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March 2, 2004

Andy Mitchell
Minister, Indian and Northern Affairs
House of Commons
PO Box: Room 707 West Block
OTTAWA, ONTARIO
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By Fax: (613) 991-2147

RE: Innu Healing Strategy

Two years ago the federal Cabinet adopted a Healing Strategy for the Innu of Labrador proposed by officials from Indian & Northern Affairs and Health Canada. Unfortunately Innu were not consulted during the development of this strategy and were only vaguely aware of the approach and content of the initiative until an independent evaluation of the strategy was undertaken in 2003 by the IER Group. While prior to the evaluation we were aware that funds had been secured for a variety of purposes, particularly for establishment of positions and offices for federal staff to carry it out, we did not hear of the scope or allocation of funds until the consultant described them.

We now know that Cabinet had made a five year commitment to Innu healing with the provision that a two year review be undertaken. Perhaps the singlemost important recommendation of the IER review was that Innu become true partners in any future healing initiatives. This led to opportunities to provide input into development of the Memorandum to Cabinet (MC) that is intended to fulfil the two year review requirement. Unfortunately, the MC was first scheduled to go to Cabinet in early fall 2003, then delayed to late fall, then further delayed to early in 2004. Now that the end of the fiscal year is upon us, and we are advised that the MC may not be passed before fiscal year end and therefore, officials are claiming that there is no authority for continuing with any healing measures and that all healing initiatives must cease as of March 31st, 2004.

We fundamentally disagree with the position that officials have taken and believe that authority does exist within current authorities of the department and with specific Innu TB minutes to continue funding. However, we do not control the funding - your officials do and therefore I am preparing to lay off a wide range of staff, cancel various services, and provide notice to both the

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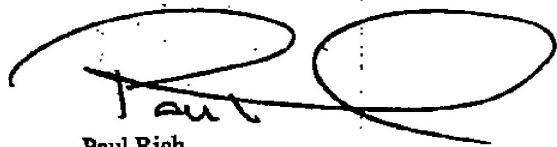
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provincial and federal governments of discontinuance of services at the school, and in additions, treatment and capacity fields. This will put in jeopardy the successes we have had with healing. I presume that those hired by the federal government under the Strategy are facing similar lay-offs and budget cancellations. Surely there must be a way that both your staff and ours can continue their valuable work while the long awaited paper process is completed.

What is needed is your intervention to ensure that funding is available to bridge these programs until there is an approved MC with new funding levels and allocations. It is imperative that Innu Healing be taken seriously by the federal government and that action be taken to avoid the disastrous consequences that inaction will bring.

I appreciated the opportunity of meeting with you recently and regret that the actions of your officials have forced me to seek your personal intervention at this early date in your tenure.



Paul Rich
Chief

cc. Peter Penashue President of the Innu Nation