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NATIVE DEAL SET AT \$5B

Native Canadians are hoping to cut a \$5-billion deal with the federal government.

Phil Fontaine, chief of the Assembly of First Nations, told CTV's Question Period it's time the Liberal government ponies up cash to back up its pledge to improve housing, education and self-government initiatives for Canada's poor native communities.

First Nations leaders are scheduled to meet with government officials during a cabinet retreat in Ottawa tomorrow.

Provincial premiers have clinched lucrative financial deals by publicly playing tough with Prime Minister Paul Martin, and Fontaine hinted he'll also take a firm stand with the Grits.

SCHOOLS UGLY ISSUE

"If we don't reach a fair and just resolution, for example on the residential schools, and we are unable to negotiate a political agreement that will ensure an integral role for the Assembly of First Nations in this process, or if it becomes clear to us that the government is not truly committed to ensuring the transformative agenda the prime minister has talked about is not going to be possible, then of course it would be foolish on our part to remain committed to participating in such a process," he said.

Fontaine, who was abused as a child at a residential school, hopes a compensation deal for victims can also be reached this week.

Poverty in Canada's native communities is an international disgrace, he suggested.

TRANSCRIPT

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Program:	CTV Question Period	Time:	12:38
Anchor / Reporter:	Craig Oliver	Length:	07:00
Topic:	Interview with Chief Phil Fontaine		

Craig Oliver: New talks about old problems. Paul Martin holds a summit with aboriginal leaders this Tuesday to sign new relationship agreements on land claims, housing and education. While Tuesday's talks helped to firm up policy, is that all they'll do? Then there's the abusive legacy of the residential schools. Will there be financial compensation for former students or will they be disappointed once again?

I'm joined by the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine. Well, you and other chiefs are going into an unprecedented meeting. Never before have aboriginal leaders sat down with the federal cabinet in a retreat. So your people are saying, Mr. Fontaine, it's time for the federal government to deliver. Tell me, what does deliver mean and can you put a price on what deliver means?

Phil Fontaine (National Chief, National Assembly of First Nations): Well, deliver means in this case the culmination of a lot of hard work. We've been at this roundtable process now for over a year, so the product, or the outcomes that we are looking for are policy changes around for example land claims, serious commitments to address issues like housing, education and most importantly, speaking personally, resolution, fair and just resolution of the residential school issue.

Craig Oliver: This is a personal matter, I know, for you. I don't know whether most Canadians realize the extraordinary thing that happened there when children, aboriginal children were taken away from their parents and you were one of those.

Phil Fontaine: I spent ten years in two residential schools, so when I left after grade 10, I was in there.

Craig Oliver: Without interfering with your privacy too much, were you abused when you were there?

Phil Fontaine: I've talked about the sexual and physical abuse that I experienced personally.

Craig Oliver: So how close are you then to a resolution with the federal government of financial compensation for people who were damaged by the residential school experience?

Phil Fontaine: We've been working very hard on this for a number of months. We were engaged in intense discussions. We've moved into negotiations and I hope that we're close. The thing that held up coming to a political agreement, of course, there are legal considerations but it's important to keep in mind that this is more than just a legal issue. We're talking about a political process that has to result with a political agreement so that we are certain that we will be an integral part of the process. When I say "we", I'm talking about the Assembly of First Nations.

Craig Oliver: Could you make a deal on residential schools by Monday, by tomorrow, or Tuesday?

Phil Fontaine: Well, we're hoping that we can conclude the political agreement before the cabinet retreat on Tuesday.

Craig Oliver: And, you know, so that Canadians know and nothing... not to like this, I mean every time a premier goes and sees Paul Martin, they seem to get money handed to them. How much would this cost?

Phil Fontaine: Well, I mean, the best I can do at this point is provide you a (inaudible) figure.

Craig Oliver: Well...

Phil Fontaine: Excluding the government Layton deal, we're talking about \$5 billion.

Craig Oliver: Five billion dollars?

Phil Fontaine: For housing, for education, for health, for a new policy on land claims, support for political organizations, fiscal sustainability of First Nations governments and communities.

Craig Oliver: Um-hum. Now, you're in your second go at this job. The first time, other native leaders bounced you because they felt you were too soft, too conciliatory, too easy to get along with with the federal government. Are you going to make that mistake again or are you ready this time to do a Danny Williams, to walk out and get difficult if you can't get some delivery from Ottawa?

Phil Fontaine: Well, I don't consider my approach the first time around as a mistake. It just was not seen as the best process for that time. We've come to learn since then that a tough approach, at least tough in the way that it was manifested, did not achieve the kind of success that First Nations need and I'm committed to the approach that I used the first time around. It's not much different now. That's not to suggest that we're not tough.

We're as tough as any group in the country in terms of our negotiations and the behind-the-scenes discussions and negotiations that we're engaged in.

Craig Oliver: But are you ready to get up and walk away from the table and go public with your criticisms of a government if they cannot deliver and deliver, I'm told, soon?

Phil Fontaine: Well, of course, if we don't reach a fair and just resolution, for example on residential schools, and that we are unable to negotiate a political agreement that will ensure an integral role for the Assembly of First Nations in this process or it becomes clear to us that the government is not clearly committed to ensuring that the transformative agenda that the Prime Minister has talked about is not going to be possible, then of course it would be foolish on our part to remain committed to participating in such a process.

Craig Oliver: So we're talking about \$5 billion here. It's a lot of money, although it's the kind of money premiers are getting from Mr. Martin. Do you think that you've sold Canadians on the need for this? Are you frustrated that the aboriginal agenda doesn't seem to have a high profile with Canadians even though, to his credit, it does with Paul Martin?

Phil Fontaine: I think Canadians generally understand that the community that I represent is the most vulnerable in the country and that if Canada is going to continue to promote itself as it has internationally, that it has to do better, far, far better than it has in terms of its commitment to First Nations communities. Our people are too poor and there has to be a serious commitment to the eradication of mass poverty in First Nations communities.

Craig Oliver: And by the way, I understand that yesterday here, in Ottawa, you were one of those who did the 10K run, so congratulations for that.

Phil Fontaine: Thank you.

Craig Oliver: And Sunday today is the marathon. You did that years ago too.

Phil Fontaine: Oh, I've run my share of races.

Craig Oliver: Well, good luck, Mr. Fontaine. Thanks very much.

Phil Fontaine: Thank you.

Craig Oliver: Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

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Time for AFN to get tough with PM? Fontaine's nice-guy routine fails to produce results

Paul Samyn PAUL SAMYNN NATIONAL REPORT OTTAWA — What would happen if Danny Williams was the national **native** leader instead of Newfoundland premier? Would he pout and then storm out of meetings with the prime minister? Would he take down the Maple Leaf and run up the flag of the Warrior Society over the **Assembly of First Nations**?

Would he threaten to have the country's natives take to the war path? And, most importantly, would he have been able to win the kind of deals from Ottawa that will make a difference in the lives of Canada's natives? These aren't entirely academic questions. We saw how Williams' brand of political hardball scored a \$2.6-billion accord for his poor province. As for the man who actually heads up the AFN?

Well, **Phil Fontaine** has had precious little to show to his poor people other than a lot of big promises from the Martin government. He plays nice.

He's patient. He's after solutions, not squabbles. In the meantime, he watches the squeaky wheel from Newfoundland laughing all the way to the bank.

This certainly wasn't the way things were expected to play out when Paul Martin came to power, complete with a ceremonial smudging, courtesy of an elder from Sagkeeng **First Nation** — Fontaine's home reserve.

Back in December 2003, Martin signalled the high priority **native** issues would have in his administration by creating not only a cabinet committee on **aboriginal** affairs that he would chair, but also an **aboriginal** secretariat in the Privy Council Office. Better still, there were all sorts of commitments in the government's first throne speech, including a pledge to tackle the "shameful" conditions facing **aboriginal** Canadians. And prepared to work with the prime minister was the Liberal-friendly Fontaine, who is as comfortable in Hugo Boss as he is in buckskin.

But that was all before the sponsorship scandal. Before an election reduced Martin's majority to a minority. Before the Liberal agenda became survival at all costs. Budgets came and went with little to pay for all those big promises.