

A Liberal Response to the Assembly of First Nations

RECONCILIATION

- 1. How will your party work towards reconciliation and changing the relationship between First Nations and Canada? Specifically, does your party agree to:**
 - **Ensure adequate financial and human resources and accountability mechanisms to sustain the involvement of First Nations in legislative, regulatory and policy development?**
 - **Develop processes and legislation that will support the capacity of First Nation governments to provide good government to their citizens in all areas of appropriate jurisdiction?**

Consultation and consensus will be the cornerstone of a renewed and strengthened relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit and a new Liberal government. Canada needs respectful and progressive partnerships with First Nations— partnerships characterized by trust, with real engagement and participation by Aboriginal Canadians; partnerships that will create real opportunity and a deep respect for the principle of self-government. We will continue to involve First Nations in legislative, regulatory and policy development at all stages. We respect and actively seek out input from First Nations governments, as they know what is best for their communities.

- 2. Do you agree that First Nations need to be consulted on any initiatives, activities, legislation or developments that affect their people and their lands? If so, how would you implement consultation and accommodation processes with regard to resource development and with regard to legislation affecting First Nations rights?**

Yes. The Liberal Party will work jointly with First Nations, Inuit and Métis to establish an open and transparent process for the development of a federal policy for consultation and accommodation. As the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled, the federal and provincial Crown has a legal duty to consult, and, where appropriate, accommodate when Crown conduct may adversely impact established or potential aboriginal and treaty rights.

- 3. If elected, is your party committed to the development of a joint bilateral review process (Canada-First Nations) to examine and overhaul federal policies respecting self-government, comprehensive claims and treaty rights?**

. Self-government is an inherent right that is entrenched under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. A Liberal government will consult and work with First Nations on the establishment of an independent body to resolve comprehensive claims and to ensure that self-government agreements are respected and fully implemented. Where modern land claims agreements exist, a Liberal government will respect and uphold the spirit and intent of these agreements.

4. If elected, is your party committed to working jointly with First Nations to improve accountability for First Nations programs and services and address the respective responsibilities of all governments to better serve First Nations citizens?

We fully support reforms to accountability in programs and services, and will work to bridge the gap between all levels of government on Aboriginal issues. A new Liberal government will make it a priority to improve access to health care for First Nations children by ensuring children are not denied the health care they need because of jurisdictional squabbles between different orders of government or different departments within the same level of government. We will work with other orders of government on a policy that would require the agency of first contact to pay and establish a mechanism to resolve the disputes – after the needs of the child are addressed. To resolve these disputes at the federal level, a new Liberal government will enact a Jordan's Principle law, based on a Liberal Private Member's bill, which will require the federal department of first contact to pay for the required services and to seek resolution later so that children are not denied the services they need.

5. If elected, is your party committed to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

The Conservative government has demonstrated their lack of concern and respect for Canada's aboriginal population by being one of only four governments in the world to vote against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This marked the first time in its history that Canada failed to commit to a major international human rights treaty. A Liberal government will reverse this historical disgrace, sign and ratify the Declaration and show the world that Canada can be a leader in its treatment of Aboriginal Peoples.

QUALITY OF LIFE

6. If elected, how would your party involve First Nations in addressing climate change?

The cornerstone of the Liberal platform is the Green Shift plan. This innovative and forward-thinking plan will cut income taxes, put a price on pollution, fight poverty and position Canada to be a leader in the 21st-century global economy and address climate change.

We would ensure that Aboriginals will enjoy all of the tax cuts that the green shift provides, taking into account their specific needs and realities. To assist in accomplishing this goal, a Liberal government will re-establish the First Nations' Advisory Committee that the Conservatives abolished.

A new Liberal government will also create a new Joint National Climate Change Advisory Panel to foster joint initiatives between the Government of Canada and First Nations, Métis and Inuit on climate change mitigation policies. Obviously, getting the design of the delivery of this

program right is a particular challenge for First Nations given the fact that income earned on reserve is not subject to the Income Tax Act.

We know that there are additional costs due to energy use patterns in rural and Northern Canada. To help offset these costs, we will provide a refundable rural green credit worth \$150 every year for every rural tax-filer, starting immediately in the first year of the plan. And we will increase the Northern Residents Tax Deduction to an annual maximum of \$7,000 from just over \$6,000, and will index it going forward. This represents an immediate tax saving of \$150 and over \$200 within four years.

In order to receive many of the benefits in the Green Shift plan, many of which take the form of refundable tax credits, participation in the tax system is required. This of course presents particular challenges for First Nations and we will engage the Assembly of First Nations on this. The focus of our discussions will be how First Nations who do not participate in the national tax system can receive the fiscal benefits in the plan, how to make the Green Shift plan revenue-neutral for First Nations. To accomplish this we will look at re-establishing the National Joint Advisory Committee on taxation. A new Liberal government will also establish a Joint National Climate Change advisory panel to foster joint initiatives between the government and First Nations on climate change mitigation policies.

7. Do you agree that First Nation students should have the same educational opportunities and funding levels as students in provincial schools? What steps would your party take to close the education gap between FN students and other students?

Liberals believe in life long learning, and educational opportunities for all Canadians. The Kelowna Accord was a commitment between First Nations, the federal government and provincial and territorial governments to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal high school and post-secondary graduates. We are committed work with First Nations to meet the targets set out in Kelowna and to taking further steps in our common efforts to close the gap in education between First Nations and other students.

8. It is our view that First Nation poverty is the greatest social justice issue facing Canada. The Kelowna Accord set out a plan to close the gap in the quality of life between First Nations and other Canadians within 10 years. If elected, will your party honour the goals and targets of the Kelowna Accord?

- **If so, will your party also honour the financial commitments of the Accord in your first budget?**
- **If not, why not and what would you propose as an alternative approach to closing the gap in the quality of life?**

Canada needs respectful and progressive partnerships with our Aboriginal Peoples – partnerships characterized by trust, with real engagement and participation by Aboriginal Canadians; partnerships that will create real opportunity and a deep respect for the principle of self-government.

The Kelowna Accord represented this type of partnership. It was a historic consensus that, unfortunately, the Conservative government scrapped. Over the course of our mandate, a Liberal government will bring back the Kelowna Accord. Our platform commits to ramp up funding to reach the full per year Kelowna commitment within four years. We will also fulfill the commitments within the First-Nations-Crown Political Accord. .

As well, a Liberal government will hold a meeting with the leadership of the five national Aboriginal organizations and provincial and territorial leaders to consult on priorities and getting Kelowna back on track within six months.

In addition to bringing back the Kelowna Accord a Liberal government will implement the 30-50 Plan to reduce poverty, with a goal to reduce the number of people living below the poverty line by at least 30 per cent and the number of children living in poverty by at least 50 per cent. We will make this possible through a combination of measures included in the Green Shift, including a new \$350 child tax benefit and an improved working income tax benefit and other spending commitments. We would work to ensure that First Nations will enjoy all of the tax cuts that the green shift provides, taking into account their specific needs and realities

As well, a Liberal government will meet with the leadership of the five national Aboriginal organizations and provincial and territorial leaders to consult on priorities and getting Kelowna back on track within six months, something Prime Minister Stephen Harper has failed to do.

9. Over the next few years more Canadians will retire than will enter the workforce. This will leave Canada with a shortage of skilled labour. The First Nation population is young, with more than half 25 years old or younger, yet they receive less education support than other Canadians and, as a result, have lower education levels. Will your party commit to fair and equal funding for First Nations education? What will your party do to ensure more First Nations are trained and educated so they can take their place in the workforce?

Liberals are concerned about the impending shortage of skilled labour, and are anxious to assist Aboriginal Canadians in learning the skills they need to satisfy labour market demands. As part of our strong plan for Post-Secondary Education, we have pledged to make available 100,000 access grants of up to \$4,000 per year for those who are members of groups that are traditionally under-represented in post-secondary education, especially Aboriginal Canadians.

We will also ensure that the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy is renewed and that the national aboriginal organizations involved in this strategy continue to be its main stakeholders.

10. The Premiers at the recent Council of the Federation meeting called for a First Ministers meeting (FMM) on Aboriginal Issues. This plan was interrupted by the election. If elected, will your party commit to holding a FMM within the first six months of taking office?

Provincial and Territorial Leaders have committed to building a new relationship and have called for the Prime Minister to hold a First Ministers' Meeting on aboriginal issues. Regrettably, Stephen Harper has not called such a meeting after nearly three years in office. A Liberal government would hold such a meeting within the first six months of taking office.

11. First Nations have filed a complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) regarding the unequal funding of child welfare services for First Nations children and expect that the issue will go to the tribunal for a full hearing on the merits but the Government of Canada has been using procedural tactics and technical defenses to delay justice for these children. How would your party approach this issue?

The Liberal Party's position is that First Nations children should have every opportunity to fulfill their greatest potential. Our commitment to the Kelowna Accord will help to close the gap between First Nations children and other children.

We have committed to Jordan's Principle because we believe First Nations children and families living on reserve should not be denied access to health services due to jurisdictional disputes. As well First Nations access to child welfare services should not be qualified by race or residency.

Ideally, a Liberal government will work to resolve this situation through cooperation and partnership with First Nations before a tribunal hearing. However, should there be a tribunal hearing a Liberal government would not interfere with the process.