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SCO Denounces Fearmongering Over Potential Vaccine Distribution

Manitoba Premier Resorting to Fearmongering – SCO Grand Chief

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is expressing grave concern over comments made by the premier of Manitoba over how a COVID-19 vaccine will be rolled out in the province.

"I did not think the premier would resort to fearmongering at this time of crisis," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "Unfortunately, I was wrong. True leaders bring people together, they don't try to divide them."

Yesterday, during a COVID-19 media availability, Brian Pallister said he was worried that if an approved vaccine is prioritized for First Nations, First Nation people who do not live on reserve will converge on those communities and bring the virus with them. Meanwhile the latest published reports show that First Nations across the prairies are being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

"It's unfathomable that those words would come from the mouth of a leader in a province where First Nation people are in the midst of a modern-day health crisis," added Grand Chief Daniels. "Instead of creating an environment of empathy and cooperation, this premier is stoking the fires of division."

The latest data shows that First Nations across Canada have to be a priority for an approved vaccine. The number of new and active cases of COVID-19 continue to rise on reserves with 1,562 active cases according to the latest data from Indigenous Services Canada. The federal department reported 765 new cases in the last week alone, with outbreaks occurring primarily in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

In Manitoba, First Nation people make up 11.4% of the population but account for close to 19% of current COVID-19 cases, 25% of the province's hospitalizations, and 38% of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) patients. Meanwhile, centuries of health care disparities along with systemic racism and economic and cultural genocide have created a potential disaster in the making.

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"I hope the premier did not have an ulterior motive with his inflammatory words," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "Anyone should be able to see why First Nation people need to be at the front of the line for a vaccine. To think or advocate otherwise sets a dangerous and potentially life-threatening precedent."

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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