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SCO APPLAUDS AGASSIZ MLA'S COURAGE

Pallister Must Apologize to First Nations and all Indigenous Peoples – Grand Chief Daniels

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 15, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is pleased to learn of the resignation of Aggasiz MLA Eileen Clarke from the provincial government's cabinet. Yesterday, it was reported that Ms. Clarke was stepping down from her role as Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations.

"I want to commend Eileen for her integrity and for this bold step. Eileen has always been dedicated as a Minister and I thank her for her many years of service." said SCO Grand Chief Daniels. "Yesterday's news corroborates what I have long suspected; that provincial leadership and their outdated beliefs got in the way of her building the trust and relationships that she wanted with First Nations and other Indigenous peoples."

According to published reports, Clarke officially resigned last Friday, just days after Pallister's egregious and tone-deaf comments on colonization. The premier went so far as to say that the colonization of what is now Canada was done with good intentions.

"Those comments still make me shudder when I read or hear them," added Grand Chief Daniels. "Anyone with a shred of decency and intuition would know how blatantly misguided Pallister's comments were. I'm pleased to see someone from the provincial cabinet stand up for Indigenous peoples and for what they believe in. She has shown she has courage to do what is right."

"My council and I have had several meetings and gatherings with Ms. Clarke over my time as Chief," stated Lake Manitoba First Nation Chief Cornell McLean. "I knew she always wanted to do more when it came to reconciliation and building bridges, and that she was handcuffed by an out of touch leader. I too commend her fortitude and wish her well in her future endeavours."

Yesterday's news comes after a long list of insensitive blunders by Pallister. Those include, but are not limited to, saying that night hunting issues in Manitoba would lead to a "race war," and that putting Indigenous people first for COVID-19 vaccines would leave the province in a precarious place when it came to doses being allotted. Add to that, ongoing disputes between the province and First Nations over gaming jurisdiction, flood mitigation, and resource development, among many other issues, and there is a have legacy of racism and innate bias against First Nation leadership and peoples.

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Even yesterday, in light of Clarke's resignation, Pallister had the audacity to stand by his comments of last week and refused to acknowledge his responsibility for Clarke's resignation, going so far as to imply her decision was due to the Indigenous and northern relations portfolio being "tough."

"I can accept nothing less than a full apology to First Nations and all Indigenous peoples, for the ignorant and discriminatory stance of this so-called leader," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "This premier has got to go before he causes even more irreparable harm between his administration, and the First Peoples of this land we now share. I know it is not alarmist to state, the economic, environmental, and social fabric of Manitoba depend on his departure."

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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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