

## CANADAS' FEDERAL BUDGET FROM A MI'GMAG PERSPECTIVE

Letter written by Chief John Martin.

As the federal budget came down last week reporters flocked to the premiers and political party leaders. Very few called First Nation chiefs to hear their views on the federal budget just presented. The budget is important in that it tells the people what the government is going to do for them in the coming year. The same for First Nations people as well. So here is my brief perspective on the federal budget and what it is going to do for First Nations.

The federal government proudly announced that they were going to invest **300 million** in the development of the private housing market in First Nation communities. I'm not a rocket scientist or an economist but the news on TV tells us that the housing market is driven by the economy. A down turn in the housing market reflects a down in the economy. With 60 to 90% of people in First Nation communities not working for 2/3rds or a 100% of the year, I think that you could say that First Nation economies are in no way shape or form to begin significant investment in a private housing market. To me this money means an increase in debt by First Nations that will create hardship. But not to worry the feds also announced privatization of reserve lands that means they will put themselves in a position to take the land when First Nation people can't pay. This to me spells the destruction of First Nation communities that have been the last bastion of First Nations people and the survival of their culture.

The social housing crisis in our communities is not being addressed. Deterioration, mold and out right housing shortages have created a serious backlog. In the Quebec region alone \_\_\_\_\_ are needed just to catch up. Yet there were no major announcements to address this situation.

There was an important announcement \_\_\_\_\_ for the provision of safe drinking water. This is good news because the number of First Nation communities living in third world situations is significant. What the majority of Canadians have taken for granted for years the federal government of Canada is finally beginning to address. Kesetchewan has seen many promises for years but they were on national news again trying to get their situation addressed.

I received a CBC French network document the other day saying that **20 million** would be available for the First Nations of the Gaspé region for the development of the fisheries. This amount is for the next two years 10 million each year and is not just for the Gaspé region. It is for New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and possibly the north shore. It is also not new money because the previous program that supported the Mi'gmaq ended in 2006.

The federal budget announced **105 million** for the training of First Nations. This means 52.5 million each year. A strong component for access to the funding is partnerships. So not only will this amount be shared with partners but with all First Nations within the 10 provinces and 4 territories. For the Canadian labor market training **510 million** a year

there are other initiatives. Like the 1.3 billion over 5 years to help immigrants settle and integrate into the workforce and a future investment of 342 million.

The budget promotes what the feds call the ‘knowledge advantage’. The advantage for First Nations citizens is not comparable to Canadian citizens. A quick look at the budget shows **800 million** per year plus a 3% increase every year for post secondary institutions. No two-year limit there!

For graduate student support, **35 million** for the next two years and **27 million** every year after is being given and another **510 million** to improve the competitiveness of universities. Nothing for First Nations post secondary students and nothing for basic second level services for First Nation schools.

This budget is the perpetuation of disadvantaged First Nation communities. While the federal government cut the aboriginal languages support program aimed at preserving our languages, this year they give 52 million to Quebec City for their cultural celebration. With budgets like this one and the previous budget which saw health service programs to First Nations cut by 25% and a significant loss in housing revenues to First Nations in the Quebec region is it any wonder that First Nations are increasingly resorting to civil disobedience.