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Subject: Innu to get their own detox centre for gas sniffer

fyi.

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### Innu to get their own detox centre for gas sniffer

ITEM

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HEADLINE: Innu to get their own detox centre for gas sniffers:  
Chretien promises money to help end `human tragedy'

Prime Minister Jean Chretien pointed Sunday to the ``human tragedy'' in Labrador, where many Innu children are addicted to sniffing gasoline, to demonstrate the wisdom of investing in social programs rather than simply slashing taxes.

The day before the federal election, Chretien met with a small Innu delegation from Davis Inlet while his industry minister promised the government would put up money for a detoxification centre in Labrador to help Innu families and their children.

Brian Tobin joined Newfoundland Premier Beaton Tulk to jointly promise funding for the centre, which would serve the remote communities of Sheshatshiu and Davis Inlet.

Tobin, who resigned as Newfoundland premier to re-enter federal politics shortly before the election call, said he was unsure how much the treatment centre would cost, but it would be ``millions'' of dollars.

Television newscasts have been carrying images of intoxicated Innu

youths staggering around as they sniff bags filled with gasoline.

``Many of these families are dysfunctional,'' said Tobin. ``You need not just children in treatment but entire families in treatment.''

Tobin also said he had ``confirmed'' that the federal government was now willing to include the Innu under the Indian Act.

The Innu have sought to be included in the act so they would be eligible for programs available to status Indians, such as tax exemptions and subsidized food.

The government, which chose the final day of the campaign to make the announcement, put a political spin on the tragic situation.

Throughout the election campaign, Chretien has touted the Liberals' ``balanced approach'' to divvying up budget surpluses, devoting half to new investments in social and economic development programs and half to debt and tax reduction. He has contrasted that with the ``extreme'' agenda of the Canadian Alliance, which advocates less spending, less government intervention and much steeper tax cuts.

On Sunday, he said the gas-sniffing crisis among Innu children proves his point.

The Innu plight is ``a very sad situation,'' Chretien told reporters.

``I said during the campaign that we need an approach, we need money for social problems. This is an example that we still have some very difficult social problems in the land. And that type of problem will never be resolved by the market forces. They need government intervention.''

An Innu delegation, including an 18-year-old solvent addict, had flown to the prime minister's riding to impress upon him the seriousness of the gas-sniffing epidemic that is destroying the lives of the community's children.

Chretien met with the delegation for about 45 minutes at his private home in Lac des Piles, just outside Shawinigan.

Simeon Tshakapesh, chief of Davis Inlet, told reporters the meeting was ``productive.''

``The prime minister of Canada, he's aware of our crisis and he gave us his personal assurance that he will act as soon as possible,'' he said.

Chretien, who has repeatedly reminded audiences throughout the campaign that the United Nations has for seven straight years rated Canada as the best country in the world in which to live,

acknowledged that the Innu have not benefitted from the booming economy.

''Even in the best country in the world we have some problems. I recognize that. And a big part of the debate during this 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 our problems? It's not true.''

Chretien acknowledged the federal government has already poured millions into trying to resolve the poverty and substance abuse among the Innu.

But he said such deep-rooted problems will never be resolved quickly.

An aide to Chretien said it was a ''very moving'' meeting in which the Innu told the prime minister some of their own personal stories about how gas-sniffing is ruining their families. Other than promise to speak to his health and Indian affairs ministers, as well as to his senior

Newfoundland minister, Tobin, to see what could be done, the aide said Chretien made no specific promises.

In Goose Bay on Sunday, Tobin has been meeting with leaders of the Innu community of Sheshatshiu, which is also experiencing a gas-sniffing crisis among its children.

Tshakapesh said the delegation presented Chretien with a nine-point plan aimed at ameliorating the problem in Davis Inlet. **Among other things, the plan calls on the federal government to give the band status under the Indian Act and self-government powers, as well as to set up addiction rehabilitation and family counselling centres in the community. It also calls on the government to accelerate the relocation of the Innu band from Davis Inlet, a remote island community to which they were forcibly moved in the 1960s, to mainland Labrador.**

The relocation was supposed to take place this fall but has fallen behind schedule and is now not expected to happen until 2002.

Tshakapesh said kids are living in poverty in unsafe, dilapidated houses and, until the community is relocated, he doubted the substance abuse will stop.

In the past, kids from Davis Inlet have been sent to detoxification clinics in Alberta. But Mark Nui, a former chief, said the community needs a permanent clinic so that people can get long-term help.

Nympha Rich, an 18-year-old addict, told reporters, through Tshakapesh, that she will stop sniffing gas if she can get treatment, if her parents stop drinking and ''if we have a good

home, a real good home where the water is, where I could take a shower.''

Davis Inlet has a population of 604, half of whom are under the age of 19. A recent survey found that 91 per cent of those between the ages of 10 and 19 have abused solvents.

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: CP / Nympha Rich, a gasoline sniffer from Davis Inlet, pauses while speaking to the media after meeting with Prime Minister Jean Chretien on Sunday.; Map: Journal Stock / (Map of Newfoundland)

SOURCE Southam Newspapers

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