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PRINCIPAL(S)/PRINCIPAUX:

Robert Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Stephen Owen, Secretary of State, Western Economic Diversification and Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Deborah Jeffrey, President of the Tsimshian Nation of British Columbia and Co-Chair of the Working Group on Education

Corinne Montplaisance-Jetté, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Concordia University in Montreal and Co-Chair of the Working Group on Education

SUBJECT/SUJET:

News Conference To Announce Initiatives in First Nations Education

Moderator: Bonjour, good morning. Bienvenus à l'amphithéâtre national de la presse. This morning we have with us Minister Robert Nault from Indian Affairs and Northern Development. We have Secretary of State Stephen Own and then we have to my right Deborah Jeffrey and we have to my extreme right over there Miss Corinne Montplaisance-Jetté. I believe Minister Nault and Mr. Owen have a short presentation of about two minutes. Actually everybody has a short presentation of about two minutes and then I'll take questions from the floor. Je demanderais à tout le monde s'il vous plaît de fermer vos téléphones cellulaires, please turn off your cell phones. Minister Nault?

**Robert Nault:** Thank you very much and good morning. The government as you know has moved concretely in the last few days to meet key throne speech commitments to Aboriginal people. Improving education is an important part of that effort. First Nations and Inuit parents want the same things for their children as other parents, the best education they can get so that their children will have the best shot at success that they can get. Any Canadian who has children can identify with this point of view. The reason we're all here today is that I'm announcing the creation of a national working group on education. Its overall mandate is clear, to encourage excellence in classrooms for First Nations students. With me are the co-chairs, Corinne Montplaisance-Jetté and Deborah Jeffrey. They are First Nations people who have solid credentials in the field of education and I have every confidence that they and the panel will provide outstanding guidance. This group will work directly with the Secretary of State Stephen Owen over the next several months as we work in partnership with First Nations to improve education achievements. They will look at existing research on

recruitment, retention and training of teachers as well as at education standards, jurisdiction, curriculum, language and culture, parental involvement and institutional capacity. We are committed to working with First Nations to ensure that youth enjoy the same access to education and opportunity as any other child in Canada. Youth do better in school when their parents have the opportunity to become involved in a meaningful way in their education both at home and in the classroom. This will be another area where the working group could put forward findings from research leading to action. They will also examine how curriculum can be adapted to reflect the unique culture, history and heritage of First Nations potentially for the benefit not only of First Nations students but for all Canadian students. As we can remember from our own school days, learning is about a lot more than academics. School helps children learn about community and their place in it. Good schools build a sense of belonging that is important to healthy youth and development. Across Canada many community based efforts in First Nation education are beginning to pay off. Today there are more than 30,000 Aboriginal university graduates and 27,000 First Nations and Inuit currently enrolled in college and universities across Canada. They are the best educated generation of First Nations and Inuit people ever. They are comfortable with new and changing technologies and they are well equipped to make their way in the knowledge based economy. They will become teachers, administrators and leaders, maybe even politicians. They will fill these highly skilled occupations and they will form the basis of an emerging Aboriginal business class. But as you've heard me say before we can do better and the national working group on education will help us get there. First Nations and Inuit students still do not graduate at the same rate as other Canadians, nor do they attend post-secondary education at the same rate as other Canadians and they require more access to special needs programs. With that in mind, the Government of Canada announced last December an investment of 185 million in support of the well-being of First Nation children. However we need to ensure that First Nations and Inuit children receive from the education system the skills they need to take their place in Canadian society and the economy. The national working group on education is a concrete example of the Government of Canada's renewed commitment to supporting strong self-sufficient First Nations and Inuit communities. I look forward to working with the national working group on education to improve First Nations and Inuit education. I urge First Nations and Inuit parents and educators in particular to work with this panel of experts and I offer my thanks to the co-chairs and to the members of the national working group on education for accepting this task. I will now ask my colleague the Honourable Stephen Owen who has a very long title, he's the Secretary of State for Western Economic Diversification and IAND to say a few words and then we'll follow that of course with our co-chairs and we'll take some questions from the media.

Stephen?

**Stephen Owen:** Thank you Minister. Often the degree of influence in Ottawa is in adverse proportions of the length of your title I find but one of the responsibilities I'm immensely pleased to be involved with is to work with this national working group on education for Aboriginal people. The education system I think we all understand in our own lives and for our own children and we hope for the future is intimately connected

with every other strand of life. We can have the best education system in the world but if children are not getting enough sleep because of disturbance in the home or come to school without being properly fed or are suffering from some sort of abuse or distress in their lives than the best education system in the world will not help them to succeed. So, as we look at education for Aboriginal people in this country we have to see it as intimately connected with all other aspects of healthy fulfilled lives in a community and in the self-determination that Aboriginal people are working so hard to achieve. Now, education as well just can't be seen as elementary and secondary school. Education of children must, and people must go on throughout their lives from early childhood opportunities to intimate relationships between parents and the schooling system, through of course elementary and secondary school on into post-secondary opportunities, apprenticeships, training and in fact life long learning and this is ever more important today with increasing technology as well as the opportunities that brings. We also when we look at Aboriginal education across this country have to take into account the very complex jurisdictional dynamics, the federal government responsibilities for on reserve education, the responsibilities of the territories through transfer agreements from the federal government, the relationship between provincial educational authorities and off reserve education with complex series of types of different local education agreements. So we're looking at something that's immensely complex but we're also looking at something that's immensely important. The outcomes as Minister Nault has mentioned for Aboriginal children going through the different schooling systems is not as good as it should be despite the great increases in positive outcomes that have occurred and are occurring. There's another aspect to this which this working group and this government are working, will work diligently to achieve. If we think of the next 15 to 20 years there will be almost half a million Aboriginal children coming into the workforce. Now looked at from one point of view that's a tremendous challenge, how on earth can a country like Canada provide all of those jobs. Well if we look at the other way around, we have a renewal challenge in this country. Many of our professions and skills and trades are looking for, are to be under-employed over the next two decades. So if we can ensure that First Nations children have the maximum benefit from successful educational outcomes to break through that secondary school barrier, to go into post-secondary institutions, to become professionals and highly trained technicians and to work in all of the opportunities that are going to become available and we as a Canadian society need to fill, there is a wonderful coincidence of opportunity in this country and it's of course the right thing to do and this is about the kids. Now, we've done a lot of work across this country in different jurisdictions, in First Nations communities on the educational challenge. There have been dozens of studies which have indicated the problems, that have suggested solutions and many of the people on this very expert panel of Aboriginal educators from across the country have been part of those studies. The time is not for more in-depth study, the time is for action and that's what this national working group is going to achieve. From the perspective of educators from across the country, it will pull together the studies that have been done, identify perhaps some gaps in the research and fill them but most of all from a highly realistic expert perspective from across the country to help us move forward to action. Minister Nault has mentioned that the timeframe is short and that's because the need is great and immediate and so this will be a period over a period of months than a period

of years to pull together the work that's been done and to make solid recommendations for action drawing on work of the AFN for instance whose education committee has done very in-depth work in this field and the many studies that have been done across the country. So, Corinne Montplaisance-Jetté and Deborah Jeffrey coming from central Canada and western Canada and their colleagues that span the country and the north will bring to us I think as a country, as First Nations and Inuit communities but most of all to us as Canadians and as people the promise that a solid education linked to strong communities and linking on to real well based occupational opportunities for the future, we hope we can bring this together quickly and get working further on the work that needs to be done. Thank you.

**Deborah Jeffrey:** Good morning. My name is Deborah Jeffrey. I'm President of the Simshan Nation, one of the largest nations in British Columbia and also co-chair of the working group on education. Meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners is a long standing issue that must be addressed. Our working group, comprised of educators from across the country, will develop and action oriented strategy aimed at improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal learners. Much of the work will be based on previous studies and recommendations. Positive change in the education of Aboriginal children can only come about through the full participation and partnership with Aboriginal parents, communities and educational institutions. The summary of our work will be presented to First Nations people and communities. Aboriginal people are integral to the social fabric of this country. We are the founding nations of Canada and we need to begin to educate Canadians about Aboriginal people in order to foster respectful and inclusive relationships. Educational institutions can play a pivotal role in transforming the relationships between Aboriginal people and Canadian society. Aboriginal parents and communities want their children to receive a quality education that will allow them to live and work where they choose. They also want their children to be linguistically and culturally competent as Aboriginal citizens. In partnership with Aboriginal people and communities our working group will assist in improving the educational opportunities for Aboriginal learners and assist in the long term goal of improving the quality of life for Aboriginal people across the country.

**Corinne Montplaisance-Jetté:** Good morning. I'm Corinne Montplaisance-Jetté. I'm Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Engineering at Concordia University in Montreal and I come to this process, the Minister's national working group on education, with a lot of optimism and a lot of hope. Certainly, many of us have been involved for years in analysing and taking a look at the issue of education for First Nations in this country. As we assemble reports and attend conferences and have meetings, many of us over the years have developed a sense of the kinds of needs that exist in our communities. I see this announcement as an opportunity to move forward to take the work that's been done and the work that's been done at the community level, people who know best are the people who own the product in a sense, the parents, community members, understand the best needs of our children. So, the process is intended to act almost, I see us as a group of people who will look back to reports certainly from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People through to reports that have been done as Minister

Owen referred to to the AFN committee and certainly at the community level. I see it as harvesting, gathering from the various documents that are out there and listening to the experts who have done the analysis, harvesting a crop of recommendations and ideas. We will then gather the findings into some document format and then take them and validate them at the community level. I'm very proud of the calibre of the members who have been selected to participate in the working group. They're a very impressive group of people most of whom have quite a long history of involvement in education at the community level. So we're looking to gather the ideas and suggestions that have been made already and try to address the reality of this country, the reality which Minister Owen referred to in terms of demographics. In some areas of the country we have communities where over 50% of the population are under 18 years of age. That's an extraordinary number when we look at the retiring baby boomer, when we look at the needs that are going to be evident very very soon in our societies. So that's our challenge then is to try to have a look at the kinds of recommendations that are there, to validate them at the community level, to bring parents into the process. We have parents sitting at the table of this advisory group. As is the case in our First Nations communities, our children are extremely important and none of us in academia or in school boards or education associations would dare to think that we know best. Our elders, our parents are the ones who will guide this process as well. So I look forward to the work of the committee and it's a challenge. Minister Nault wants us to act pretty quickly so we'll do our best and report our findings later in the year.

Moderator: Thank you very much. I'll now take questions. Yes, Kate J. from the Ottawa Citizen.

Question: I just have two quick questions. This is to Mr. Nault but if either of you ladies would like to address it that would be great too. As you've all said there have been tons of studies, conference, meetings, everything else. I'm sure recommendations have been made before. What makes you think that these recommendations are going to be different and will actually be acted upon rather than I guess all these recommendations that have been made that presumably haven't been acted upon otherwise we wouldn't be here today?

**Robert Nault:** Well I think the answer to your question rests in the speech from the throne where we committed to renewal of education. It also rests in the analysis done by the Auditor General not too long ago which asked a very simple question of the Government of Canada through the Indian Affairs, are you in education or are you out. We obviously are the funder of education and we have transferred as you know control over Indian education many years ago but there's some issues in some areas that seem to have gaps and I think that's the discussion that we need to have as to how to improve on the level of attainment of education by Aboriginal children and so the commitment in the speech from the throne is obviously driving our agenda and our commitment as a government and we'd like to see some decisions and some targets set and as I have said to people, you never set up an expert panel like this and build expectations unless you are very committed to doing something because that really is a recipe for disaster politically speaking and so you can get my assurances this morning

that we will do our utmost best based on the recommendations of this panel to move forward with an action plan. Minister Own has been put specifically on the file to give it some prominence and he's come in this portfolio to work with me because we have a very large agenda and we need to move on these issues. And so these co-chairs who have a lot of knowledge and expertise I believe are here because they are as committed as I am and as Mr. Owen is to make this happen. We do have a lot of studies, I'll just give you one example. There's a large belief out there that there's a disconnect between the provincial education system and the Aboriginal education system and we need to find a way to reduce that large gap in working relationship because we have to be connected through governments and institutions and that's the kind of advice that I'm looking to have and I'll leave it there unless Deborah or Corinne want to fill in the more expert side of it and I've asked them to report relatively soon in the fall because I want to move very quickly on the recommendations based on our commitment in the speech from the throne.

**Deborah Jeffrey:** Further to that is there's a great deal of systemic barriers at play that hinder the academic achievement of Aboriginal learners and we recognize those right from policy, at the classroom level to policy at the federal government level and part of the process is to clear, identify those barriers and begin to overcome them and I'm optimistic because at the table with our working group we will have representatives from other ministries that we can work together to improve the educational opportunities collectively.

Moderator: Kurt Petrovich, CBC-Radio?

Question: Mr. Owen, you referred to the notion that it's hard to educate, and I'm paraphrasing, when children haven't been able to sleep, etc., etc. Will this panel have the ability or the mandate to make recommendations outside the specific realm of education but those that have everything to do with how children learn such as improving the social and economic conditions on First Nations.

**Stephen Own:** Well certainly this panel's work is not in isolation, its work is centred in the realization, the reality of the need for strong community support, parental involvement, economic opportunities and the general well-being and quality of life in Aboriginal communities. So it's not isolated and the people who will be bringing the action recommendations to us are very much aware of those connections. There will clearly be recommendations related to the relationship between parents and the children and their successful education but it will be set in the context of the reality of some pretty challenging social economic situations and this as far as that goes it's part of a whole range of initiatives that this government and this department are working on to improve economic opportunities, to strengthen the instruments of governance and fiscal institutions in Aboriginal communities, in First Nations governments. These are all inter-related and so this won't be in isolation from them.

Question: I'm sorry, it's still not clear to me. Maybe either of the co-chairs might be able to respond to this issue. Would you consider it within your

mandate if you found for instance that a problem, where there are problems is that it's not what's going on at the school, it's not what's going with the parents per se, it's what's going on in the whole community and that has much larger roots than beyond where the school is and what the curriculum is and whether they can hire teachers or not.

**Corinne**

**Montplaisance-Jetté:** If I can address that, we've actually had a little discussion. Education and any analysis we do will be looked at from a holistic point of view. Within the strict definition of our mandate we've been asked to make recommendations based on other reports and other things we've heard. For example, economic development can't happen without a skilled labour force. There are aspects of development, community development and certainly aspects of managing resources, forestry, water, all of these things, that will only come about once our children play an important role in the process. From an infrastructure point of view if we need community buildings, if we need roads and services it seems logical that we make every effort possible to school our kids in the talent and skills of professional credentials that will allow that to happen. We are all of us connected to communities, all of us understand the reality of how a school has to function. I am a high school teacher by trade. I taught in a high school and I understand the implications of a snow storm on a Friday afternoon, that you can't teach and equally you can't function with children who do arrive at school, as Minister Owen said, unhealthy or unhappy or hungry. All of us at the table have that kind of basic foundation for the information we're bringing to the process. That's our experience. So I will take the step to say that we understand wholly that you make recommendations in a context and the context obviously has to be addressed as well. We need healthy people, healthy kids in healthy schools.

**Deborah Jeffrey:** Further to that, the social economic conditions that exist within Aboriginal communities has a huge impact on the educational achievement of Aboriginal learners, there's no question about that. It's complex, it's multi-layered but we need to begin to address it systemically and I think this working group is a means of achieving a part of that and it would be presumptuous of us to say that we can address all of those needs but I think if we can work in concert collaboratively and positively with the firm commitment to making a difference at the community level, I think we can begin to address that long term objective of improving the quality of education.

Moderator: Paul Simon, Winnipeg Free Press.

Question: Minister, I'm wondering this initiative, what kind of money is backing it up so that the recommendations that come forward can be enacted? I know the 30 million dollars I recall was for special needs children as opposed to education as a whole. Is there going to be additional funding so that these recommendations can be put in place?

**Robert Nault:** Well I think it's a little early assume what the recommendations will be. One of the mandates of the expert panel is to assess the resources that are available and what, what we're getting for those resources. We have

of course as you know a major capital plan to build brand new schools on reserve. We've been doing a lot of that in regions like mine but a number of young Aboriginal students go to public school. Some 50% in my province and I think it's 60% in British Columbia and so the question is if young Aboriginal students are sitting in the same classroom as a non-native student and not getting the same education attainment or succeeding, is that a matter of money or is that a matter some sort of disconnect and we need to find those systemic barriers that people have. At the same time we have to recognize that we have to improve infrastructure, basic services in the communities. Those initiatives will all be brought forward in due course. All you have to do to get a sense of where this government and this minister and Mr. Owen are going is to follow the speech from the throne because you will see a series of announcements in the next number of weeks and months dealing with those issues that Kurt was talking about in his question. We understand the whole issue of importance of water quality. We understand the whole importance of building an economy and the financial resources necessary. That's why we have increased economic development five times in two years and that is all part of our commitment to make sure that these young children will have a job at the end of the line because regions like mine as I've said publicly many times will not be successful if the young Aboriginal people are not part of the economy. By 2015 my riding will be half Aboriginal and it's a third of Ontario's land mass and these kids have to be part of my economy where I live. And so there's a lot of urgency to this and so there's a lot of interest by me and others. This obviously is an important part of the Prime Minister's agenda as you know and so I give you that as sort of a general sense of our urgency and our interest without going down the road too far of what the financial resources are that will be needed because at that point, at this point we need some advice and I think that's the objective of this expert panel.

**Question:** And with education in many cases is being willfully controlled, are you concerned or how concerned are you that this initiative may be caught up in the politics of your governance legislation where, you know, the Aboriginal leadership in many cases is saying, you know, we're not, it's not Ottawa's job to tell us what we do and what not to do. Is this going to perhaps be victimized by that other issue that's ongoing, with them saying you know don't tell us what to do with the teaching of our kids, we've got the mandate.

**Robert Nault:** Well, I think it's important to understand that we're not looking to take control over Aboriginal education as a government. What we're looking for are solutions to improve and make it work better for the children. This is not about politics, this is about kids and people and the community and I'm looking for recommendations that will make the system function more effectively. If that means that we talk about school boards where there's more regional flavour than community control we're prepared to look at those kinds of initiatives but I wouldn't want to pre-judge the experts giving me advice. I think that's the reason why I've asked them because I want to make sure those who have been in the field for a long time and have spent a lot of years getting their head around what the issues are, it will be up to them to say if you move and this action plan suggests these recommendations then you will see

a dramatic improvement and that's what I'm looking for and Minister Owen will see that that happens because he'll be following this every day.

Moderator: I have Laura Eggerton.

Question: Laura Eggerton for Time Canada. Minister, will you be looking at the amount of money that goes to First Nations for students in post-secondary education given the rising numbers of students who are now enrolling? A lot of them have said to me and to others that the funding appears to have been capped at a level that doesn't quite meet the needs of the numbers of students going through?

**Robert Nault:** No, we won't be looking at it from that perspective because that work is already ongoing. That data is being accumulated between the AFN and regional organizations and the department. We are looking at and assessing the numbers to see whether in fact there is a deterrent or a financial cap and it will be my job and others to make sure that that doesn't happen because the least we can do is make sure those who are, have the excellence already to be successful that they're not held back by financial constraints. So those issues are ongoing. We're restricting ourselves to up to grade 12. I think that's the objective of this exercise.

Question: Because in your background paper you said that it will be looking at the post-secondary issue.

**Robert Nault:** Well we're looking at it from the perspective of how the youth get to that area. Now we're not looking necessarily at the funding of that. I think that's already, we don't want to bog down that more money means better results. I think that always is an issue for some but I think there's more to it than just that. I think there's a lot of efficiencies we can find and a lot of ways we can deal with it and curriculum is an issue, jurisdiction is an issue, institutions are an issue and I think we want to focus on those.

Question: Can I just have a follow-up quickly. Why not simply implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People as they have to do with education?

**Robert Nault:** Well, I think you can't do that without having other jurisdictions accept those recommendations as you know. One of the areas that I have asked specifically for Minister Owen and the expert panel to look at is the relationship between the provincial education system, which is not our jurisdiction, and the work that's done between those education systems and the First Nations education structure that exists today and how we can better coordinate our activities because as you know education is a provincial jurisdiction and pretty much all the institutions are provincial and so to implement those recommendations, and that will be part of the work of the panel as to how that can be done, and we'll need to do that in recognition that Minister Owen will be talking to a lot of provincial Ministers of Education. He's going to have to bring them into the loop and make sure that they are aware of our interests and I can

report to you that we've started this already and we started in a place like British Columbia where we have a very good working relationship with the Education Minister there and Deborah can tell you more about that than I can, she's been meeting regularly with them and to build that kind of connection. So we can be able to see the results and target initiatives in the gaps that exist. So maybe Deborah would want to talk a little bit more because I don't want to suggest that one jurisdiction over another is better but British Columbia does lead the way in a lot of ways in this particular field.

**Deborah Jeffrey:** In British Columbia, what we have been undertaking over the last several years is working relationships with educational partners and educational stakeholders where we come to the table quarterly to develop, agree that we have to work collectively to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. We have set some goals and priorities and some action plans attached to that and that ongoing dialogue we think has gone a long way to building a sustained commitment to addressing the needs of Aboriginal learners within the public school system in British Columbia. We've signed a Memorandum of Understanding that very simply says, we the undersigned acknowledge Aboriginal learners are not meeting with school success. We will work within our respective organizations to improve that. That simple Memorandum of Understanding has done a great deal to move forward collectively because it has been very positive, it's been a lot of hard work but there's a real understanding that we need to work in partnership respectfully to address the long standing needs of Aboriginal learners. We have a long way to go, there's no question about that, but the ongoing dialogue and the building of commitment I think has really established a firm foundation on which we can build and move forward together.

Moderator: Thank you. The lady in the back. No? Okay. Other questions?

Question: Is this a paper review of the research or will you talk to people? When you're talking about validating it with communities. Can you explain exactly what you will be doing?

**Stephen Owen:** I'll just address that generally. There has been as we've said a lot of research done and that includes the RCAP report but we also have a lot of expertise in the panel itself. So, in assessing what's been done, including the experiences such as are ongoing in British Columbia that Deborah Jeffrey mentions, the panel will be identifying any gaps that are there and they'll be filling them with their own research, commissioned research but this is all in the context of the urgent need that the Minister has mentioned and the need to get to action quickly. But there is capacity for research potential but it's not a major research job starting over, it's actually at the end of the process saying let's get to action.

Question: That wouldn't necessarily involve, it wouldn't, I mean travelling to various First Nations to see first hand how it's done, it's more looking at research about those of things.

**Stephen Owen:** Well and bringing together the research, the expertise of the panel that already is highly aware of those conditions but the validation that we've been talking about is the, as the ideas come together to ensure that they make sense right across the country or there may be different nuances in different places, the people, to ensure that the people who are going to be involved as key partners in implementing any of these action recommendations are in agreement with them, that we're all in step. So it's a validation, it's a refinement, it's gaining support for implementation at the end of this relatively short process.

Moderator: Paul Simon?

Question: The budget for this consultation in this process?

**Robert Nault:** Whatever it takes.

Question: I mean are we talking something that's 50,000, are we talking something that.

**Robert Nault:** Well when we asked the co-chairs to put the panel together we said give us a workplan that will make us successful and I'm pretty comfortable that they will give us a workplan that is efficient cost-wise but I don't want to, because first of all there are some gaps in the research. We don't know what the costs of those are at this point so we don't have an exact number but I think education is by far one of the top priorities of our government and Aboriginal people have the right to be successful and so I think we can afford to make sure we get it right. So I don't have a number for you Paul.

Question: But there's a range though wouldn't there be?

**Robert Nault:** No. I'll tell you when I get it because I will as you know have the discussions after people submit things so I'm waiting for it.

Question: ..inaudible.. with the Globe and Mail. Minister Nault, you've said earlier that education is a provincial jurisdiction. So at the end of the day with this process how will you be able to enact any of your findings ..inaudible..?

**Robert Nault:** Well, at this point the recommendations of the panel will be based on our need to work with the provinces, obviously to work with First Nation communities and there are now already in most jurisdictions tuition agreements between provincial school boards and First Nation communities for kids that go of course to the public system. So yes we need to work together. This is going to be a very collaborative approach and we will be talking and Mr. Owen will be talking to the other Ministers in the provincial jurisdictions. We have a federal responsibility under the Constitution for Aboriginal people and their education but all the expertise if I can say doesn't rest in my department, it rests out there in the communities and within the provincial governments and territorial governments of education and I think we need to

use their experiences as well to help us and that's going to be part of what we will do once we get the recommendations is work with the other levels of government both Aboriginal and provincial and territorial.

Question: When are you expecting those recommendations?

**Robert Nault:** I'm asking for an interim report in October and a final report at Christmas.

Moderator: The last question.

Question: Mr. Nault again just on the Governance Act, can you lay out where you see it going over the next few months, what the timetable might be?

**Robert Nault:** Well, you can maybe ask me that after I deliver a speech in the House of Commons around 12:20 which will lay out some of our expectations but today I think I'll stick to the education side versus governance if you don't mind.

Moderator: Merci beaucoup, thank you very much.

**Robert Nault:** Thank you.

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## **A STEP FORWARD FOR FIRST NATION EDUCATION - MINISTER NAULT INTRODUCES THE NATIONAL WORKING GROUP ON EDUCATION**

**OTTAWA, ONTARIO (June 17, 2002)** - The Government of Canada says education for First Nations is a priority. Today the Honourable Robert D. Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) announced the establishment of the National Working Group on Education. A move in the right direction, he says, to ensuring First Nation children have the same opportunities and quality of life that many Canadians enjoy.

The Minister's National Working Group on Education will provide findings to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) on how, in partnership with First Nations, the department can better foster excellence in First Nation education and help narrow the unacceptable gap in academic results between First Nations students and other Canadian students. The Working Group is comprised of 13 Aboriginal members from across Canada. They will review various issues surrounding First Nation education, such as the development of First Nation education capacity, teacher recruitment/retention and professional development, Aboriginal content in curriculum (culture and language), pedagogy and standards, increased parental involvement, and national education instruments. The input provided to the Government of Canada by the

Minister's National Working Group on Education will help determine the next steps required to improve results for the First Nations children who are currently in school, as well as for those who will be in school in the future.

"Investing in First Nation education is an investment in the economic future of First Nation communities. That means it is a solid investment in the future of Canada," said Minister Nault. "The advice of the National Working Group will help us to move forward in very real ways," he continued. "Immediate action must be taken on a number of fronts because improving First Nation education today means a better future for all Canadians tomorrow."

Honourable Stephen Owen, Secretary of State (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), agrees. "We need to enable and empower First Nation children. Education is the way to do that. This group will provide focus and bring together the invaluable information needed to reduce the unacceptable education gap between First Nation and other Canadian students," he explained.

The Government of Canada funds the delivery of elementary and secondary education to First Nation children living on-reserve. It has reinforced its commitment to education for First Nations in both the Speech from the Throne and the 2001 Budget. The Government of Canada will spend \$947 M in 2002-2003 for the provision of elementary and secondary education needs of approximately 120,000 First Nations students across Canada. The Government of Canada remains committed to the principle of "Indian control of Indian education".

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## **Backgrounder**

### **Minister's National Working Group on Education**

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The Government of Canada is working in partnership with First Nations to improve their quality of life. An essential component of this work centres around education. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) funds and supports the provision of elementary and secondary services to on-reserve First Nation students. The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that Aboriginal children across Canada have the same opportunities and quality of life many of us take for granted and therefore takes the education needs of First Nation children very seriously. The Government of Canada has made education for First Nations a priority and confirmed its commitment in the Speech from the Throne and in the 2001 Budget.

As a concrete step forward for First Nations education, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) has appointed a National Working Group on Education. The Minister's National Working Group on Education is an important step by the Government of Canada, recognizing that investments in education today mean a better future tomorrow.

The Minister's National Working Group on Education will consist of 13 Aboriginal members from across Canada. Members were selected on the basis of their personal and/or professional expertise; as such,

they are expected to present their individual views and are not spokespersons for any political bodies or institutions.

It is currently proposed that this Group sit from June 2002 to December 2002. The Group's mandate is to research and provide advice to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on how, in partnership with First Nations, INAC can better foster excellence in First Nation education, celebrate some of the successes in First Nation education and help narrow the unacceptable gap in academic results between First Nations students and other Canadian students. The Group will examine a number of areas which are central to First Nation elementary and secondary education, such as:

- the development of First Nation education institution capacity;
- teacher recruitment/retention and professional development;
- Aboriginal content in curriculum (culture and language);
- pedagogy and standards;
- integrated services for children and youth, and increased parental involvement;
- national educational instruments.

In order to do so, the Minister's National Working Group on Education will review existing relevant research and papers dealing with both First Nations and mainstream education. The Working Group will be free to seek the advice of outside experts in education and related matters to present their findings. As its work evolves, the Working Group may decide to examine other areas that it judges necessary.

The Working Group will be expected, for each theme area, to review and analyse the specific issue in a First Nation context, note the trends in other jurisdictions, examine success stories, both within First Nations and in other school systems, and present findings on each specific topic.

While the direct focus of the work of the Working Group will be elementary and secondary education, the work of the Group may touch upon issues that relate to post-secondary education.

The work of the Working Group will build on efforts undertaken over the past two years by INAC, in partnership with First Nations to address the recommendations of the Auditor General's April 2000 report on First Nation elementary/secondary education. To date the following improvements have taken place:

- in partnership with First Nations, INAC regional offices have established action plans to address education issues;
- the December 2001 Budget announced new funding of \$30 million a year for two years to do more to meet the special needs that some First Nation children living on reserve have in school;
- an advisory group of Aboriginal educators provided advice to the department on issues such as the role of INAC in education; and,
- a senior executive has been appointed to advise the department on the issues of recruitment and retention of teachers in First Nations schools.

The Government of Canada recognizes that education is an enabler and is an essential vehicle for strong, self-sufficient individuals and communities across Canada. The government is committed to ensuring that Aboriginal children across Canada have the same opportunities and quality of life that many of us take for granted.