



**ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS  
NATIONAL CHIEF SHAWN ATLEO**

**SPEAKING POINTS SUMMARY CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada membership meeting  
Wednesday, October 28, 2009**

My mandate and focus as National Chief puts a priority on Lifelong Learning and an emphasis on post secondary education. Success in education requires all of us, whether the Federal Government, Provincial Governments, First Nation Governments or Universities to find and to sustain cooperative efforts that focus on the student and on their success.

Broadly, I've set out a straight-forward plan that has three elements:

1. **Building schools and key learning infrastructure** including gymnasiums and libraries
  - federal responsibility plus excellent opportunity to create new partnerships for investment)
2. **Effective coordination and support** with other school boards and authorities for second level support ensuring a nurturing environment and seamless transition for our students as they progress
  - key part of current dialogue through Council of Ministers of Education last February and tomorrow through the follow-up process that we called for from the Council of the Federation – the Aboriginal Affairs Ministers working group which will bring focus and attention on the role of provincial and territorial leaders in working with us to improve education outcomes
3. **Broadening the dialogue and understanding** among all involved in education especially universities
  - The reason why I am so pleased to be here tonight – we have much exciting work to do together

My mandate includes working towards a 'never-again' set of commitments through reaching out and building understanding with all Canadians. This, so that 'never again' is education used as a weapon against our people but rather becomes an essential tool offering hope, nurturing and opportunity. Turning the page on residential schools requires a coordinated and sustained approach of all recognizing mutual responsibility.

AUCC and the University Presidents are taking up this challenge and I look forward to working closely with you. There are many key opportunities for us to work together – Universities partnering with and embracing FN traditions and knowledge, supporting student success in new and innovative ways.

## Elaborated key points

- Acknowledgement of Paul Davidson, President and CEO and all those representing Canadian universities and colleges for taking up the challenge, for realizing the shared benefit of postsecondary education of First Nations youth and for working towards new strategies and approaches to increase access and to support student success.
- I am very pleased to see that Aboriginal student access to postsecondary education is one of your top three priorities this year. (AUCC pre-budget submission to House of Commons Finance Committee). This is exactly the kind of leadership and support that First Nations and First Nations youth in particular have asked for and we applaud you for stepping up. I believe we can work on this together and we can succeed.
- Success in education requires all of us, whether federal, provincial, First Nations or universities to find and to sustain cooperative efforts that focus on the students and on their success.
- The systemic challenges that we face are well known to you, as are the realities of the widening education attainment gap of our people and other Canadians. We know that failure to tackle this issue holistically and comprehensively will negatively impact all Canadians

*If the educational gap were to be closed by 2026, the cumulative benefit to the GDP would be \$179 billion. (Center for the study of Living Standards – May 2009*

- But there are also successes – specific to postsecondary.
- When we consider that we've gone from 3 Aboriginal students in the early sixties attending university to the almost 30,000 attending now – we can see remarkable success. But we must be very concerned that more recently, these numbers have been in decline due to a cap on the funding for over a decade (in 2007 total down to 22,000). This reality combined with increasing tuition costs has meant that fewer and fewer students have access. This is absolutely the wrong trend and something we must turn around especially in the face of our growing demographics.
- I encourage you to engage in the current review of INAC's PSE program. There has been no public process on this to this point – but we encourage all to engage with us on the critical advocacy needed. There are clear messages that need to be delivered:
  - The investment must increase.
  - We must see an increase in the number of currently eligible students having access to funding.
  - The program must recognize and support the connection between students and their communities.

- There are many ways in which Universities can and should be working more closely with First Nations to support student success and our success as a country.
  - Research protocols that respect traditional knowledge and bring it together with western research as a mutual learning and supportive endeavour;
  - Governance models wherein First Nations have direct access to university decision-making about what courses are offered and how they are taught,
  - Special programming such as summer youth science and math camps to encourage and support improvements in K-12 learning;
  - Linking courses to community needs both for students and as future employers of graduates;
  - Supporting the development of an Indigenous Public Policy Forum;
  - Contributing to the further development of Canadian identity and understanding by linking graduation with requirements to learn and understand First Nations language, culture and/or history.
- There are excellent examples of universities working towards these very outcomes across the country (including a record number of 5 First Nations chancellors).
- Universities have always been places of youthful energy and higher ideals, the best of which should shape public policy and push new frontiers of understanding. As we face the challenges of today – H1N1 or climate change, for example – we need to be working with you.
- Universities have a direct and indirect role in First Nations health delivery through programs to recruit FN students but also a potential direct role in such areas as placing residents or doing practicum rotations in community health programs contributing to the recruitment and retention of health professionals in FN communities. Support of health research into causes and effectiveness of interventions is another important role that groups like University of Manitoba, University of Alberta and others are doing on a broader basis.
- First Nations leaders and academics have been shut out of many important discussions to this point, but as I have been saying I truly believe **it is our time**. Climate change forces us to take a new look at the values of care for earth and sustainability – the centuries old traditions of our people as the way of the future necessitated by the indulgences of a strictly western approach to development.
- But the key here is really that **it requires all of us- all of us working together** bringing forward the leadership, the knowledge and the tools needed. Where some have relegated our Treaties as ancient relics of the past, I remind everyone that they are living documents and most importantly they are partnership agreements. **We are all Treaty people** and we are all called upon to turn the heavy page of the residential school and colonialism chapter to a new one of hope and opportunity for our future.