

A Liberal Response to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

1. Does your Party agree that following the historic June 11th, 2008 Apology by the Prime Minister to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada that the next Government should embark on a bold new path in partnership with Inuit to close gaps in housing, health, economic development, and education needs by 2015?

Liberals fully agree with the Apology to Aboriginal Peoples for the Residential Schools legacy. On June 11th, 2008, the date of the official apology, Stéphane Dion said:

“As the leader of the party that was in government for more than seventy years of the last century, I acknowledge our role and our shared responsibility in this tragedy. I am deeply sorry.”

But even before Mr. Dion’s apology, Liberal governments were taking action. The former Liberal government which signed the Kelowna Accord in November 2005, committing \$5.1 billion over five years to close the poverty gap between Aboriginals, Inuit, Métis, and the rest of Canadians. The Accord addressed education, health, economic development, and housing and infrastructure.

The Conservatives killed the Kelowna Accord upon taking office, and have offered little in its place. A new Liberal government would fully honour the spirit of Kelowna.

2. Does your Party support expanding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by adding an Inuk Commissioner to recognize the many Inuit who were impacted by the dark period in Canada of Aboriginal Residential Schools, and would your Party further support the inclusion of Inuit (for example in Labrador) who attended residential or day schools who were subject to abuse but have been excluded from the Indian Residential School Settlement?

In consultations with stakeholders, a new Liberal government would be open to the possibility of including both an Inuk and an Inuit Commissioner on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

3. Would a government formed by your party call a meeting of First Ministers and national Aboriginal Leaders, within one year of its election, to agree on clear targets and commitments sufficient to overcome gaps between Aboriginal and other Canadians in basic measures of social and economic well being?

A new Liberal government would be willing to meet as soon as possible

4. Does your party support the reform of federal policy in relation to the implementation of modern land claims agreements along the lines recommended in the May 2008 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples?

The leader of the Liberal party indicated in his leadership platform his support for an independent, specific claims body. Stéphane Dion also called for an independent claims body for comprehensive claims. The Liberal Opposition supports the Specific Claims Tribunal Act, however we remain wary of the cost cap which may limit the number of claims the tribunal can deal with.

5. Does your party support the development of a new Arctic Strategy to guide federal policy for the Canadian and international Arctic, and agree that such a policy must extend to all of the lands and marine areas of the Inuit Homeland in Canada (including Arctic portions of Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador), and to engage Inuit as co-partners in the development of such a strategy?

The Conservative government has abandoned the commitments made by previous Liberal governments on the environment and to the international community on Arctic affairs. By eliminating the position of Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs, the Harper government confirmed that Arctic issues would play no real role in his foreign policy. By auctioning off permits to explore for oil in the Beaufort Sea, the same territory that has already been classified as environmentally sensitive, Mr. Harper has shown that he is willing to support development at all costs.

A Liberal government will engage the Inuit to develop economic, environmental, and internationalist policies that will enhance the quality of life for Northerners, without sacrificing the Arctic environment, or our reputation on the international stage.

6. Does your Party agree that asserting Canadian Arctic Sovereignty must by design include a human dimension that ensures a healthy, well educated economically viable Inuit majority population in the Arctic?

Arctic Sovereignty is about far more than flexing muscle and sending in the Army. That is why Mr. Dion made an announcement in December 2007 outlining a comprehensive strategy for Arctic Sovereignty. Mr. Dion committed to:

- re-start the land claims negotiation process and ensure full implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Implementation Contract;
- reinstate literacy funding cut by the Conservatives in order to ensure Northerners have the tools they need to succeed;
- honour the education funding commitments made under the Kelowna Accord and look for new ways to help First Nations, Métis and Inuit Canadians succeed;
- stand with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Mary Simon and Nunavut Environment Minister Patterk Netswer in calling on the Conservatives to promptly reject a proposal to allow Canadian navy ships to dump waste into the Arctic Ocean;

- work with Northern communities to mitigate the effects of climate change and to fund centres for research and development in the North;
- improve the capability of Fixed-Wing Search and Rescue aircraft in the North by basing four of them north of 60 to make the region safer for Northerners and the people who travel there;
- re-establish the Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs position created by the previous Liberal government in 1994;
- create Small Craft Harbours in Nunavut;
- ensure the completion of seabed mapping to better protect Canadian sovereignty; and
- increase the Northern Residents Deduction to better reflect the rising cost of living.

This strategy acknowledges the diversity of the north, and helps give northerners the tools to build their economy and the well being of northern communities.

7. Does your party agree that any new federal policy aimed at combating carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases must contain a set of adaptation and adjustments factors for Inuit communities sufficient to ensure that implementation of the policy would not have a net negative effect on regional economies in the Arctic?

The Liberal Green Shift plan will help Inuit communities by cutting income taxes, putting a price on pollution, fighting poverty and positioning Canada to be a leader in the 21st century sustainable global economy. We recognize that energy requirements are often higher in rural Canada and in the North due to higher transportation use and because the residents have fewer options than urban residents to adapt to a new greener climate (i.e. no public transit, no hook-ups to natural gas, etc.) That is why we will also provide specific assistance to rural and Northern Canadians to help them adjust to higher fuel prices.

Proposals by the Conservatives and NDP to reduce greenhouse gases will also raise costs of energy and goods and services. Only the Liberal plan includes progressive, offsetting tax cuts.

No new taxes will be levied on gasoline at the pump. Our plan will shift Canada's tax system away from income and towards pollution, and in a revenue-neutral way – putting it in law that every dollar that is raised from carbon pollution will be returned to Canadians in tax cuts.

We are offering a broad-based income tax reduction program to offset any increased cost in heating bills.

Using the revenue generated through carbon pricing, a Liberal government will introduce broad-based and progressive income tax cuts, and implement tax measures to protect low-income Canadians and those who live in rural and Northern communities from rising energy costs. These include:

- cutting the lowest income tax rate to 13.5 percent from 15 percent, a 10 percent reduction. We will also cut the two middle-income tax rates to 21 percent from 22 percent (a five percent reduction) and to 25 percent from 26 percent (a four percent reduction);
- a new, universal child tax benefit worth \$350 per child, per year, on top of all existing child benefits which will be available even to those who do not pay federal income tax;
- a \$850 increase to the Employment tax credit (from \$1000 to \$1850) targeted at Canadians who earn less than \$50,000 per year which will also be made fully refundable – putting up to \$250 back into the pockets of working Canadians who need it most even if they do not make enough to pay federal income tax;
- an increase to the value of the Working Income Tax Benefit to help low-income Canadians get off of welfare;
- tax incentives for business to encourage investment in green technology and innovation and the creation of jobs in the new green economy; and,
- a Green Rural Credit worth \$150 for every rural tax-filer regardless of whether they make enough income to pay federal income tax.

We will also provide specific assistance to rural and Northern Canadians to help them adjust to higher fuel prices.

In addition to the significant tax measures already described, every rural Canadian tax filer will receive up front an annual Green Rural Credit of \$150. This applies to everyone, whether they actually pay taxes or not.

For those Canadians who live in Canada's North, we will also immediately boost the Northern Residents Deduction (NRD) to a new maximum of \$7,000 per year from just over \$6,000 and index it going forward. This represents an immediate tax savings of nearly \$150 per year and over \$200 per year within four years for those who fully benefit from the NRD.

Seniors living in rural Canada will also receive targeted relief to absorb any increase in the cost of heating. In addition to the \$150 Green Rural Credit, we will be introducing a boost to the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), steadily rising to an additional \$600 per year in the fourth year of our plan. The GIS provides additional money, on top of Old Age Security, to low-income seniors living in Canada.

Some rural and Northern Canadians families will also benefit from the new Guaranteed Family Supplement which will provide a maximum of \$1,225 for an estimated 500,000 low-income families with children under 18.

We will provide further assistance to lower-income families with children by ensuring that all families with incomes up to \$26,000 keep all of the National Child Benefit Supplement which is currently phased out at approximately \$21,000.

Be sure to visit www.thegreenshift.ca to calculate how much your family will save under The Liberal Green Shift plan.

8. Does your party support the Government of Canada endorsing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007 and endorsed in a resolution of the House of Commons during the last Parliament?

Liberals wholeheartedly support Canada endorsing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We were shocked and angered that Canada, under direction of the Conservative government, rejected the historical Declaration, without explanation or legal basis.

9. Does your party support additional federal funding to allow for the construction and operation of Mental Health Centre's for the treatment of alcohol and drug abuse and other mental health issues for Inuit in the Arctic?

A new Liberal government, in consultations with the provinces, territories, and the Public Health Agency of Canada, would be open to consultations on how to best address mental health in the Arctic.

10. Does your party support the renewal, and expansion of the following federal initiatives vital to Inuit in the Arctic: a) Food Mail, and b) Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development Programs?

A new Liberal government fully supports the Food Mail program, and will consider renewing the Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development Programs, which was started in 2004 with a \$90 million investment by the former Liberal government.

11. Does your party support the appointment of an Ombudsperson for Aboriginal Children?

The Liberal Party of Canada has no plans to appoint an Ombudsperson for Aboriginal Children at this time.

12. Does your party support the goal of making the Inuit language the primary working language in the Arctic, and support providing federal funding support for the Inuit language at a level at least as generous as provided francophone and anglophone minorities in the Arctic?

The Liberal Party has great respect for the preservation of the Inuit language. We acknowledge that it is very important for a nation that its language be supported and stay alive. We certainly support that the Inuit language be an important part in the artic where it is spoken by many people. As for funding, we think that programs like the Aboriginal Languages initiative are important and we will surely build on such programs to ensure the preservation and the development of Inuit language.