

Mushuau Innu Band Council



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February 25, 1993

Mr. Ross Reid, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to Tom Siddon
218 Confederation Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Via fax: 613 992-7342

Dear Mr. Reid:

In reply to your letter of February 25, 1993, the Mushuau Innu Council is very disappointed with the Federal Government's response to our budget. Our community has been underfunded for years and unable to adequately respond to the needs in the community. Our community is rocked by suicide attempts, gas-sniffing, health problems and other symptoms of cultural breakdown. The Canadian public becomes aware of the totally unacceptable situation in our community and the critical human needs, and even the International community is shocked. The Federal Government states publicly its commitment to ensure that renewal and healing will take place, and yet the same approach continues to be used.

The extra amount approved will not cover all the extra costs we have already incurred, let alone get us to the end of March. We are very concerned that the Federal government will try to continue this approach in the next few years as we try to achieve healing and renewal, effectively limiting our chance of succeeding.

We also find the response paternalistic. You tell us what items you will fund, trying to exercise control where clearly much of the social breakdown is due to the fact that so much control has been taken away from us.

You offer the services of your officials to review the current deficit and its underlying causes (while at the same time not providing any funding for the audit). I decline the offer as we know full well why we have a deficit. The funding provided to the council has always been far from adequate. I suggest that instead the officials review our past funding against our needs, against the funding provided to other aboriginal communities, and they will see that the budget deficits are due in a large part to the fact that we do not have enough resources.

We recognize the need for administrative and financial consultants, and that this can help make sure that what funding we do receive is used most effectively, and we intend to get this simply to

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mismanagement or poor planning is not acceptable. If the Federal government were to provide us the funds it is presently spending to manage the crisis we would certainly be in a good position.

You state that the Federal government will be advancing \$100,000, subject to agreement being reached and in the next fiscal year, to develop a comprehensive community development plan. I am not sure what you mean by this. If you mean the plan to abandon the present settlement and to create an Innu community, then we suggest that this figure is without any basis. It would be very poor planning indeed to spend \$100,000 to develop a plan for a community that would cost over 100 times that amount, especially if the government is serious about making sure that cultural breakdown, suicide and substance abuse are not merely relocated. Again, it is paternalistic to state what level you will fund without us having prepared a budget and set out our needs. We have started developing a budget, and it is clear that what you are proposing would be unacceptable. Since it is so much less than what would be needed (and surely your officials can appreciate that), it occurs to me that what you mean by this budget amount must be the funding necessary to plan the process that will be used, develop budgets, decide what communities to visit and that separate funding will be provided once we have defined the process and our requirements. We therefore request your clarification on what you mean by "develop a comprehensive community development plan" and how the government came up with \$100,000 as suitable funding.

The approval of \$50,000 for "professional and other assistance" would seriously limit the ability of Innu Nation and the Assembly of First Nations to provide us the assistance that we need, and to allow us to benefit from their expertise and in the case of the AFN, experience gained from other communities in crisis.

The government recognizes the immediate infrastructure needs, but the funding for this item will not allow us to do both assessments and to undertake the most urgent repairs.

An analysis of the Federal government's offer shows that in effect, we are being funded \$140,000 to deal with a payroll of almost \$70,000; a debt of \$80,000; core funding needs of \$55,000; community service supplies of \$10,000; and that we cannot plan for outpost programs. Perhaps the government wants to tell the council which staff it wants to be cut from payroll?

The community is in dire circumstances. Council needs to begin the healing and renewal process, we have to make sure our tribal police are able to carry out their duties and help the youth, we have to plan for the creation of an Innu community, we have to assess what immediate actions can be taken -- we are overwhelmed by the amount of work to be done, the critical needs to be met. So we are forced to accept your funding approval of \$155,000 despite its inadequacy. We will decide, however, how those funds are to be allocated amongst our pressing needs.

At the same time, we request that two commitments from the Federal government. The first is that the government reconsider its response and that additional funds be provided before the end of March. The second is a commitment that we will not be faced with the same

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paternalistic and inadequate response to other budgets that we will be submitting shortly. We need to see that the government's support for the seven point plan, community healing and renewal is more than words.

Nin,

Katie Rich

Chief Katie Rich

cc. Peter Penashue, Iuna Nation
Ovids Merareedi, Assembly of First Nations
Ed Roberts, Minister of Justice