater treatment with much needed regulatory safeguards.

*Yale First Nation Final Agreement Act.*

***"Our Government is proud to have worked with many Aboriginal leaders and community members to pass these important pieces of legislation," Minister Valcourt added. "I salute all who helped make these laws happen, particularly those who began this journey many years ago. Your hard work, courage and vision have paid off. Today, we can all take pride in what we have achieved."***



## **First Nations groups mobilizing for “Sovereignty Summer”**

*Thanks to Laura Beaulne-Stuebing and iPolitics  
and Michael Woods of Post Media  
from their articles which have been adapted here*

19 June 2013

As spring draws to a close, organizers from Idle no More and Defenders of the Land, a network of indigenous communities aiming to protect environmental and rights of Indigenous peoples, are gearing up for a very busy few months in what’s been dubbed “Sovereignty Summer” of “non-violent direct action” across the country..

“National Aboriginal Day”, June 21, has been designated for the launch of the activities.

Since announcing the new alliance in March, they’ve been leading in-person and online training sessions to teach other activists effective ways to organize, providing what they say is an anchor to groups across the country who are interested in “escalating actions” and “putting into the national discourse the core concerns of First Nations peoples with the Harper government.”

Clayton Thomas-Muller, a Sovereignty Summer campaigner, says the movement’s ultimate goal is to get the federal government to sit down with First Nations leaders – to talk, negotiate and consult with them.

It seems pretty simple. But the feds and Indigenous leadership have met in the past and those meetings brought little change.

Thomas-Muller says the federal government has been fudging its obligations to Indigenous people. “The only thing that this Prime Minister listens to is economics,” Thomas-Muller said. “And so what we will see over the summer will be communities stopping business as usual, and really take a look at ways and strategies and tactics to do that.”

He added, “(We’re) aiming to look at basically putting up walls, putting up barriers to Canada being able to continue as business as usual.”

There’s a big event planned for Queen’s Park in Toronto on Friday – a “convergence” of the Toronto activist community – to get things started and says there will be action all throughout the summer, with something “quite significant” in early July – “that I’m not at liberty to share at this point.”

Thomas-Muller said there will be “major actions” in mid-July and early August. He said the end of the summer would feature “mass mobilization” in urban centres across the country.

Protests will highlight various land-based struggles: Thomas-Muller said there are “dozens and dozens that are potential powder kegs” including proposed pipeline paths, disputes with provincial governments, and proposed hydroelectric and uranium mining expansions.

The news of the plans for the summer came after several months of quiet after the spectacular winter in which Indigenous peoples and settler supporters participated in round dances, rallies, and other affirmations of indigenous identity across Canada. The movement caught on in many other countries. That winter activity had been sparked by frustration over the federal government’s C-45 omnibus budget bill and spurred on by social media.

Now, for the first time, the spontaneous movement is indicating it is organizing to take strategic action. “The point is to increase tension,” said Sheelah McLean, one of Idle No More’s four co-founders. “To raise awareness and increase tension between people who are wanting to assert their rights and people who are unjustly forgetting about the rights of indigenous peoples.”

At play are many of the same issues that helped galvanize the indigenous movement in December and January when protests reached their peak: matters such as implementing historic treaty rights, the federal government’s changes to environmental protections, and consultation with aboriginals regarding resource development on their traditional lands.

“The one thing that’s going to stop this resource hyper-extraction is the rights of indigenous Canadians, and Canadians have to stand behind them,” McLean said. “Pressure on the government is essential.”

**<e-notes> is published as a service of Four Arrows/Las Cuatro Flechas, providing communications among First Nations of the Americas since 1968. Names may be added to the distribution list on requests; names will be removed on request. Four Arrows receives no funding to provide this service. Readers are invited to send material for publication in <e-notes>.**

Organizers say “non-violent direct action” will cover a wide spectrum, and individual communities will decide what it means. But it could include banner drops, camping, rallies, round dances – and even blockades. Whatever the methods, McLean says tension will continue to escalate if the government ignores aboriginal issues.

“The government is counting on settler Canadians not understanding these issues,” McLean said. “What we’re hoping is to focus on these issues by any means possible to educate people on why they need to stand behind indigenous communities to protect the land.”

Andrea Richer, spokesperson for Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt, said the government is “always prepared to work with those First Nations, and other partners, who want to achieve results.”

“Canadians have a right to peaceful protest, but much more can be accomplished by working together,” Richer said. “While we may not always agree on the way forward, we do agree that it is critical we demonstrate concrete movement on some of the key issues like education, skills and training and economic development.”

The groups demands have to do with repealing changes made to the *Navigable Waters Act*, recognition of aboriginal rights and title, respecting indigenous rights to free, prior and informed consent on matters that may affect them; honouring historic treaties; and launching a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

“Our goal is to ... bring this government to a place where they have no choice but to act,” Thomas-Muller said. “What we’re talking about is stopping the ability of Canada to operate as business as usual until the government addresses these six core things. It’s ‘go’ time. These are life and death situations, and there needs to be real political will taken to respond to them.”

Andrea Landry, an aboriginal advocate who works with the National Association of Friendship Centres and the United Nations, says frustration’s been growing in First Nation communities over recent legislation passed by the federal government and a lack of talks between government and Indigenous leaders.

Landry says she’s worried about the potential response this summer to what she says are the government’s “empty words and empty promises.” She’s heard rumblings of blockades, which could easily lead to violence.

“I’m really hoping it doesn’t have to come down to that.”

## ***First Nations: Permanent Post-Traumatic Stress***

*Thanks to Rebekah Funk, Globe & Mail*

Krista Bouchard was married to a Mountie for 13 years – a quirky, funny, chatty guy she met on a blind date.

Thirty-year-old Martin Bouchard was an RCMP officer in Manitoba and had a French accent and plenty of friends.

But three years into the marriage, Martin was posted at an isolated northern Manitoba reserve of 1,300 residents, Shamattawa, Krista Bouchard started noticing symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder in her husband. “He’d show up at a call and end up having an axe thrown from the roof of a house at him,” said Ms. Bouchard.

But most traumatic for her husband were the suicides. Those were calls that changed her husband life forever.

“The biggest thing was the hangers, they called them. They were cutting people out of the trees weekly for attempted suicides and suicides,” she said. In one recent year, Shamattawa had 110 attempted suicides, six of them ending in death.

Martin Bouchard became constantly negative, alienating friends and being confrontational at work – a change in behaviour she would have never predicted when the pair exchanged vows.

“He was so proud to be an RCMP member, yet he was always looking for the negative,” Ms. Bouchard said. “It felt like he was always in a battle with somebody.”

He was moved from Manitoba into an Alberta post. But over the next decade he became increasingly hostile to his wife and daughters. The couple separated.

Martin was diagnosed with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. On November 4, 2012, he turned in his gun and badge..

Four days later, on Nov. 8, 2012, Martin Bouchard, 45, took his own life.

By hanging.

Commenting on his death a spokesperson for the RCMP said the Force takes mental health issues very seriously. Those who do service in isolated places such as Indian Reserves receive increased focus and monitoring.

## **Minister of Indian Affairs, 17 June 2013:**

### ***“We’re helping you achieve prosperity and self-sufficiency”***

*Parliament Hill, 17 June 2013 (The Hill Times)*

Since 2006, our government has taken concrete steps to ensure that First Nations have the same quality of life, the same opportunities, and the same choices as all other Canadians. Our commitment to achieving these goals is rooted in the understanding that a strong, prosperous Canada must include healthier, more self-sufficient, and prosperous First Nation communities.

In order to succeed, however, we must continue to strengthen the relationship between the Crown and First Nations, between aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginal peoples. That is why, since being appointed minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I have made it a priority to travel to every region of the country, including remote First Nation communities, to meet with and listen to the concerns and priorities of community members, leaders, and youth.

What I have heard will come as no surprise to anyone: First Nations, like all Canadians, want a future that provides them the opportunity to benefit from all that this great country has to offer. No one disagrees that one key to creating opportunities is a good education. A good education allows one to pursue a degree, get skills training, or find a job. But First Nations, the government and education experts all agree that the current on-reserve education system is failing our children. I say “our children” because, whether we are First Nation or not, we all have a stake in ensuring that students on reserve succeed.

Years of studies, audits, and reports have identified the need for additional supports and structures to ensure that school systems on reserve are accountable to the students who pass through them.

Our government has listened and that is why we have committed to working with First Nation parents, teachers, leaders and others with an interest in education, to introduce a *First Nations Education Act* and have it in place by September 2014. This act will help children on reserve graduate in greater numbers, with a recognized high school degree. It will also put in place the mechanisms required to provide First Nation schools with stable, predictable and sustainable funding. We have been consulting with First Nations to make sure

that the proposed legislation is of equivalent quality to school systems off reserve, and flexible enough to give communities the ability to develop and deliver an education system and curriculum that reflects their unique needs and interests. In the coming weeks we will be sharing with First Nations an outline of the proposed legislation for their input. Their input will inform the draft legislation which will also be shared with First Nations for comment at the end of summer.

Recently, I announced that our government is investing \$241-million in new funding to help First Nation youth to get personalized job and skills training. These investments will help those who can work to get the skills they need to find the job they want and achieve the self-sufficiency they deserve.

Since January, our government has also made progress on other priorities shared with First Nations. We have agreed to review and renew Canada’s comprehensive claims policy.

We have made progress on important legislation that will ensure First Nations have access to safe drinking water on reserve, that will give women and children on reserve the same rights and protections as all Canadians, including access to emergency protection orders in violent situations, and that will improve the accountability and transparency of First Nation governments.

These are just some of the steps we have taken to create the conditions for Canada’s aboriginal people to achieve the prosperity and self-sufficiency they deserve. While there are no quick fixes we remain steadfast in our commitment to work with aboriginal Canadians to ensure that they are full participants in building a better future for themselves, and a stronger future for Canada. We will only be successful if we tackle these issues together.





## ***Are the Conservatives Conservatives or Colonialists When It Comes To 'Indians'?***

*Thanks to Chris Plecash, The Hill Times*

Ottawa, Ontario, 17 June 2013 – Indigenous legal scholar John Borrows, a member of Ontario's Chippewas of Nawash First Nation says it's curious that the current federal government's approach to First Nations goes against traditional conservative values of limited government and free choice.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Professor Borrows said, "Conservative principles are that big government should get off the backs of people, including Indian people, and the best way to get big government off the back of Indians is to allow them to locally determine what they think their objectives should be," Prof. Borrows said.

"It's somewhat ironic that we have a Conservative government in power right now that seems to want to operate in accordance with these Republican-type principles, and yet it's big government that's being used to put in place the [First Nations] transparency act, the elections act, and the matrimonial property act."

Prof. Borrows, who previously taught aboriginal law at the universities of Toronto and Victoria, is currently the Robina Chair in Law, Public Policy, and Society at the University of Minnesota. Since joining the University of Minnesota in 2009 he has studied U.S. policy and found greater progress south of the border in promoting indigenous self-governance.

"The reason is that all of these pieces of [U.S.] legislation have as their guiding principle that Indian people are self-determining," Prof. Borrows said. "What Congress does is pass enabling legislation which recognizes the inherent rights of indigenous self-determination. This enabling legislation allows governments to be able to partner with First Nations as they determine on a piece-by-piece basis."

In Canada, however, federal legislation and policies aimed at facilitating First Nations self-governance is not at work in any of the government's recently passed legislation, said Liberal MP Carolyn Bennett, her party's critic.

The problem, said Ms. Bennett, is that much of the government's legislation is mandatory for First Nations and gives the minister of Aboriginal Affairs the power to impose requirements and withhold funding based on new conditions.

"It is a bizarre approach to resetting the relationship and the duty to consult. It's paternalism and prescriptive 'father knows best,'" Ms. Bennett told *The Hill Times*.

Ms. Bennett, who sits on the House Aboriginal Affairs Committee, said new legislation puts new pressures on reserves without addressing the lack of capacity that is required for implementation.

"They have suggestions coming bottom up from First Nations, they codify them, and then add some poison pill at the last minute."

Andrea Richer, press secretary to Indian Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt, disputed that the government was failing to consult with First Nations. For example, she said, the government has consulted with First Nations on the forthcoming *First Nations Education Act*, which she said would make on reserve schools "of equivalent quality" to off reserve schools and be "flexible enough" to enable First Nations to design programs and curriculum that would address their unique needs and interests.

She said that draft legislation based on consultation will be shared with First Nations and educators by the end of the summer.

"This is just one example of the steps out government has taken to create the conditions for healthier, more self-sufficient First Nations," she replied. "We remain committed to continue working with aboriginal Canadians and ensure they are full participants in building a better future for themselves and a stronger future for Canada."

Thus far, there has been no mention by the government there would be any new funding provided to make it all happen.



## ***Derek Nepinak's leadership gathering steam: Manitoba grand chief has rising profile***

*Winnipeg, Treaty 1, 17 June 2013* – The Treaty Freedom Caravan, organized by Derek Nepinak, Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, today finished a journey of 11 days, 3500 kilometres, and stops in dozens of Treaty First Nations along the way.

Grand Chief Nepinak conceived of the Treaty Freedom Caravan as an educational mission on what treaties are, as well as a chance to light a fire under First Nations people to "burn away the haze" of misunderstanding, apathy and negativity among First Nations people.

"The *Indian Act* has no future for us. It's only through the Treaty relationship I think there is an opportunity to move beyond the *Indian Act* and remember what the spirit and



– photo by John Woods, The Canadian Press

*Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Grand Chief Derek Nepinak*

intent of our agreements were," he said in his usual calm but tough-as-nails voice.

Grand Chief Nepinak is one of the strong voices coming from a First Nation movement which focuses on Treaties and the Treaty relationship to set an entirely new stage for negotiations with the federal government. Such discussions would be direct, not involving the Assembly of First Nations or other organizations.

The "Treaty 1-11 movement" is a rebirth of the 1985-era Prairie Treaty Nations Alliance, a flame which has been gaining strength for the last six or seven years. Nepinak and other Manitoba chiefs began advocating for this in

January and February when, during the height of the Idle No More protest movement, they rejected the AFN's leadership, which went ahead with a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper against the objections of many communities.

In simple terms, Grand Chief Nepinak wants the *Indian Act* a Treaty relationship in which federal and provincial governments live up to the Crown's treaty promises that remain unfilled since the settlers took over what is today the Dominion of Canada. [Compensation for use of land for immigration and settlement was never paid. Additional agreements were never entered into for the use of resources. Governments even took over control of lands not taken up for settlement.] Policies were imposed that made success next to impossible.

The result is in many ways what we have today. Non-native communities thrived, First Nations people suffered, suffocated by colonial control and discrimination.

It's all well and good to say that was then and now is now, so let's just move on, but it is not that simple.

The ability of most First Nations to do what so many seem to demand -- to stand on their own -- is deemed by those like Nepinak to be possible only if Canada lives up to its treaty obligations.

Nepinak is clearly a leader among those who seek a different path to success than the seemingly endless negotiations with Ottawa over funding envelopes that ultimately have done little, if anything, to improve the standard of living of Canada's indigenous people.

Born in Pine Creek First Nation, Nepinak was both a sports and academic star. He was the starting quarterback of his high school football team and a swimming phenom who swam in the 1992 Olympic swimming trials.

He has a degree in native studies from the University of Alberta and a law degree from the University of Saskatchewan. He started a master's program in aboriginal governance at the University of Winnipeg, but left before graduating to become Pine Creek's chief.

In 2011, he ran for the grand chief of Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs on a platform promising self-government and the creation of laws, political structures and economic rights based on treaties and independent of federal control.

Less than a year later, he was being pressured to run for the national chief's job, but he declined.

*Thanks to Mia Robson, Winnipeg Free Press*



**An 22-minute address by Chief Wallace Fox on April 10 regarding plans for this summer's Treaty 1-11 July Gathering at Onion Lake is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msi3rifrgAs>. The first five minutes of the address is in the Cree language, the balance in English. .**

### ***Crucial to Canadian Economy To Realize Great Potential of Indigenous Youth By Improving Education, Training, Opportunity***

*Thanks to Matt Moir and The Hill Times  
for his 17 June 2013 article  
from which this article has been adapted.*

The numbers of young Indigenous people is growing dramatically, but there are insufficient resources available for education and training opportunity equal to that of non-Indigenous Canadians.

Yet it is crucial for Canada's economic and social well-being that immediate investment be made to get those resources in place.

The convergence of the economy's skills shortage and the explosion in number of Indigenous young people represent a high-potential economic opportunity unparalleled in Canadian history, says Roberta Jamieson, CEO and President of Indspire, a national charitable foundation with a successful history in delivering bursaries to Indigenous youth.

"We know Canada's population is aging. There are not enough young people to replace those who are retiring. We've got hundreds of thousands of young people who if they were able to have the appropriate training, education and support would be poised to make a very valuable contribution to their own community and to the country," Ms. Jamieson told *The Hill Times* recently.

Statistics Canada data shows the population of Indigenous peoples grew by 20% between 2006 and 2011, compared to a 5% increase in the non-aboriginal population. Today, approximately 4.3% of the Canadian population identifies as indigenous. Additionally, nearly half of the aboriginal population is under the age of 24, making it far younger than the Canadian population as a whole.

What these demographic realities tell us, said Phil Fontaine, former national chief of the Assembly of First

Nations and current special adviser to the Royal Bank of Canada, is that Canada must act aggressively to provide resources to deal with the historic and current circumstances which end up in poor educational results and lack of effective training.

"If we do this right we can significantly meet Canada's future workforce needs. The challenge is access to appropriate and effective training. That means Indigenous students achieving success in high school and then going on to university or community colleges. We lag behind the Canadian success rates, and the challenge is that we close the gap," said Mr. Fontaine.

The unemployment rate nationally of the potential Indigenous workforce is unacceptable and shocking. Significant difference. Statistics for Indigenous youth 15-24 are especially grim. Even off reserve, the unemployment rate is high.



*– photo by Daniel Leon Rodriguez, The Hill Times  
Nishiyuu Walkers on Parliament Hill 25 March 2013,  
after a 1,600 km two-month trek from northern Quebec to Ottawa  
in support of the Idle No More Movement  
and to rally for better living conditions for Canada's First Nations.*

There is also the problem that many employers in Canada, unfortunately, do not see Indigenous peoples as a workforce solution, says Kelly Lendsay, president and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Rights Council. . "What many of them see is only the negative side. And we do have negative issues and challenges. We know about the suicide rates, the employment rates, the poverty rates. We know that aboriginal peoples rank very, very low on the human resource index compared to the rest of Canadians.

"So those are the brutal facts that we face. And in some cases those stereotypes go across the entire landscape of

aboriginal peoples from coast to coast to coast,” said

Mr. Lendsay told *The Hill Times* too often he hears, “It’s too complex, it’s too hard. We tried and the natives didn’t show up to work.

“Some say, ‘I actually know some native people,’ or ‘I grew up with them going to school. In fact I know where there’s a reserve only an hour away from where I grew up.’ And then they go all the way to the Philippines or some place for workers. And they haven’t gone one hour or half an hour to a reserve to talk to them about employment.”

“A third employer response says ‘Okay, where are they? How do I find them?’ They find the landscape confusing and they want some guidance,” said Mr. Lendsay.

Some industries and some employers have demonstrated initiative in working with indigenous communities.

The Canadian resource industry’s engagement with Indigenous people is well-documented. The mining industry, for example, is the largest employer of aboriginal peoples, and there are more than 180 agreements between mining and energy companies and aboriginal communities or governments, according to a 2012 report released by the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board.

The banking industry has also emerged as a leader in corporate investment in Indigenous communities. The Royal Bank of Canada released a report earlier this month highlighting the millions of dollars worth of investment it has made in aboriginal communities across the country, and both Ms. Jamieson and Mr. Lendsay noted that each of the major banks have made increased investment in educational, social, and cultural projects.

There is also high potential for Indigenous entrepreneurs. “Aboriginal peoples are Canada’s original entrepreneurs,” Mr. Lendsay notes. “From the fur trade onwards, for thousands of years they’ve been involved in trade and commerce,” he said.

Ms. Jamieson echoed that sentiment. “Our younger people are wanting to find a way to engage in the economic development they see occurring around their communities. They want to be players.”

**Thanks to The Hill  
Times for the special  
articles in its National Aboriginal Day edition!**

 HILL TIMES

## ***Gutting of Federal Fisheries Act Remains in Legal Limbo at 1 Year C-38 Anniversary***

### **Opponents credit public, scientific and First Nations pushback**

*Vancouver, Coast Salish Territory, 19 June 2013* – One year ago in an unprecedented attack on nature and democracy, the Canadian Parliament passed Bill C-38, making sweeping changes to environmental protection laws to ease the way for developments like oil pipelines.

However, faced with massive and persistent citizen opposition and First Nations' legal challenges, a year later the federal government has yet to bring into force some of the most controversial parts of C-38 – amendments to the *Fisheries Act* that would weaken legal protections for fish and their habitat.

The situation leaves new rules about impacts to fish and fish habitat in legal limbo as legal argument on the Enbridge Northern Gateway tankers and pipeline project draws to a close.

“Legal changes in Bill C-38 were aimed at silencing the voices of citizens, but they have done anything but,” says Jessica Clogg, Executive Director and Senior Counsel, West Coast Environmental Law Association. It has launched a social media campaign “No Habitat = No Fish”, calling on the federal government not to bring into force C-38 and C-45 *Fisheries Act* amendments. Government officials have indicated could occur as soon as July.

“To date the federal government has failed to offer any compelling evidence or legal argument for its assertions that changes to the *Fisheries Act* were required, or that they will protect fish,” says John Fraser, Conservative fisheries minister in 1984-5, and Speaker of the House of Commons.

Last year four former fisheries ministers, Tom Siddon, David Anderson, John Fraser and Herb Dhaliwal, who served in both Progressive Conservative and Liberal governments, wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister expressing their alarm about proposed changes to the *Fisheries Act*.

Stewart Phillip, head of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs said, “Last year’s so-called budget bills embody a vision of Canada that is unacceptable to First Nations and non-Aboriginal Canadians alike. The Idle No More Movement has been a powerful reminder of the consequences of this.”

***First Nation Education:  
Canada's moral obligation,  
constitutional responsibility***

*Thanks to Carolyn Bennett, MP,  
Liberal Party Critic on Aboriginal Affairs*

*Parliament Hill, 17 June 2013, The Hill Times* – All Canadian children have a right to basic education and, for First Nations, it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure they have that access.

It is in all of our interests to close unacceptable gaps in First Nations' education funding and graduation because, in failing to do so, we are squandering a source of future prosperity for all Canadians.

Canada risks a future of jobs without people and people without jobs. Canadian business understands this and believes engaging Canada's aboriginal population – the youngest and fastest growing population in the country – is fundamental to meeting this challenge.

Just this year the Canadian Chamber of Commerce identified Canada's labour skills shortage as one of the ten biggest barriers to Canadian competitiveness and the Aboriginal population as "a huge potential workforce" that we must support more. It said, "Funding for aboriginal education at all levels has lagged for many years, and education results have, too. It's not hard to see the connection."

The Canadian Council of Chief Executives' most recent pre-budget consultations also made it clear that the government must improve education and skill levels within the Aboriginal population and expand opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to participate fully in the economy.

In the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, access to jobs – and even skills training – requires a high school and often post-secondary education. Shockingly, only one in three First Nations kids on reserve is graduating from high school and that outcome has not improved over the past several years.

We know youth who graduate high school are twice as likely to find a job as those who don't, and research shows that Aboriginal high school graduates have almost the same post-secondary participation rate as non-Aboriginal high school graduates. But sadly, First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth are still significantly under-represented in post-secondary education.

In her 2011 report, the Auditor General of Canada made it

clear that the government "has not maintained a consistent approach and cannot demonstrate improvements to date" in closing the First Nations' education gap.

This conclusion was stated recently in the government's own report, "2012 Evaluation of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program on Reserve." It found, "education opportunities and results that are comparable to the Canadian population are not being achieved."

Although First Nations have made meaningful strides to improve education, the lack of proper resources has severely limited their progress. Appallingly, students attending school on reserve are funded on average at two-thirds that of provincial systems. Despite this, the government has consistently failed to make the needed investments to close this gap. In fact, the Conservative government still denies this funding gap exists.

The government's spin is contradicted by its own 2012 Evaluation, which states, "Expenditures to First Nations and tribal councils for the operation of schools do not appear to account for actual cost variability applicable to the needs and circumstances of each community or school, and particularly the cost realities associated with isolation and small population."

The government's response to the unacceptable First Nation high school graduation rate has been to deny existing funding gaps and set an uninspiring target of just an 8% improvement over five years.

Indian Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt now claims that the solution to unacceptable First Nations graduation rates will be the anticipated *First Nation Education Act*, but the Conservatives' track record of broken promises, misleading figures, and their complete failure to meaningfully consult on the development of previous bills does not bode well for this new piece of legislation.

First Nations are frustrated that yet again the government chooses to legislate instead of meaningfully addressing funding shortfalls well-documented by auditors general.

We need to engage in a renewed respectful and inclusive process with First Nations like the one resulting in the Kelowna Accord. That bottom-up process led to a series of concrete commitments – including \$1.8-billion over five years to achieve both a high school graduation rate for Aboriginal peoples equal to other Canadians and a 50% improvement in post-secondary education completion rates by 2016. Unfortunately the current government walked away from these commitments.



Now, five years after the Prime Minister's apology for the tragic historic wrongs of the Indian residential schools, we must rekindle the goodwill and promise that existed on that day. As a young elementary school student said so eloquently at the "Our Dreams Matter Too Walk" in Ottawa last week, "this apology has meaning only if First Nations children have opportunities, can grow up happily in their homes, have a good education, be healthy and have pride in their culture."

Canadians understand that access to education for all children is an issue of fundamental fairness. Let's get on with it.

---

### ***First Nation income assistance cuts hit courts***

*Thanks to Brett Ruskin, Global News*

*Halifax, Nova Scotia, 20 June 2013* – The future of income assistance for Atlantic Canada First Nations now rests in the hands of a judge. Legal teams for the government and First Nations communities spent the last two days presenting their cases at a judicial review.

The review was granted earlier this year and is expected to resolve whether a proposed cut to on-reserve income assistance is a fair policy decision.

"I think you'll see a lot of our families having to give up their children because they can't feed them," says Chief Brenda Perley from Tobique First Nation. "It's devastating to us and that's why we're here fighting," she said. "We're here to say that this will be a devastation to each First Nation."

The proposed changes will make severe cuts to basic allowances for food, shelter, utilities to the extent that



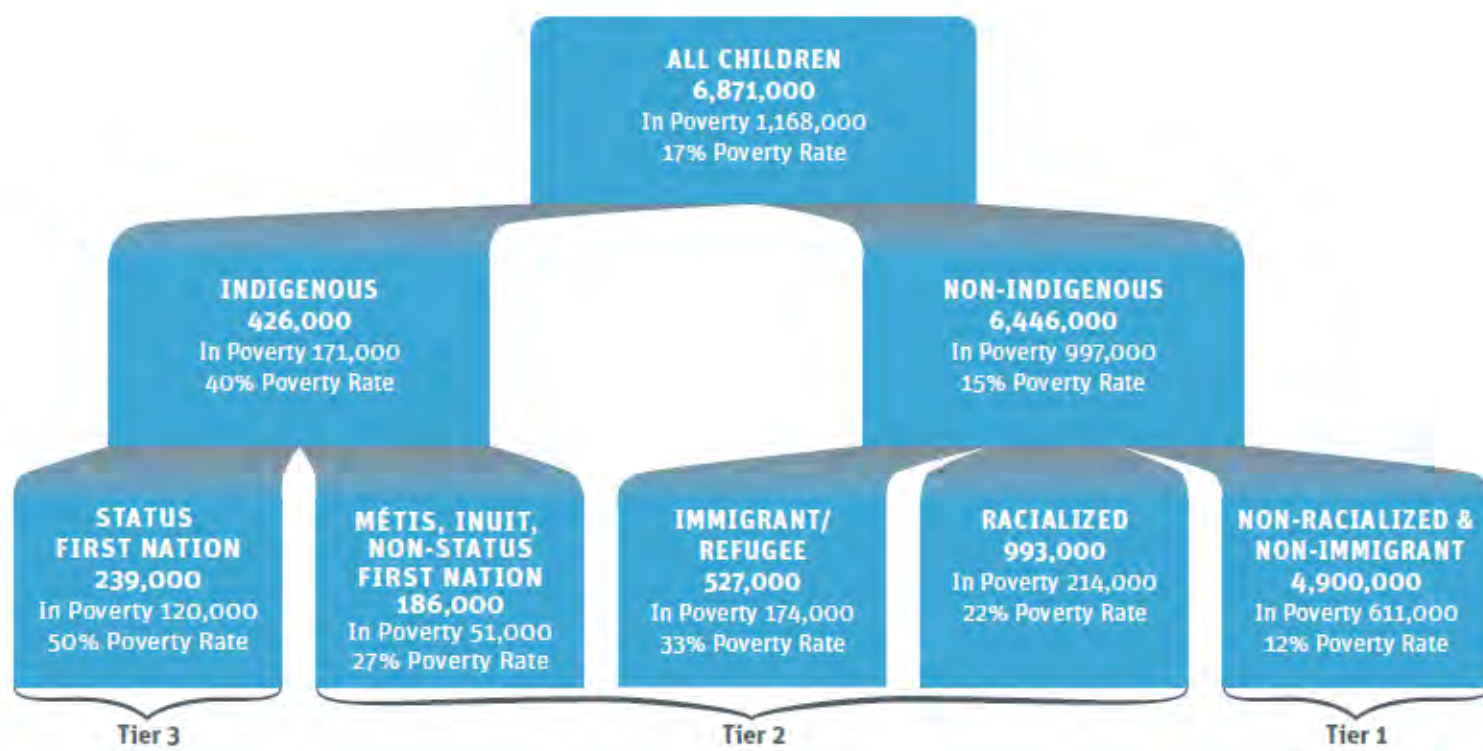
they would not be able to do one of those things, says Naomi Metallic, lawyer for the First Nations members. "They would have to choose to pay their shelter instead of eat," says Metallic.

Michelle Perron, a spokesperson for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada told Global News that "as this case is before the courts, we cannot comment on the specifics of this case but we believe that Income Assistance rates should be consistent with the rates of other individuals in their respective jurisdictions,"

The judge is reviewing the case and could present his ruling anytime in the coming months.

© Shaw Media, 2013





## 50% of First Nation Children in Canada Live in Poverty, New Study Reports

Ottawa, Ontario, 19 June 2013 – Half of the First Nation children in Canada live in poverty. That is the conclusion of a study. *Poverty or Prosperity: Indigenous Children in Canada*,<sup>1</sup> released today by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Save the Children Canada.

That is over four times the 12% poverty rate of Canadian children who are not Indigenous, racialized,<sup>2</sup> or immigrant, who can be called “Tier 1”.

The poverty rate for Métis, Inuit, and non-status Indian children is double that – 27%.. Call them “Tier 2”.

Then comes the most shocking -- First Nation children with a 50% poverty rate: Tier 3. That’s double that of the Metis children.

<sup>1</sup> The study is online at [http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/06/Poverty\\_or\\_Prosperty\\_Indigenous\\_Children.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/06/Poverty_or_Prosperty_Indigenous_Children.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, “racialized” is equivalent to the “visible minorities” definition in the 2006 Census

Shockingly, there is also a “Tier 4”: First Nation children in Manitoba at 64%, and Saskatchewan at 66% – almost two out of three of First Nation children there live in poverty.

The study was done by David Macdonald, a senior economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [ccpa@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:ccpa@policyalternatives.ca)

Indigenous children trail the rest of Canada’s children on practically every measure of well-being: family income, educational attainment, crowding and homelessness, poor water quality, infant mortality, health and suicide.

“The report’s findings that half of status First Nation children live in poverty should shock all Canadians,” said Patricia Erb, President and CEO of Save the Children.

“Looking beyond the numbers to the impact of poverty on the lives of Indigenous children explains why Save the Children is currently growing our programming in Canada.” Most Save the Children activity is designed to assist children in poverty in poor countries.

According to the study, it would require \$580-million annually to bring those First Nation children just above the poverty line. \$1-billion would be required for all Indigenous children, and \$7.5-billion a year from either market income or government transfers to bring all children up to the poverty line.





Although these investments are significant, the cost of continuing neglect is higher, both to Canada's economy and to the children.

"The Indigenous population is the fastest growing in Canada. With adequate and sustained support these people will become an integral part of society and the workforce – particularly as baby boomers retire", says Daniel Wilson, Indigenous rights advocate and co-author of the study.

"But if we refuse to address the crushing poverty facing Indigenous children, we will ensure the crisis of socio-economic marginalization and wasted potential will continue."

"As an organization that works internationally to promote and protect the rights of children, we know the positive impact Canada has had around the world," noted Erb. "It is time to work together – communities, civil society, governments, and the private sector – to ensure that Indigenous children grow up in happier and healthier communities with education and opportunity."

***At 17% for all children, Canada ranks 25<sup>th</sup> among the 30 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development with regard to child poverty.***

***The poverty rate for First Nations children is 50%.***

## THE REPORT

Canada cannot and need not allow yet another generation of Indigenous citizens to languish in poverty.

At a time when workforce replacement and skilled labour shortages occupy the attention of both business and government alike, the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the country struggles in poverty.

But that poverty is neither inevitable nor immutable. Transformative change is clearly possible, desirable and required.

It is a question of will on the part of all Canadians – the will to learn the full history of this country and its legacy, to understand the positive role governments can play, and to advocate for an end to the poverty experienced by Indigenous children.

It is up to all of us.

While direct investment to alleviate the burden of poverty is part of the answer, other solutions exist.

- The wealth of natural resources and the jobs that go with development can be shared with far greater equity.
- Entrepreneurial activity in Indigenous communities, already on the rise, can be nurtured.
- First Nations can be supported in pursuing self-government.
- Canada can enable economic growth and better



governance for Indigenous communities, empowering them to control their own destinies and to reach their full potential.

Eliminating poverty among Indigenous children is a crucial step toward unlocking that potential.

As the most vulnerable members of any community, children have a fundamental right to protection and survival. This right is broadly acknowledged.

For children living in poverty, the vulnerability runs much deeper. It is well established that poverty is linked to a variety of

physical, social and economic disadvantages later in life.

Children living in poverty require greater support to live and to fulfil their potential, a challenge that can only be met with assistance from the broader community.

Despite repeated promises from federal and provincial governments to address the issue – including a

1989 commitment by all Parliamentarians to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000 – Canada ranks 25<sup>th</sup> among the 30 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development with regard to child poverty.

Recent modest declines in rates cannot hide the fact that over a million children in Canada still live in poverty. More troubling, however, is the reality facing Indigenous children in Canada. Based on data from the 2006 census, this study found that the average child poverty rate for all children in Canada is 17%, while the average child poverty rate for all Indigenous children is more than twice that figure, at 40%. For First Nation children, 50%.

This number grows to 62% in Manitoba and 64% in Saskatchewan.

Some of these differences in child poverty appear to be a matter of jurisdiction. The provinces provide social services to all but status First Nation children on reserve, children who fare considerably better than their counterparts under federal responsibility.

For status First Nations children living on reserves, the federal government is responsible for funding social services, health care, education and income supports.

Transfer payments for these social services on reserve have increased by a mere 2% per year since 1996, unadjusted for population growth or need. The removal of



this cap on funding growth and an adjustment of transfers for need could reduce the alarming rate of status First Nations households living in poverty. It is a matter of choice.

To bring all children in Canada up to the poverty line would cost \$7.5 billion, \$1 billion of which is required for Indigenous children. Of that, \$580 million would be required to lift status First Nations children to the poverty line, which equates to 11% of the budget of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for the comparable year.

Indigenous children trail the rest of Canada's children on practically every measure of well being: family income, educational attainment, poor water quality, infant mortality, health, suicide, crowding and homelessness. For

example, Status First Nations children living in poverty are three times more likely to live in a house that requires major repairs compared to the non-Indigenous children of families with similar income levels, and five times more likely to live in an overcrowded house.<sup>3</sup>

The failure of ongoing policies is clear. The link between the denial of basic human rights for Indigenous children and their poverty is equally clear. Failure to act will result in a more difficult, less productive, and shorter life for Indigenous children.

The choice is ours.



– First Nations Child and Family Caring Service

<sup>3</sup> A year after the Royal Commission Report was issued, alarmed by all the comment about how expensive its recommendations were going to be, on October 23, 1997, the Royal Bank of Canada and the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) co-hosted a conference designed to highlight the outstanding benefits Canadians and Corporate Canada, in particular, could realize through implementation of what it called "the practical recommendations" of RCAP.

The Royal Bank concluded that by taking a direct role in the economic development of Aboriginal communities across Canada, businesses would not only ensure a better standard of living for Aboriginal Canadians, but would ensure long-term value for their own shareholders. These opportunities were presented in stark contrast to the high cost of maintaining the status quo, the truly daunting "cost of doing nothing".

Thus it was that at that meeting, Charlie Coffey, Executive Vice President of the Royal Bank, gave a speech (which was later published). The title of the speech was "The Cost of Doing Nothing: A Call to Action." See

<http://www.rbcroyalbank.com/commercial/aboriginal/rr-speech.html>

### Introduction

Children are the most vulnerable members of any community. They all require help to survive and to thrive, help that families and societies willingly provide.

Children living in poverty are at even greater risk than others. Our actions as a society will impede or enable their prosperity.

This report reinforces the imperative and urgency to act if we want to prevent future generations from paying the price.

The fact that poverty trends and levels differ markedly across countries and regions tells us that poverty is neither inevitable nor immutable. Different trajectories and rates of progress make it clear that the effects of poverty can be managed. National policy decisions can make a world of difference.

Poverty is deeply rooted in a country's history, politics and governance. It manifests itself in a lack of resources, power, voice, agency and access to services.

***Federal funding for social services for First Nations people on reserve have increased by only 2% per year since 1996, unadjusted for population growth or need.***

As in many countries, poverty in Canada differentiates based on race, it disproportionately affects Indigenous people as well as immigrant and racialized Canadians

First Nations, Métis and Inuit children trail the rest of Canada's children on practically every measure of wellbeing: family income, educational attainment, crowding and homelessness, poor water quality, infant mortality, health and suicide.

Poverty among Indigenous children is closely linked to the legacy of colonialism and to current underfunding of basic services, particularly on reserves. Despite repeated warnings from various quarters, including Canada's Auditor General, progress in providing basic services for Indigenous peoples such as safe water, good-quality education and adequate housing remains disturbingly slow.

Ending child poverty requires a commitment to defend the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable children.

A focus on alleviating poverty must be augmented by a common commitment to tackle inequities in both opportunities and outcomes.

A sustainable society requires a more inclusive approach to economic development and a more equitable approach to how the benefits of that development are shared.

No matter the economic circumstance facing Canada, children only develop once, and children living in poverty are much more likely to have poor outcomes as adults. Canada must seize the opportunity to harness and develop its greatest resource, the potential of all its children.

***The federal government has been alerted frequently to the fact that the quality of education, support for adequate housing, and the provision of basic services for First Nations is insufficient.***

***What the comparison of poverty rates between First Nations and other children and the analysis of jurisdictional responsibility would suggest is that the lack of equity in the funding levels between federal and provincial jurisdictions is reinforcing inequalities between First Nations children and all other children in Canada, while the complicated structures built around accountability and responsibility do little to improve results on the ground with the funds that are available.***

***This report reinforces the imperative and urgency to act if we want to prevent future generations from paying the price.***

### **Key Issues**

Recalling that the provinces provide the bulk of social services to citizens while the federal government maintains jurisdiction for “Indians and lands belonging to the Indians,” the striking difference between poverty rates for status First Nations children compared to Métis, Inuit and non-status First Nations children suggests that the government jurisdiction under which they fall is a significant factor in the poverty of status First Nations children.

On-reserve social services from health care to education,

from housing to social assistance, are funded by the federal government with complex arrangements as to how those services are delivered on the ground.

Canada compares particularly unfavourably to Nordic countries like Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway which have 4% or fewer of their children living below the poverty line, while performing slightly better than the United States, Mexico and Turkey.

If disadvantaged groups and Indigenous children are excluded, Canada’s child poverty rate is still at 12%. Even excluding the worst examples of child poverty in the country, Canada exactly matches the OECD average and has a child poverty rate three to four times higher than that of the Nordic countries.

However, the status First Nation child poverty rate of 50% is off the chart when compared to any other OECD country’s general child poverty rate, including that of the worst performer, Turkey, where 25% of children live below the poverty line. Even the Metis child poverty rate of 27% is worse than Turkey’s.

### ***Regional Variations in Child Poverty***

While Indigenous people represent only 3.8% of the total Canadian population in the 2006 census, Indigenous children make up 6.2% of all children in the country. . .

It is notable that the prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) as well as the North have a significantly higher proportion of Indigenous to non-Indigenous children.

The national non-Indigenous child poverty rate is relatively consistent when broken down by province with two exceptions; Alberta having a lower rate of 11% and BC with a slightly higher rate at 17%. There is much less provincial consistency for Indigenous child poverty rates.

By far the worst area in the country for status First Nation child poverty is the prairie provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan where almost two-thirds live below the poverty line (62% and 64% respectively). This compares to the non-Indigenous child poverty rate of 15% and 16% respectively in those provinces.

The geographical distribution of Indigenous children in Canada is different from that of non-Indigenous children. Roughly the same percentage of Indigenous children live in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, BC and Ontario. Fewer Indigenous children live in Quebec and the North, with relatively small numbers living in the Maritimes. The majority of non-Indigenous children live in Ontario and



Quebec with Alberta and BC well behind.

Similar to Alberta, the First Nations child poverty rates in Manitoba and Saskatchewan are about four times higher than the non-Indigenous rates, while in Ontario, Alberta and BC they are approximately 3 times higher.

***Indigenous children trail the rest of Canada's children on practically every measure of well being: family income, educational attainment, poor water quality, infant mortality, health, suicide, crowding and homelessness.***

***First Nations children living in poverty are three times more likely to live in a house that requires major repairs compared to the non-Indigenous children of families with similar income levels, and five times more likely to live in an overcrowded house.***

***The failure of ongoing policies is clear.***

***The link between the denial of basic human rights for Indigenous children and their poverty is equally clear.***

***Failure to act will result in a more difficult, less productive, and shorter life for Indigenous children.***

***The choice is ours.***

The large variance in Alberta is in part due to that province's standing in Canada as the jurisdiction with the lowest non-Indigenous child poverty rate. Lower non-Indigenous child poverty in Alberta is no doubt related to the resource boom allowing more parents to be employed. However, the impact of resource development that benefits many non-Indigenous children has entirely evaded status First Nations, despite the fact that reserves are often much closer to resource extraction points.

Quebec has the lowest concentration of status child poverty at 33%, although this is double the non-Indigenous child poverty rate in that province of 15%. It should be noted though that Quebec contains a relatively small proportion (8%) of the Indigenous child population.

### ***Other Elements of Indigenous Child Poverty***

Poverty is not solely a question of income levels. Status First Nations children, in addition to a higher poverty rate, often live in communities that are without comparison in Canada when it comes to the impoverishment of services and infrastructure. This has as deep an affect on the lives of these children as the amount of money their parents earn.

Status First Nations children living in poverty are three times more likely to live in a house that requires major repairs compared to the non-Indigenous children of families with similar income levels and five times more likely to live in an overcrowded house.

More than half of all water systems on First Nation reserves pose a risk to those using them.

Many Indigenous children face nutritional challenges due not only to a lack of income, but also due to the loss of traditional foodstuffs and the high cost of imported foods in remote and northern communities.

### ***Analysis and Recommendations: What Can Be Done?***

#### ***First Nations Children***<sup>4</sup>

Most of the measures that might help other children living in poverty in Canada will not help First Nations children living in the third tier of child poverty, particularly those living on reserve. For one thing, the administration of social services is completely different.

Beyond that, however, is a set of larger issues pertaining to the historic struggles of First Nations in Canada.

The administration of services like health care and education are provided by First Nation governments on-reserve, funded and directed by the federal government. Provincial income supports are not available on-reserve.

Many federal income supports administered through tax benefits, while they may be available, have low take up rates on reserve as they are linked to filing taxes which isn't required for those living and working on-reserve.

The immediate focus for the worst child poverty in Canada must be on social transfers to First Nations.

---

<sup>4</sup> See the full report for information on Metis, Inuit and non-status Indians.

Since 1996, transfers for core services to reserves have been capped at 2%. While this matches inflation, it does nothing to keep up with population growth and is unadjusted for need.

Under such constraints, there is little that First Nations can do to ameliorate conditions, outside of limited opportunities for own-source income.

Federal programs like Canada Child Tax Benefits adjust for increased need in areas like child poverty. But a hard cap of 2% on transfers for core social services on-reserve does not adjust for need.



– photo: Toronto Star

The introduction of “workfare” on reserves in the most recent federal budget will likely further restrict access to income supports.

Moving to a system that adjusts core transfers based on need instead of a hard cap will go much further to addressing status First Nations child poverty.

The absolute cost of lifting all status children out of poverty is not prohibitive. With an 11% increase in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada’s budget, the worst child poverty among status First Nations children could be completely eliminated in Canada.

In fact, these costs are more than offset by the benefits to Canada’s economy from investing in better outcomes for Indigenous children.

The cost of lost productivity and increased remedial costs caused by aboriginal poverty was estimated by the Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples at \$7.5 billion annually. That 1996 figure would be much higher today.

A study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards projected a \$115-billion cumulative benefit (2006–26) for federal and provincial governments from equivalent educational attainment and labour market outcomes for Indigenous people.

While direct investment to alleviate the burden of poverty must be part of the answer, other solutions also exist. There are ways to enable economic growth and better governance for Indigenous communities.

The wealth of natural resources and the jobs that go with development can be shared with far greater equity.

Entrepreneurial activity in Indigenous communities, already on the rise, can be cultivated.

First Nations can be supported in pursuing self-government, leading to greater electoral and financial accountability.

Indigenous communities can be empowered to take control of their destinies.

At a time when workforce replacement and skilled labour shortages occupy the attention of both business and government alike, the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the country struggles in poverty. Almost half (48%) of Indigenous people are under the age of 25.

The population is growing six times faster than that of the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous youth will be maturing and entering the workforce. As such, equipping

***Almost half (48%) of Indigenous people are under the age of 25.***

***The population is growing six times faster than that of the non-Indigenous population.***

***Indigenous youth will be maturing and entering the workforce.***

***As such, equipping them with the tools for success – or withholding those tools – will determine either the contribution or the costs associated with young Indigenous populations seeking work as adults.***

them with the tools for success — or withholding those tools — will determine either the contribution or the costs associated with young Indigenous populations seeking work as adults.



— photo: Toronto Star

Sustainable economic development requires improved educational outcomes and measures to increase market incomes. Improved, accessible, culturally-relevant education, more local employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and better infrastructure must be available to on-reserve families if poverty is to be ended for these children.

Adults in low-income status First Nation households have a woefully low level of education, with 60% lacking a high school diploma. As such, any programs to increase labour force participation will likely need to be paired with a substantial focus on on-the-job training both on an upfront and ongoing basis to overcome the barriers of low education levels.

Given the proximity of many reserves to resource extraction sites, particularly in the prairie provinces where First Nation child poverty is the highest, opportunities exist for better labour market integration as well as longer term revenue sharing agreements.

Impact-benefit agreements are becoming more common when resource extraction overlaps with First Nation communities. These agreements between private industry and First Nation governments often specify that a certain proportion of the workforce for new extraction sites will come from First Nation communities and can provide an opportunity for employment.

Unfortunately, it is all too common for there to be escape clauses whereby, if sufficiently well trained Indigenous workers are not found, non-Indigenous workers are substituted. Given that development is occurring now, in circumstances where education levels are so low, such agreements frequently provide few, if any jobs.

Impact benefit agreements usually also fail to address other concerns such as co-management to address environmental impact and remediation. They provide little long-term funding, lasting only a portion of the lifetime of a particular development project.

A longer term fix for chronic underfunding of social services on-reserve is through resource revenue sharing for those communities that consent to development where Indigenous rights or title are implicated. In contrast to impact-benefit agreements, resource revenue sharing involves federal, provincial and First Nations governments in cooperative agreements that can provide equity interests and other long term funding, enabling improved health care, education, housing and other social services.

The effects of resource sharing are long-term, and properly negotiated, they can provide “social license” to outside actors for resource extraction in First Nations territories.

Another area for focus is support to the welcome growth in Indigenous entrepreneurial endeavours. The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business says that, “According to the 2006 Census, there are more than 37,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit persons in Canada who have their own businesses, a significant increase of 85 percent since 1996.” Interestingly, women own over half of these businesses in whole or in part, a higher proportion than in the broader Canadian public.

***Tackling the underlying conditions that lead to multi-generational poverty certainly will require policy change, but to take that change from words on paper to lived reality requires non-Indigenous Canadians to join in this national project.***

They provide jobs to Indigenous workers with employers who understand the challenges facing those workers, as well as the opportunities such investment provides.



Along with direct investment in transfers, support for business development and resource sharing agreements, all of which can increase the level of funding available to address poverty among status First Nations children, there must be a new approach to governance and accountability that helps to make government transfers more effective.

***Existing accountability structures fail because those with authority pay no consequences for bad decisions.***

***Those who write the legislation, develop the policies, set the level of funding, and determine the administrative and accountability structures for First Nations are disconnected from the communities for whom they are making decisions.***

***Without personal or political consequences for decisions that impact the community, whether negatively or positively, the accountability of the federal government is extremely limited.***

***These facts have been a driving factor in decades of poor governance.***

of the federal government is extremely limited.

Similarly, without the authority over the decisions they administer, First Nations governments have limited accountability for the results of those decisions. The accountability mechanisms that are in place focus on command and control over spending authorities.

Reporting goes from First Nation governments to the federal government, leaving the citizens out of the accountability relationship. Limited information on results is collected, meaning that performance measurement and evaluation cannot be done effectively, which makes improvements difficult to identify and implement.

The net result of this dysfunctional accountability structure amplifies the negative consequences of the under-funding to programs and services discussed earlier.

To raise status First Nations children above the poverty line will require that federal, provincial, territorial and First Nation governments work together. Tackling the underlying conditions that lead to multi-generational poverty certainly will require policy change, but to take that change from words on paper to lived reality requires non-Indigenous Canadians to join in this national project.

***Thanks to David Macdonald, Daniel Wilson and the Centre for the Study of Policy Alternatives for its report on Child Poverty in Canada.***

Existing accountability structures fail because those with authority pay no consequences for bad decisions and gain no benefits from poor ones. Those who write the legislation, develop the policies, set the level of funding, and determine the administrative and accountability structures for First Nations are disconnected from the communities for whom they are making decisions. These facts have been a driving factor in decades of poor governance.

Without personal or political consequences for decisions that impact the community, whether negatively or positively, the accountability



## **Conclusion of the Report**

All children have basic rights, including the right to live free from poverty.

Their development can be thwarted by a collection of circumstances.

A hungry child won't learn much in school,  
and she won't stay there long enough to benefit  
if she has to work to help support her sick mother.

She has a right to her heritage and culture  
that will give her the foundation on which she can build her future.

While action on all child poverty is needed urgently,  
the mere existence of three distinct tiers of poverty should give impetus  
to focused action with regard to Indigenous child poverty  
and the poverty experienced by racialized and immigrant communities more broadly.

In Canada, Indigenous children are at greater risk than any others.

In the case of status First Nations children,  
at an elevated rate that makes their circumstance wholly unique.

There is a demonstrable link between Indigenous child poverty and government policies,  
policies that have failed.

Moreover, this situation is a denial of basic human rights for Indigenous children.

The risk to another generation of Indigenous children and to Canada as a whole is clear.

Direct investment is needed, but other solutions exist and merit pursuit.

Eliminating poverty among Indigenous children is a crucial step  
toward unlocking their potential and can be achieved.

To end child poverty in Canada  
and ensure that the rights of Indigenous children to life, education, health and opportunity,  
a holistic approach that strengthens all determinants of success must be taken.

This report is a first step in understanding  
some of these interconnected and interdependent issues.

It points toward concrete action that can and must be taken  
for the sake of the country and for the sake of the children.