

Media Release

FSIN Communication Unit



RACE SHOULD NEVER KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ENJOYING THEIR GRADUATION CELEBRATIONS

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(Saskatoon) FSIN Chief Lawrence Joseph joined with Chief Gilbert Ledoux of Muskeg Lake First Nation and Chief Daryl Watson of Mistawasis First Nation to express concern about the strained relationship between several Leask citizens and neighboring bands.

“It is an unfortunate reality there are still people out there who do not respect First Nations as an integral part of Saskatchewan’s lifeblood - people who refuse to acknowledge that we have a significant role to play in the prosperity of this province. We want to repeat our vow that we will reach out and work with anyone, but our relationship must be based on mutual respect,” Chief Lawrence Joseph said.

There are about 170 First Nations youth from Mistawasis and Muskeg Lake attending schools in the nearby town of Leask. For over 40 years, First Nations students have been bussed into town schools. But in January, it was a group of parents from Leask who wanted a separate graduation ceremony – one for the mostly First Nations youth going to the Storefront school and one for the Grade 12 students from Leask Community School. This division of the graduating classes has caused distress for students in both schools. The students know each other well and write their exams together.

Chief Ledoux and Chief Watson are urging the parents from Leask who are encouraging this division of the young people along racial lines to think hard about the messages they are sending their children.

“Many of us thought this kind of attitude was long gone, but obviously it’s not,” says Chief Ledoux. “Many of our kids are friends with kids in the Leask school and for a few people to force their kids to think this way; it’s shocking in this day and age. There are many good people in the Town of Leask so you can’t paint everyone with the same brush. We get along very well with them, but there are a few parents that have an issue with race who are forcing our children apart.”

Chief Ledoux said his band members and those from Mistawasis are major supporters of Leask businesses like the grocery store, hardware store and restaurant so it’s clear that First Nations help keep the town vibrant.

Chief Daryl Watson said, “Graduation should be viewed as a positive milestone for our youth, not a time to promote intolerance. What message are these parents sending their children? What about when these young people go off to University, they will see a multitude of different races all in one place, learning together. What will happen then? Diversity should be seen as an enriching force, not a force that divides.”

These same parents who are drawing lines between young people should know that it was the influx of First Nations students into Leask that made it possible for many capital expansions, Chief Watson said. Funding for First Nations students from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada through the capital contribution agreements based on First Nations populations gave the school a boost in capital funding and these improvements have been enjoyed by all students.

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