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First Nations Leadership Council

INFORMATION BULLETIN

Introduction

All comments, feedback, and inquiries on these bulletins are welcome; contact information is provided in the column to the left. These reports are issued on the 15th day of each month.

2006 Federal Budget

The federal government announced its budget on May 2, 2006. Despite the Conservative Party platform of accountability and addressing the fiscal imbalance, the federal government did not live up to its obligations under the Kelowna agreement and did very little to address the poverty and poor socio-economic conditions of First Nations peoples and communities. The new government is proceeding with its own plan for aboriginal peoples, developed without consultation with First Nations; over the next two years, the new government plans to:

- Honour the residential schools agreement (\$2.2 billion)
- Improve educational, socio-economic conditions for Aboriginal women, children and families, and water supply and housing on reserve (\$450 million)
- Address pressures in off-reserve Aboriginal housing (\$300 million)
- Institute affordable housing in the North (\$300 million).

However, this budget provided a mere 20% of the funding committed in the Kelowna agreement, which included \$600 million for on-reserve housing, \$1.3 billion for health, and \$400 million for safe drinking water.

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is disappointed with this budget, and has sent letters to the Prime Minister, Finance Minister, and Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development calling for the Kelowna commitments to be upheld. The FNLC has also been lobbying opposition parties to support an amendment to the budget and uphold the honour of the Crown by supporting the Kelowna

agreement. The FNLC is also calling for:

- A First Ministers' Meeting on Aboriginal Issues to be convened to address First Nations-Crown relations, fiscal imbalances faced by First Nations governments, Aboriginal and treaty rights in Canada, and federal government responsibilities and legal obligations to provide services to First Nations peoples;
- First Nations to be fully represented in the federal/provincial/territorial Finance Ministers' meeting to be held in the spring to consult on the federal government's discussion paper, Restoring Fiscal Balance in Canada; and
- The full involvement and representation of Aboriginal peoples at the First Ministers' Meeting on the fiscal imbalance to be held in the fall.

On May 4, 2006, Premier Campbell also voiced his disappointment in the federal government, and vowed to work with the federal government, Leadership Council and other Aboriginal peoples to achieve the goals set out in Kelowna. The Premier's Ministerial Statement was unanimously supported by both sides of the Legislature, which subsequently passed a motion of support for the Kelowna agreement and Transformative Change Accord: "That this House unanimously recommend the federal government reaffirm its commitment to the Transformative Change Accord, a document signed by the federal government, the province of British Columbia and the BC First Nations Leadership Council and, further, to uphold the honour of the Crown by carrying through on the joint commitment reached by First Ministers and national Aboriginal leaders in November 2005 to close the gaps in education, housing, health and economic opportunity for Canada's aboriginal people within the next ten years."

A detailed information kit on this budget, including a form letter from First Nations to the federal government, has been sent to all First Nations in BC. The FNLC urges you to read through this information, and to publicly support an amendment to the federal budget in support of the Kelowna agreement.

Resolution (Litigation) Strategy

The provincial government has agreed to revisit its litigation strategy to be more respectful of, and consistent with, the New Relationship, and in particular to change its traditional “denial” approach. The FNLC has formed a core legal group which has drafted a paper, tabled with BC, setting out suggestions for improving approaches to the resolution of disputes between First Nations and the province.

As a first step, the FNLC will be organizing an education forum for provincial representatives, to explain the doctrine of terra nullius (“empty land”) and its continuing impact on current Crown policies and practices.

Transformative Change Accord

The FNLC is currently working with First Nations organizations and the provincial government to gather data to inform the identification of action areas, indicators and “early wins” (projects that could be fast-tracked for early implementation) under the Transformative Change Accord. Extensive consultations with BC First Nations later in the year will help to identify priorities, and shape the 10-year implementation strategy.

The federal government’s commitment to the Transformative Change Accord is unclear, and the FNLC continues to lobby Canada to uphold its obligations under this agreement.

Mountain Pine Beetle

On April 19-20, the second Mountain Pine Beetle forum was held in Prince George. The first day of the Forum was internal to First Nations; the second day was held jointly with the province and other delegates.

The Minister of Forests and Range, Rich Coleman, attended the Forum and committed a portion of the existing federal funds to First Nations, as well as allocated 20% of future federal funding to First Nations.

The Mountain Pine Beetle Working Group is currently preparing a workplan for the funds immediately available to First Nations, and is also working with the Ministry of Forests and Range to jointly draft a proposal to the federal government for additional funds to address the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic.

Children & Families

The introduction of legislation to enable the creation of Aboriginal Authorities has been postponed to allow for more meaningful consultations with Aboriginal peoples.

On April 21-22, 2006, an Aboriginal planning forum was held to discuss this postponement and next steps. Ms. Lesley du Toit, the new Deputy Minister for the Ministry for Children and Families (MCFD) attended the event and described her approach to the issues, and her perspectives on the situation in British Columbia, including:

- Respect must be the ultimate value of the Ministry;
- The heart of the Ministry is children; and
- Children belong to the community, not government.

A follow-up planning forum will be held on June 5, 2006.

On May 1, 2006, a meeting was hosted by the FNLC on recent reports issued on the child protection system in British Columbia. The meeting was attended by representatives of First Nations organizations, First Nations delegated agencies, and First Nations planning committees. The Hon. Ted Hughes presented his recent report, “BC Children and Youth Review: An Independent Review of BC’s Child Protection System”, Jane Morley, the Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia discussed the Director’s case review

into the death of the Nuu-chah-nulth child and systemic issues arising, and Terry Smith, BC Chief Coroner, spoke on the role of the Coroner’s office and the inquest into the death of the Nuu-chah-nulth child. It is hoped that these reports and discussions will inform the ongoing work in fully implementing First Nations’ authority over children and families.

On May 5, 2006, a Joint Aboriginal Management Committee (JAMC) meeting took place. Aboriginal Planning Committees provided an update on their work and stressed the need for more stable funding arrangements; the MCFD committed to look at 3-year funding commitments and other means for stabilizing funding for the Planning Committees. As it relates to the postponement of enabling legislation, all parties agreed that more consultation and discussion with First Nations is required in moving forward on fully implementing Aboriginal authority over child welfare.

MCFD has advertised for 100 new social workers; the Ministry is, in particular, interested in hiring qualified individuals of Aboriginal ancestry.

Other Notes

- As of May 24, Michael Wernick will be replacing Michael Horgan as the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The FNLC has invited the new Deputy Minister to meet with them here in BC.
- A joint New Relationship Progress Report prepared by the provincial government and the FNLC has been issued and mailed to all First Nations in BC.

Calendar of Events

- **June 7-8:** UBCIC Chiefs Council Meeting (Vancouver)
- **June 14-16:** First Nations Summit Meeting (Squamish Recreation Centre)
- **June 21:** National Aboriginal Day
- **July:** BCAFN Annual General Meeting (TBD)
- **July 11-13:** AFN Annual General Assembly (Vancouver)