

Media Release

FSIN Communication Unit



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FSIN can't see how \$450 million will even begin to "Close the Gap"

FSIN Chief Alphonse Bird is disappointed in what appears to be the demise of the Kelowna Agreement in the 2006 budget. In their budget, the Conservatives claim they will set up a consulting process with Aboriginal leaders and provinces to develop new approaches to targets set at the First Ministers' Meeting in Kelowna, but the \$1 billion in Aboriginal budget spending is a far cry from the \$5.1 billion promised to close the gap in Kelowna. "Until Minister Jim Prentice commits to timelines for these discussions, they are just words on a paper," Chief Bird says.

"With an \$8-billion surplus projected for 2005-06, it was entirely possible for the Conservatives to honor the hard-won Kelowna Agreement," Chief Bird adds.

The federal government says it will spend \$450 million on four major areas of need in First Nations communities - housing, education, water, and the socio-economic status of women, children and families. FSIN Chief Alphonse Bird asks, "How can \$450 million stretched like a fiddle string across ten provinces and territories ever hope to fulfill these desperate needs in on-reserve First Nations communities?"

This \$450 million is a long way from the commitments of \$3.4 billion made to First Ministers and Aboriginal leaders in November on education and housing. "And it is troubling to think that the federal government will spend almost as much over the next two years fighting the pine-beetle infestation. It makes you question the priorities of this government and where First Nations people rank."

Chief Bird acknowledges the critical need in off-reserve housing but again wonders how \$300 million across this vast country will even begin to address the void.

It is also discouraging that much of this spending is one-time funding that comes from budget surpluses; it's not ongoing funding that is here to stay, Chief Bird adds.

Despite his disappointment with most of the budget, Chief Bird applauds the \$2.2 billion the Conservatives set aside for the survivors of the residential school legacy.

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