

**Subject:** INAC presents options to change the post secondary student support program

Sekon sewakwekon:

Last week INAC officials appeared before the parliamentary Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs to discuss their internal review of the Post Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and revealed their intentions to seek potential changes.

It is important to remember that this program has been subject to a 2% annual cap on expenditure increases since 1996 despite the fact that the First Nations population has grown at a far greater rate and post-secondary tuition costs have risen dramatically in the last decade. The presentation identified that the program is supporting tuition, books, transportation and living allowances for 23,000 students on \$314 million, down from a high of 30,000 students a decade ago. INAC denies that post-secondary education is an Aboriginal and Treaty right.

The AFN has noted that the cap has meant that 10,589 eligible PSE FN students were denied funding from 2001-2006 as a result of the limited funding available. In 2007-08 AFN estimated that an additional \$197 million would be required to overcome the impact of the cap – this number continues to grow. Statistics Canada has identified that the university attainment gap between First Nations (4% on res, 9% off-res) and Canadians (27%) is actually growing over the last census period.

INAC officials noted that the review was intended to determine, strangely enough, how best to *increase* student access to post-secondary education within available resources. There was a reference to ensuring linkages to mainstream post-secondary programs. However a primary question raised by the official was whether the program should continue to be “100% grants” based without a loan component. It was noted that there is currently no income testing for PSSSP eligibility.

In response to a question from a Member of Parliament, an INAC official confirmed that the department is examining options for alternative delivery of the program including through INAC, third party organizations and a vague reference to a relationship with Canada Student Loans.

Officials did not note how potential changes would increase the numbers of FN’s students in post-secondary, or how potential administrative changes would impact on student support or FN’s education capacity.

They committed to publicly posting their review in the next thirty days. There was a commitment to seek feedback from learners, parents and First Nations leadership.

It is worth noting the following recommendation from the very positive 2007 Standing Committee report on Aboriginal post-secondary education called “No Higher Priority”

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Committee/391/AANO/Reports/RP2683969/aanorp02/aanorp02-e.pdf>

*2. The Committee recommends that the 2% annual cap on spending increases for the Department's Post-Secondary Education Program be eliminated immediately; that the Department's spending increases for PSE programming be based on actual costs associated with program components and not be subject to discretionary caps; that the Department make it a priority to provide adequate funding under the PSE Program to every eligible First Nations and Inuit learner and put in place a plan to achieve that priority by the end of 2007, said plan to include implementation measures with clear target dates; that the Department ensure financial assistance for eligible First Nations and Inuit learners under the Department's PSE program is based on actual costs incurred for tuition, travel and living expenses, and indexed annually to reflect rises in both tuition costs and the cost of living; and that the Department review the categories of eligible expenses under the PSE program in order to ensure that the real expenses routinely incurred by individual eligible First Nations and*

*Inuit learners are covered. Such expenses may include, but are not limited to, child care, special needs, and special shelter. This review should occur immediately, and at regular intervals thereafter.*

Here is the government's response to the recommendation

(<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=1&DocId=3030369&File=0>):

*The Government therefore considers that the issues of post-secondary education support raised by the Committee need to be addressed in the larger context of the review of education programs currently being conducted by INAC and its partners. As well, they must be related to other priorities of the department and of the Government in serving First Nations and Inuit as well as Canadians generally. The Government also believes that the responsibility for financing post-secondary education should be shared by learners and their families, according to their financial circumstances. It agrees that levels of support provided through INAC post-secondary education programs should take into account the real needs of learners, but this does not mean trying to meet all of the costs they incur in pursuing post-secondary education. Instead the Government will take a closer look at the overall efficiency of programming and ways to improve upon it. The aim is to ensure that Aboriginal learners have access to education and training opportunities. This approach is consistent with longstanding principles of shared responsibility accepted by Canadians and applied through programs such as Canada Student Loans (CSLP) and a wide range of provincial/territorial and other programs, all of which aim to provide sufficient student financial assistance rather than "full funding." The success of such student assistance should be measured by the access that is achieved by qualified students to post-secondary education.*

*INAC will continue to work with the CSLP, as levels and criteria of support for learners under PSSSP are directly linked with those developed for CSLP. This ensures that INAC support reflects current costs, and that the two programs provide complementary support for First Nation and Inuit learners. In this process, costs having special significance for these students, such as travel from remote locations and child care, can be addressed as part of the larger range of issues. INAC will also work with other federal and provincial programs of support, as well as institutional and private sources, to identify other forms of student assistance potentially helpful to First Nation and Inuit and other Aboriginal learners. The resulting information will be available on the website (see response to Recommendation 1).*

*In addition, as part of its overall review of education programming in cooperation with First Nations and Inuit organizations, INAC is examining the level and functioning of its support to determine how best to maximize opportunities for access to post-secondary education.*

It will take a massive effort by all educators and First Nations students in Canada to prevent misguided approaches which will result in the erosion of this vital program.

Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President  
First Nations Technical Institute  
3 Old York Road  
Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, Ontario  
K0K 1X0  
toll free 800-267-0637  
office 613-396-2122 ext. 133  
cell 416-801-1529  
[www.fnti.net](http://www.fnti.net)

#### United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Article 13 - Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons... States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected.

Article 14 - Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning... States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples,

take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.