



FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT

NEWS RELEASE

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First Nations Summit Comments on Provincial Budget

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver – The challenge facing the government in releasing its 2006/07 budget and related service plans today is in responding to the overwhelming social and economic disparity that exists between First Nations peoples and the rest of British Columbians, and how it would specifically deal with this reality on a government-wide basis.

“The devil is always in the details,” said Grand Chief Ed John, an executive member of the First Nations Summit.

“While the budget lists a number of government commitments to improving the social-economic circumstances of Aboriginal peoples, targeted resources to achieve this is not readily visible in the budget or in the service plans of many of the ministries,” added Grand Chief John.

In the lead up to the budget, the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations worked closely with the government to address the socio-economic gap that exists between First Nations and the rest of BC, with a number of strategic plans submitted in areas covering information technology, mountain pine beetle, health, and education.

Regional Aboriginal Authorities

In light of on-going child death reviews and investigations it is important that First Nations see an emphasis on children, particularly those in government care. This is especially important because 50% of all children-in-care are Aboriginal.

First Nations and other Aboriginal leaders have been meeting extensively with government officials to address this priority issue. For several years First Nations and Aboriginal leaders with MCFD officials have been developing plans to get five regional Aboriginal authorities up and running who will have the responsibility for Aboriginal children-in-care.

“The funding announcement of \$31 million to establish regional Aboriginal authorities is over a three year period,” said Grand Chief John.

“While this commitment is important, we need to ensure the funding is enough to effectively establish and implement the five regional authorities,” added Grand Chief John.

There are currently 23 Aboriginal agencies with delegated authority from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. While these agencies are delegated by MCFD, almost all of the funding – close to **\$44 million** per year – is provided by the federal government, with about half going to the Province and the other half going to the 23 agencies.

“In these provincial reviews and investigations then, the federal government needs to be directly involved,” said Grand Chief John.

“It is important for Aboriginal families and communities to exercise responsibilities for their children. Furthermore, since the 1960’s the Province has become deeply involved in First Nations child and families matters, generally considered a matter under federal jurisdiction,” said Grand Chief John.

“Now is the time for both Canada and B.C to work with First Nations to recognize First Nations’ responsibilities and work with First Nations communities and families to address important children and family issues. Support needs to be provided in the communities in order for them to find and develop necessary solutions. And it must be recognized that poverty and the number of children-in-care are directly related and need to be addressed in a serious way,” said Grand Chief John.

On-going treaty negotiations

“Despite ongoing treaty negotiations at 44 separate tables and general efforts to initiate a new relationship between First Nations and the Province, the certainty which industry and business need out on the land remains elusive, “ said Grand Chief John. “Progress in negotiations has been very slow.”

“The ‘*respect, recognition and accommodation of Aboriginal title and rights*’ as stated in the Premier’s service plan is an important step, “said Grand Chief John. “However, this needs to be reflected in the Province’s treaty negotiation mandate.”

Budget Measures

- \$31 million over three years to implement regional Aboriginal authorities
- a portion of \$173 million to fund more culturally-appropriate services for Aboriginal children and families
- \$17 million over 2 years for computer technology, access and training
- \$30 million to coastal First Nations for conservation and economic development opportunities
- Tapping into the skills and training potential of First Nations communities where *rates of unemployment and underemployment are higher in Aboriginal communities* than non-Aboriginal communities
- grants up to \$10,000 for community and First Nations organizations to fight crystal meth at a grassroots level
- moving forward with last year’s budgeted \$100 million Trust Fund, with legislation to be introduced in the spring session
- Support for the New Relationship and the Transformative Change Accord that was signed between Canada, BC and BC First Nations last November in Kelowna at the First Ministers Meeting

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in the treaty negotiation process in British Columbia. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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