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SOUTHERN CHIEFS' ORGANIZATION RESPONDS TO FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL THRONE SPEECHES

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — Both the federal and provincial governments made significant commitments in their throne speeches, as they laid out their agendas for the coming months. While many of the commitments align with the priorities of the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO), the Chiefs of the southern First Nations are looking for concrete action on a number of critical items.

"We will be watching for measurable outcomes from both levels of government in the coming months," said Grand Chief Daniels. "We urge our federal and provincial Treaty partners to continue collaborating with our people on a Nation to Nation basis, and to renew their commitments to our shared goals of reconciliation and healing. This calls for accountability that goes beyond just words."

While both levels of government pledged to improve health care, Grand Chief Daniels called on the Manitoba government to dramatically increase the number of First Nation nurses, doctors, midwives and other health professionals as one way to tackle surgery backlogs, start addressing racism in the health care system, and ensure it is more representative of the people it serves.

Grand Chief Daniels also noted it will be important to recognize and defer to the work already underway at SCO to create a new southern First Nations health governance structure that is representative of, and accountable to, First Nation communities, as a tangible way of closing the 11 year and growing gap in life expectancy for First Nation peoples in Manitoba.

Elder care is also a priority for southern First Nations citizens. Grand Chief Daniels addressed the Annual Manitoba First Nations Personal Care Home Network Forum, where community leaders, health care workers and Elders are gathered this week to discuss the lessons learned from surviving the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our Elders are some of the most vulnerable members of our population," said Grand Chief Daniels. "The pandemic has exposed health inequities and confirmed that much more must be done to protect and support them. There are currently only eight First Nation personal care homes in the province, and governments need to walk the talk and invest in infrastructure to address this need."

While both levels of government are focused on economic recovery after the pandemic, Grand Chief Daniels said that universal basic income should be at the forefront of these efforts, including resources to address food security.

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Indigenous peoples contribute more than \$9 billion to the Manitoba economy annually, and efforts should also focus on building an economy that includes investments in First Nation peoples and economies. SCO sees wealth creation and economic sovereignty as the basis for lifting our people out of chronic poverty.

Grand Chief Daniels also recognized that both speeches made reference to homelessness, which affects First Nation people disproportionately, but said that more investments are needed to increase the affordable housing supply and support First Nation organizations to address gaps in delivering housing and programming.

While the federal government referenced the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan, it will be important to ensure that the plan has timelines and appropriate funding attached. Grand Chief Daniels noted that SCO is a founding partner of the MMIWG Manitoba Coalition and said that the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit people has been a priority for southern Chiefs for more than two decades.

SCO applauds the appointment of Governor General Mary May Simon, who is Inuk and delivered a portion of the federal throne speech in Inuktitut, and SCO renews its call for First Nation languages to be designated as official languages.

The federal government also committed to take action on climate change. However, immediate action is needed by both governments to address the disastrous results of the climate emergency, which is leading to annual evacuations of whole First Nation communities due to fires and flooding.

SCO looks forward to seeing the words delivered manifest into actions and initiatives that will advance reconciliation and recognize the rights of the First Peoples of Turtle Island.

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,500 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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