

From Al Garman

DAVIS INLET

What can Health Canada bring to the table at the meeting on November 26?

1. Atlantic Region has already promised to provide \$300,000 against projects the community wants to (or likely in some cases already has) run within the context of its overall "strategic plan". Three Chiefs (this year) have been asked to submit proposals outlining what they intend to do and how they will meet our accountability requirements. The proposals are still awaited.
2. Atlantic Region can likely reallocate another \$300,000 in total to Labrador issues and still end up with a nil variance at year-end. Doing so, however, would likely generate a backlash from First Nations in N.S. and N.B. in particular, for reasons of inequity, and would leave the Region with no cushion for dealing with the situation in Nain, Labrador, an Inuit community, which is at least as badly positioned as Sheshatshiu.
3. The least we can expect Davis Inlet to demand from Health Canada is to fund a year-round family-oriented treatment program from a site like Border Beacon. The Band already owns the facility though its use is problematic because, as a former U.S. Forces base, it is thought that parts of the property were used to store PCBs and other pollutants. Nevertheless, if this is the chosen course, the cost for year-round programming could easily be \$2 million p.a. Much of this would be for the exorbitantly high cost of transportation from Davis Inlet to Border Beacon.
4. It is fairly certain that Davis Inlet will use this occasion to demand much more than just the treatment program. If they model their request after the formal request from Sheshatshiu to the Ministers of DIAND and HC and the Premier of Newfoundland, and there is no reason to expect they won't since Peter Penashue is involved in this meeting, then they could also ask for such things as:
 - a round-the-clock detox facility and program
 - recreation programs and infrastructure
 - crisis coordination and relief for program staff
 - an Innu heritage and culture program/facility
 - a restorative justice programWithout more information it is not possible to estimate the cost of such endeavours but, without doubt, it would run into the millions.
5. To insist that the 80 children be placed in FNIHB facilities would not be less expensive. Assuming that sufficient placements could be found (highly unlikely given that a regional survey yielded a total of 16 available beds) the cost of transportation of the children and a minimal number of escorts and interpreters would likely match the cost of using Border Beacon.

6. The key to determining what would be a reasonable course of action here is to ask whether the Innu themselves are committed to healing. If they are, then pouring mega-bucks into the community is not the necessary answer. In the case of Alkali Lake, a community that was in dire straits because of addictions but managed to pull itself together, it didn't happen because of tremendous government funding. It happened because of the determination of a nucleus of dedicated people to make it happen. In my view, the realistic answer to this question is no, the community is not committed to healing itself. In the Region we hear stories from community people about Simeon bringing alcohol into Davis Inlet to buy votes for his election; about counsellors going into the country for treatment programs who also act as bootleggers; and certainly about parents who are drunk night after night so that their children are afraid to go home and consequently get drawn into the gas-sniffing lifestyle. If the added political dimension were not hanging around this issue like an albatross I would argue strenuously that we should continue along the path the Region is already pursuing, that is, support the Innu on a gradual basis in implementing the various aspects of their strategic approach. Because of the political dimension and the media coverage this will undoubtedly not be sufficient.
7. Having survived similar crises in Davis Inlet in 92/93 and Big Cove in 93/94 I expect that, as a bottom line, Health Canada will be obliged to pay in the order of \$2 - \$3 million over the next 24 months to address the issues in Davis Inlet.