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Indian Association of Alberta - Meeting
With (Orange) June 17, 1981

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Key Document

Mr. Eugene Steinhauer,
President,
Indian Association of Alberta,
Room 202, Kingsway Court,
11710 Kingsway Avenue,
Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Mr. Steinhauer:

On behalf of the Premier and the Caucus Committee on Native Affairs, I would like to thank the Chiefs of Alberta and your Association for their presentations on many important matters on June 17 at Government House.

In particular, I was pleased by the number of Chiefs, who in spite of other pressures and long distances, were able to attend personally.

The Alberta Government was appreciative of the opportunity to receive their views on behalf of the Indian people and I believe it would be agreed that the meeting was productive in that some better understanding of different programs was achieved in certain areas.

In order to ensure that these understandings are clear, I would like to outline briefly, from our perspective, the major points of discussion and the commitments which were made during the meeting.

I. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Chiefs and the Association raised concerns in relation to the report of the Joint Indian-Caucus Committee on Economic Development, and proposed that the Committee be reconvened and directed to re-examine the means by which the Alberta Government could support Indian economic development within the context of a comprehensive development framework.

In response, the Premier stated that, although the Alberta Government was prepared to help in a supportive way, it must recognize the special obligations and responsibilities of the Federal Government. Within this context, the Government agreed to the proposal to re-establish the Joint Committee, but with certain qualifications.

First, it was suggested that the Committee be directed to submit its report within six months, following which the Chiefs and Caucus would meet again, on a somewhat smaller basis, to determine areas of agreement and common ground.

Secondly, the Chiefs and Association were advised that the Government would not be prepared to grant any large amounts of public funds to a special group, especially one enjoying large resource revenues and a special tax position.

Thirdly, the question of the approach to an economic development package was raised. Basically, the Joint Committee could concentrate on initiatives which could be accomplished relatively quickly or it could attempt to deal with a more comprehensive framework for subsequent action. The Government prefers the Committee study initiatives that can be realized in the immediate term. The need to address the diversity of economic opportunities throughout the Province was recognized and it was suggested that these might better be dealt with on a regional basis.

Finally, it was the position of the Government that any approach would need to reflect a mix, involving modifications and expansion of existing programs as well as consideration of new ones.

Commitments:

1. The Government agreed to the proposal to reconvene the Joint Indian-Caucus Committee on Economic Development; the Committee to submit its report within six months.

2. The Government agreed to consider means by which loans could be secured on Reserve in a manner which would protect the integrity of Indian lands.

3. The Government indicated its willingness to discuss further the infrastructure needs of Indian communities.

II. CONSTITUTION

In discussing matters related to the constitution, I believe we were in agreement on our opposition to the process of unilateral amendment and patriation, although perhaps for different reasons.

In response to the presentation by the Chiefs and the Association, the Government very clearly stated it would support the Indian people of Alberta in ensuring that existing Treaty rights were not lost or diminished in the process of constitutional amendment, but rather that these special rights were protected.

The Government also stated, however, that it would not be able to support the Chiefs and Association in their proposals for Indian Government if these proposals involved their acquiring additional or expanded rights beyond those granted by existing treaties or agreements.

In regard to these proposals, the Minister of Federal and Interprovincial Affairs did indicate that he would appreciate an opportunity to discuss the matter further.

Commitment:

4. The Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs indicated his willingness to discuss further the issue of Indian Government.

III. HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING

The Chiefs and Association presented a number of concerns regarding the effects of Provincial legislation and regulations on Treaty rights related to hunting, trapping and fishing. The Minister of Public Lands and Wildlife, who outlined a number of recent Government initiatives at the time, has undertaken to review and respond to the various concerns which were presented.

Commitment:

5. The Minister of Public Lands and Wildlife will review and respond to the concerns raised regarding hunting, trapping and fishing.

IV. ROADS

Presentations were made by several individual Bands related to roads. In particular, these included the issue of Highway 509 from Standoff to Lethbridge and the old Highway 2 at Sucker Creek and Driftpile.

Also, concern was expressed by the Chiefs and Association in regard to the Government's policy requiring clear title prior to construction of roads on Reserve and to general problems of maintenance and the enforcement of Band by-laws.

In regard to the individual problems raised, the Minister of Transportation undertook to respond immediately to the specific requests. He also noted that, although the Government policy was to provide fencing only in those cases where fencing had existed prior to road construction, he was prepared to negotiate in special cases.

The Minister of Transportation informed the Chiefs and Association that the Government was proceeding in 1981 with the construction and improvement of a number of access roads to Reserves as part of a $10,000,000 program.

Noting both the importance of roads in terms of mobility and economic development and the desire of the Indian people to protect the integrity of their lands, the Premier indicated that the Government would be willing to reconsider its policy with respect to secondary roads, and the need for the Province to acquire clear title.

Finally, it was agreed that, in response to the request of Chief Nelson Small Legs of the Peigan Band, that each Band would deal directly with the Government, with the Association providing support as necessary.

Commitments:

6. The Minister of Transportation undertook to respond immediately to specific concerns such as Highway 509 from Standoff to Lethbridge and Highway 2 at Sucker Creek and Driftpile.

7. The Minister of Transportation indicated a willingness to negotiate, in particular instances, the provision of fencing following road construction.

8. The Government undertook to review its policy requiring clear title prior to the construction of secondary roads on reserves.

V. INDIAN VETERANS

In regard to the presentation concerning the problems of Indian Veterans, particularly in dealing with the Federal Departments of Veteran's Affairs and Indian and Northern Affairs, the Chiefs and Association were advised that this was a matter clearly within Federal jurisdiction.

The Government did indicate, however, that the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs and I would be willing to meet with the Indian Veterans Group to obtain further background to the problems and that we would be willing to draft a letter presenting the case to the Federal Government.

Commitment:

9. The Government indicated that the Ministers of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs and Native Affairs would be willing to meet with the Association and the Indian Veterans Group and write to the Federal Government on their findings.

VI. EDUCATION

Concern about the lack of opportunities for Indian people to participate effectively in the operations of the Northland School Division was expressed during our meeting. The proposal presented by the Chiefs and the Association was that an independent task force be established to make recommendations upon measures which would enable more effective participation at the Band level.

The Minister of Education indicated his concern that the work of the Ministerial Investigating Committee not be duplicated, since it had been asked to address this particular issue. He did state, however, that he would be willing to entertain recommendations regarding the manner in which it might proceed.

Commitment:

10. The Minister of Education undertook to discuss the issue of Indian participation within the Northlands School System with the Chiefs and Councils of the affected Bands, and the Indian Association if interested.

VII. JUSTICE

The Government was advised that the Indian Association had completed an initial study examining the justice system on Reserves and its effects on Indian people. The proposal they presented requested $98,000 to undertake a second phase of this study and fund a conference at which the results would be discussed.

In response, the Attorney General indicated that he would like the opportunity to review both the completed report and the Phase II proposal and to discuss these in relation to any problems which might be arising in the implentation of the Kirby IV recommendations.

Commitment:

11. The Attorney General undertook to meet within a month with a small group representing the Chiefs and Association to discuss matters related to the Indian Justice proposal.

VIII. ALCOHOLISM PROGRAMMING

Some discussion took place in relation to the Government's commitment of more than $6,000,000 for the construction of facilities for Nechi/Poundmaker and the Bonnyville Rehabilitation Centre. In this regard, the Minister of Social Services and Community Health noted that the Government's commitment concerning new facilities for Nechi/Poundmaker was in direct response to presentations by Chiefs and the Association at previous meetings.

Commitment:

12. The Minister of Social Services and Community Health indicated the Government's willingness to continue to work with the Chiefs and Association on matters related to alcoholism programming.

IX. OTHER MATTERS

In addition to these subjects, I am aware that there are other matters which we were not able either discuss or to provide a response to in the time available. In particular, I am referring to the presentation by the Frog Lake Band and the written briefs dealing with child welfare, extension of services and equity participation. In order that these matters might be addressed, I will undertake to ensure that they are brought to the attention of the appropriate Ministers and that a response is provided.

I believe that this summary accurately reflects our understanding of the more significant discussion which took place during the July 17, 1981 meeting. On behalf of my Caucus colleagues, I would like again to thank the Chiefs and the Indian Association for their presentations. I believe that we have made some significant progress during the past year and would hope that we will be able to build on that progress in the year ahead.

Sincerely yours,

Don McCrimmon

Don McCrimmon,
Minister Responsible for
Native Affairs.

cc: Premier P. Lougheed
Chiefs of Alberta
Caucus Committee on Native Affairs