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cc:

Subject: Chretien pledges aid for Innu *Federal*, provinci

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Chretien pledges aid for Innu *Federal*, provinci

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BYLINE: DANIEL LEBLANC
CLASS: National News
SOURCE: STAFF CP
EDITION: Metro DATELINE: SHAWINIGA

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HEAD: Chretien pledges aid for Innu
HEAD: *Federal*, provincial leaders promise
HEAD: treatment centre for solvent abusers
HEAD: in remote locations

DANIEL LEBLANC

With a report from Canadian Press

SHAWINIGAN, QUE. The Innu leadership garnered another string of promises for its gasoline-sniffing youth yesterday and is now relying on the Canadian and the Newfoundland governments to come through.

"Our youth are in the hands of the Prime *Minister* now," said Luke Rich after a meeting with Jean Chretien. "I have stated to him that there have been so many broken promises, I hope his word is good enough for us."

The problems with gasoline-sniffing in Innu communities were widely publicized in the early 1990s, but an effective solution has yet to be

implemented. Some youngsters were sent to treatment centres in Western Canada in the past, but many returned to their addictions afterwards.

Yesterday, federal Industry *Minister* Brian Tobin and Newfoundland Premier Beaton Tulk promised to build a detoxification centre in Labrador for the solvent abusers. They said the centre would serve the remote communities of Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu, where youngsters recently were filmed sucking gasoline fumes from plastic bags.

Mr. Tobin said he was unsure how much the treatment centre would cost, but that his government's commitment was firm. Mr. Tobin also "confirmed" that the federal government was willing to include the Innu under the Indian Act, which would, among other things, give them the power to send children to treatment centres.

Still, Mr. Chretien warned the Innu not to expect a miracle.

"Very often it's not only money. You know the situation is there since a long time and it's very difficult to cure it. It's a problem of alcoholism and drugs and so on. It's a human tragedy and we're doing our best to help them," he said at a news conference.

On the last day of the campaign, Mr. Chretien used the issue to highlight the differences between his party's plan and the tax-cutting platform of the Canadian Alliance.

"Even in the best country in the world, we have some problems. I recognize that. A big part of the debate during the campaign was that, should we just think about giving tax breaks to the rich and to the big corporations, and eventually the market forces will solve all that problem. It's not true," Mr. Chretien said.

The native leaders refused to say whether they believed he was politicizing a human tragedy.

Davis Inlet Chief Simeon Tshakapesh is determined to get medical treatment for those children in Davis Inlet who are substance abusers. Of the 154 young people between the ages of 9 and 20, about 80 are chronically addicted to sniffing gasoline.

Mr. Tshakapesh said young people are sniffing gas because of the decrepit housing and poor living conditions in the isolated settlement.

The federal government has promised to move the settlement 15 kilometres away to a site on the mainland and build a new community with modern amenities, but the move has been delayed.

About 20 of the children from the community of Sheshatshiu are currently locked in a military barracks in Goose Bay receiving treatment.

Speaking through an interpreter, 18-year-old Nympha Rich said she did not know why she started sniffing gasoline. She said she will be able

to stop in a new environment.

"The reason I'm going to be able to stop is because my parents stopped drinking and if we have a good home, a real good home, with water and where I could take a shower."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Sheshatshiu; Davis Inlet

SUBJECT TERM: illegal drugs; gasoline; political; *health*
care; innu indians

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