



Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation, 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

Winnipeg Sub-Office

1572 Dublin Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4 www.scoinc.mb.ca

Phone: (204) 946-1869 Fax: (204) 946-1871 Toll Free: 1-866-876-9701

SCO RESPONDS TO PROVINCE OF MANITOBA'S 2020 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct 8, 2020

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB – The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is concerned with priorities outlined in the latest provincial Throne Speech. While the current provincial government publically commits to reconciliation, there is a marked lack of action on longstanding issues, or any indication of funding or programming announcements that would assist First Nation peoples.

“I was looking for more in the speech as it pertained to First Nation peoples,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “We have gotten used to not being on this premier’s radar. The First Peoples of this land should never be an afterthought, and we will hold this government to its word when it says it wants to begin to engage in reconciliation.”

If reconciliation is a goal, then several parts of the speech clearly missed that mark. In response to peaceful and legal protests that took place last year, the government announced it intends to introduce legislation to prevent blockades. The attempt to characterize the democratic right to peacefully protest as “putting people and communities at risk,” undermines fundamental rights.

“Make no mistake, this line in the speech is being directed at First Nation leadership and activists during the Wet'suwet'en pipeline protests,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “When it comes to protecting our lands, water, and Treaty and inherent rights, we will not compromise nor will we ever back down from defending what we know is right.”

The government’s Speech from the Throne included a promise to “create new partnerships with Manitoba’s Indigenous communities, hunters, and landowners to protect big game species currently in decline.” The Manitoba government has already proposed an approach for re-opening at-risk moose hunting areas without properly consulting First Nations and other Indigenous peoples. This proposal would infringe on section 35 rights and we are prepared to defend our rights, which are federally protected.

The government also made a commitment to completing the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin Channel. The Interlake Reserves Tribal Council and several First Nations in the region have tried to have meaningful consultations with this government, but instead the government has disregarded our Treaty rights and moved forward with authorizing the clearing of public land along the channel, and

with the construction of a 20 kilometre all season access road. As a result of their actions, First Nations had to go to court, and the province was issued an interlocutory injunction to halt work on the access road and other activities related to the proposed Outlet Channels Project.

These projects should not move forward until there is proper consultation and accommodation involving all orders of government, and only if they adequately protect the citizens and lands impacted along the channel.

We are pleased that the provincial government has heard southern First Nations on the importance of economic development and jobs creation, which is a top priority. They have promised to seek the advice of public and private-sector leaders, which must include First Nation business and public-sector leaders and be done sustainably and responsibly.

For too long, First Nations have been cut off from the larger economy and it is time for recognition of our contributions. Our 2019 report, [Indigenous Contributions to the Manitoba Economy](#), showed that in just one year spending by Indigenous businesses, governments, and households plus relevant infrastructure spending added over nine billion dollars to the Manitoban economy. The government needs to invest in First Nation people and organizations, as we represent a young and growing demographic with the largest potential for economic growth in Manitoba.

But economic growth and job creation cannot come at the expense of our most vulnerable, and we are troubled by the province's promise to work towards a two term balanced budget in the midst of a global pandemic. SCO is concerned that could mean more austerity is in the works.

"The Pallister conservatives can attempt to spin this messaging but we're not being fooled," added Grand Chief Daniels. "Committing to a balanced budget during the COVID-19 crisis can only mean cuts to vital programming and services. We need to be prepared to defend what we have and to fight for proper consultation before any funding cuts negatively affect the people I serve, especially children."

The government committed to protecting education and child care in their speech, yet licensed child care centres have not seen increases to their operating grants since 2016, putting the stability of many at risk and making it more difficult for parents trying to return to work.

Additionally, almost 2,000 fewer low income families are receiving the Child Care Subsidy, from 8,417 families five years ago to just 6,452 in 2019/20. The Child Care Subsidy has not been indexed in years, with the income cut off for a single parent with one child at just \$16,420 net a year. The cut off is so low that a single parent working full time earning minimum wage would not qualify for a full subsidy.

Programs like the Manitoba Child Benefit and the 55 Plus Programs for low income seniors have not been indexed or have not seen increases in years. The government now spends \$705,000 less on the Manitoba Child Benefit than five years ago and the program supports 1,561 fewer children. The government is also spending \$281,000 less on low income seniors through the 55 Plus Programs than it did five years ago.

The Pallister government has already trimmed programs such as Employment Income Assistance (EIA) and Rent-Assist, help that low income families need to survive. Income levels for the Rent-Assist program have dropped and the monthly benefit has been reduced. At the same time, individuals have to contribute a greater percentage towards their rent, now 35 percent when it used to be 25 percent.

We are also very concerned by the government moving forward with a second reading of Bill 34 during yesterday's emergency meeting meant to respond to COVID-19. Section 8 of Bill 34 sets out to legally end the ability of current and former children in care to sue the Manitoba government for clawing back their monthly Children's Special Allowance (CSA).

It is estimated that the provincial government has illegitimately taken at least \$250 million from Indigenous children in care, moving these funds from the Government of Canada into their general revenue stream. Section 8 in Bill 34 would mean that the provincial government cannot be held accountable for its actions in the future. SCO expresses its urgent concern with Bill 34 and the way that the province is pushing it forward to the detriment of our children.

"It cannot be overstated how critical it is to hold the government to account and to ensure the words shared yesterday on reconciliation are not hollow," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "We need to know that the province of Manitoba, our Treaty partner, means what it says and that it will begin to move forward in a new and respectful way."

The southern Chiefs are pleased that the government plans to erect a monument to Chief Peguis on the grounds of the legislature. This year has been filled with long overdue conversations around statues and who deserves to be memorialized, and we are very supportive of increasing First Nation and Indigenous representation among statues. However, a statue does not make up for years of inaction on funding inequities, lack of consultation and jurisdictional overstepping.

Manitoba celebrated its 150th anniversary this year. For more than 150 years, settlers from around the world have come to our territories, fleeing conflict, poverty, and a lack of opportunity in the own lands. While many others have grown wealthy off our lands and resources, we are in many cases left managing poverty. It's time for the provincial government to work with First Nations in a meaningful way, in respect of our Treaty rights and our inherent human rights, so we can truly begin the process of reconciliation.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations 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.

-30-

For Media Inquiries:

Vic Savino, Communications Officer, Southern Chiefs' Organization
Winnipeg Sub-Office: (204) 946-1869 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca