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## Editorial

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### Act now to help native school

Posted 1 day ago

Shameful. Absolutely shameful.

The crisis being faced by the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) is yet another shameful page in the history of the Canadian government's treatment of First Nations people.

After more than a century of cultural genocide perpetrated by the federal government under the guise of residential schools - and after attempts to suppress indigenous higher learning by codification in the Indian Act which made it illegal for "Indians" to attend colleges or universities until the 1950s - a shining success story by the name of FNTI rose up to offer an alternative in tertiary education for First Nations peoples.

More than 23 years and 2,000 graduates later, FNTI has proven that a post-secondary institute, controlled and operated by indigenous people for indigenous people, can make a real difference in improving the lives of the people and communities it serves. The FNTI model worked where the paternalism practised by the federal government failed. To build on this success, FNTI was poised to grow; a new campus, new programs, new national and international partnerships.

Was it bureaucratic ineptitude, or maybe a crystalline lack of vision, or perhaps - quite simply - was it a fear of what continued FNTI success would mean, in terms of the increased self-awareness and self-confidence among Ontario's (and Canada's) indigenous population?

Whatever the true reason might be, the federal government has decided to try to force the closure of FNTI by claiming an inability to provide continued funding. They claim to have no authority to fund post-secondary institutions. Of course, the absurdity of this assertion is readily apparent when one thinks of the Royal Military College - located in Kingston and just a short drive down the highway from FNTI - that continues to receive full federal funding for its diploma and degree programs.

The Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Chuck Strahl instead of trying to find ways to support FNTI, has launched a campaign of misinformation by stating half-truths and, in some cases, absolute falsehoods, in official media releases. Instead of tasking his bureaucracy with finding ways to provide the necessary funding, he has engaged them in actions aimed at ensuring FNTI's closure, by discrediting the institution and its reputation, and by maintaining a stance that funding must be obtained from private sources.

The provincial government, for its part, simply states that "Indian" education is a federal responsibility. How's that for inspired leadership! If the provincial government really cared, if Dalton McGuinty and Leona Dombrowsky honestly and truly cared about the future of First Nations peoples, they would step up now and seize this opportunity to support FNTI.

The old adage that actions speak louder than words is certainly true in this case, and the lack of action on the part of the federal and provincial governments, and in particular by our local representatives - Daryl Kramp and Leona Dombrowsky - is deafening.

Time is running out for FNTI and the moment for action is now. Don't sit back and allow this wonderful institute of higher learning to close. I encourage all readers to call our local representatives, write to our federal and provincial leaders, and demand that they take action. Help prevent another shameful page from being entered into our collective history books.

James Heffernan

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