

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada  
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens  
Canada  
Manchettes**

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September 15, 2006

## Chiefs Must Take Stand on FNUC

*The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)*

By: Danna Henderson

Following is the personal viewpoint of the writer, a student from the Pasqua First Nation.

Knowledge. The word embodies what all individuals strive for in life -- to know who one is, where one comes from and what one believes. Today, knowledge must be looked at in terms of education and the ability to know where one stands in life.

I am appealing to the First Nations chiefs and councils in Saskatchewan to use their knowledge and leadership abilities to take a stand on the situation at the First Nations University of Canada and the importance of assuring a high quality of education. For too long, many peoples, both First Nations and non-First Nations, have waited for our leaders to step up and voice their concern over the situation at FNUC.

As an Anishinabe female, a youth leader and most importantly, as a student, I wonder why chiefs and councils who are our leaders and role models have done nothing to ensure that the quality of our education is being taken seriously.

As youth and students we have often heard that "education is our new buffalo," and that "to survive in the white man's world, you need an education." We have taken that initiative to reach for higher learning in post- secondary institutions. Many of us have had a lifelong dream to attend FNUC to obtain an aboriginal-derived learning.

However, with the present situation, our dreams are being slowly shattered. Our education, just as the buffalo, surely is dying. Our means to survival is suffering as we watch our leaders do to First Nations peoples what the white man has done for decades and centuries. A new form of colonialism is emerging: neo-colonialism where the oppressed become the oppressors.

When First Nations peoples were constantly being oppressed through government policies such as the residential schools, permit system and reserves, very few could stand up.

But the very university that enabled me to assert my rights as a First Nation person in Saskatchewan is now trying to prevent me from being the strong, outspoken leader I was taught to become so proudly. The knowledge, education and the ways in which we were taught is being sidelined as intimidation and fear of reprisal overwhelm some.

Speaking on behalf students who are concerned about their education, I am standing up for my beliefs. I believe in the right to ask questions. I believe that our leaders are capable of making positive social changes.

And I believe there are no excuses for letting our people down.

The state of affairs at FNUC is not improving; rather, it's at a standstill. No one seems to care, and they don't want to improve the situation. Where are the leaders who are supposed to be responsible for our people and our rights, and to ensure that our future generations have secure lives as First Peoples in North America? While I realize that leaders have many duties that are time-consuming, I ask them humbly to look at this issue of education.

Do our leaders want FNUC to be there for future generations to help them nurture their identity as First Nations people, to learn the history of our people that cannot possibly be taught properly anywhere else? Currently, many students are waiting and hoping that someone will do something. We want to know that our education is at its highest level and we want certificates, diplomas and degrees that are highly respected in mainstream society.

"Indian control over Indian education" was gained after a long and hard fight. Its main premise was to reinforce identity and give confidence to our self-worth and ability, and to provide the best possible education for our people. This is not happening.

Right now, people are afraid, intimidated or lack the confidence to speak. I am not. A true leader will stand up, even alone, to speak against what he or she believes is wrong.

Instead of talk, we need action from our leaders. Save our institution, restore hope in our people and live up to the speeches about seeking education. The chiefs and councils should not be hypocritical. All people are watching for them to do their job. Our people and our communities vote for the leaders, whose position is based on a collective group, not an individual agenda.

I have confidence that FNUC, can reestablish its reputation and resume as a place of pride without interference.

## **A Sin Against Democracy: Publicly Funded Catholic School Board Wrong to Shut Out Non-Catholics**

*Yellowknifer*

The Yellowknife Catholic Schools district has enjoyed a sterling reputation in this city but are tarnishing it now.

For years, Catholic school trustees have gone quietly about their business, passing balanced budgets and implementing worthwhile programs for the students of their district.

The three YCS schools are near maximum capacity while the public school district, which has suffered a number of embarrassing controversies in recent years, struggles with declining enrolment. Many Yellowknife parents - Catholic and non-Catholic alike - prefer the YCS system.

In fact, some 40 per cent of YCS students are non-Catholic.

In the face of such success, the recent attempt by Catholic trustees to stop non-Catholics from holding any of the school board's seven seats is a troubling development, if not downright self-righteous.

It says to parents of non-Catholic students that they don't deserve representation, even though YCS is happy to enrol their children and collect their tax dollars.

Thank God the territorial government stood up for a basic principle of democracy - no taxation without representation. Territorial government officials ordered the city to extend deadlines for Catholic school board nominations this week, after pamphlets were handed out warning non-Catholics they need not apply.

This came after the Catholic board bought themselves a "legal opinion" stating its in their right to insist upon only Catholic trustees because Catholic schools are enshrined in the Constitution. But reaching back to Canada's earliest foundation, when religious intolerance made such constitutional arrangements necessary, does not hold up today.

If it were so, YCS would not be accepting non-Catholic students and non-Catholic parents would not be so eager to enrol their children with their schools.

The Catholic zealots on the board can try their luck suing the territorial government over the issue, but it would be a risky venture, costly in terms of tax dollars for legal bills and more importantly, a potential loss of the hard-earned public faith in the board.

A legislative change to the Local Authorities Elections Act will require approval of MLAs, some of whom, with an eye to the Catholic Church's sorry past with residential schools - however unrelated to YCS - may not be sympathetic.

Trustees should stick to what they've been doing best up to now - overseeing quality education programs, and keeping YCS in the black.