

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens Canada
Actualité**

Wednesday, May 24, 2006 ♦ mercredi, 24 mai 2006

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Conservatives deserve credit for listening

Patrick Brazeau

Doug Cuthand's column of May 8, "Tories show true colours", had more to do perhaps with the colour of his own political stripe than it did with an objective analysis of the Stephen Harper federal Conservative government's budget.

Cuthand suggests that the Kelowna Accord is dead. To this assertion we must ask, where's his data? If demonstrations of the importance of aboriginal issues must be rooted in the content of federal budgets, the Liberal government of Paul Martin must be held to account. The two budgets tabled by the Martin government during its tenure contained little measures of significance for aboriginal peoples.

The proposed Kelowna investments were announced in the last hour of the last day of the First Ministers' meeting, held three days before the Martin government fell in a non-confidence motion.

The money contained in Kelowna's provisions were not voted on by Parliament. There was no clear indication of where the investments were coming from, or specifically where they were to be applied.

There was no clear sense of how much would go to the provinces or territories, or to specific aboriginal organizations. There was no indication of how the money would be split between on-reserve and off-reserve aboriginal peoples.

In short, while it made for great headlines, there was little about the Kelowna accord that was sustainable. Certainly, the historic opportunity to ensure that its provisions would accommodate all aboriginal peoples was lost. It was a deal that purposely excluded non-status and off-reserve Indians, as well as aboriginal women and children.

With respect to our organization's endorsement, there is nothing suspect about our support of the Harper government and its aboriginal affairs platform. In the 2006 election campaign, we asked each of the three national mainstream parties to outline their programs in respect of off-reserve and non-status Indians and Metis.

The Harper team provided a detailed and comprehensive response, fully addressing its intentions. Inexplicably, the Martin Liberals did not bother to respond to us. Perhaps the response was conclusive proof of the Martin government's view that off-reserve and non-status Indians, Metis, and aboriginal women and children are indeed the forgotten people.

At any rate, our decision to support the Harper government was based on a clear commitment by the Conservative party to accommodate the needs and aspirations of those for whom we speak.

Since the election, we have begun to see delivery on the promises contained in the Harper team's response: The proposed Federal Accountability Act contains provisions to improve accountability in First Nations communities, and the budget delivered much-needed funding for off-reserve housing.

We invite Cuthand and Leader-Post readers to learn more about the Harper government's new approach to aboriginal affairs by reading their letter to us outlining their program. It is available on our Web site (www.abo-peoples.org).

In the meantime, we continue to work with the new national government to "put wheels on Kelowna", as India and Northern Affairs Minister Jim Prentice terms it, to the benefit of all of Canada's aboriginal peoples.

There is room at the table for others to join us as we attempt to put an end to the issues that prevent aboriginal peoples from staking their claim on Canada's unparalleled prosperity. The only inside track the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples seeks is one that sets all Canada's aboriginal peoples on a productive and sustainable path.

(Brazeau is National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples.)