

Speaking Notes for

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MLA

Wetaskiwin-Camrose

Calgary Chamber of Commerce
Aboriginal Workforce Symposium

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Ballroom

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8:45 a.m – 9:15 a.m

- Thank you Geoff for your kind introduction.
- First of all Ben – your research report resonates with the objectives set out for the MLA committee.
- I will be reading the report with a great deal of interest.
- Thank you for inviting me here today to talk about the MLA committee on the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Workforce Planning Initiative.
- The FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative is being co-led by the ministries of Employment and Immigration and Aboriginal Relations and supported by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and Alberta Education.
- The MLA committee was appointed by the Ministers of Employment and Immigration and Aboriginal Relations – the Honourable Hector Goudreau and the Honourable Gene Zwozdesky.

- It's truly an honour for me to be the chair of this committee...and to work alongside my fellow committee members:
 - Pearl Calahasen, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake,
 - Evan Berger, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod and,
 - Tony Vandermeer, MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview
- The purpose of the initiative fits well with the focus of this symposium – to increase the participation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Alberta's workforce and to help create more opportunities for economic development.
- Since our committee was appointed, Alberta has undergone some significant changes.

- I want to emphasize that the downturn in the economy has not diminished our commitment to the importance of engaging Aboriginal people in the labour force and the economy.
- In fact, the current economic downturn has given this engagement process an even greater urgency.
- Alberta's economy will rebound and the work we do from now until then will help ensure that we have a ready workforce and a stronger economy for tomorrow.
- As Ben pointed out in his presentation - the skills and talents of Aboriginal people are integral to helping us build to that future.

- On that note, I'd like to give you an overview of our work on this committee and I'll start by telling you what this committee is **not** interested in doing.
- We are not interested in telling First Nations or Métis communities what they need to do.
- We are not interested in deciding what the best solutions are for First Nations or Métis communities.
- We are however, interested in working in a collaborative manner with First Nations and Métis leadership on a government to government basis.
- We're interested in listening, learning and finding out how we can work together to come up with concrete actions aimed at increasing First Nations and Métis participation in the workforce and at increasing economic development activities.

- We want a true process of engagement.
- We're looking for greater dialogue with First Nations and Métis leaders that will result in shared responsibility and ownership of agreed upon actions.
- We want to hear about **their** vision for their communities and how government and other stakeholders can best fit into their plans and goals – not the other way around.
- In fact this engagement process is building on a previous collaboration. About two years ago, the government provided support for First Nations and Métis communities to identify issues and challenges and create workforce action plans.
- First Nation and Métis communities and members identified four broad areas as important.

- These four areas are to:
 - Increase understanding and respect;
 - improve access and support for education and training;
 - support economic development and
 - improve coordination of programs and services across and between governments.
- These four broad areas will be the jumping off point for our discussions when we begin travelling to engage with the First Nations and Métis leadership.
- They will guide us as we work together to find action and solutions to address these issues.

- At the end of the process we expect to emerge with a series of workforce action plans that set out collaborative initiatives along with an agreement of ownership and responsibility for carrying out each action.
- While we haven't started official meetings with First Nations and Métis leaders just yet, I have been visiting some communities and I have met some elected leaders, council members, community members and elders...as well as local business and industry representatives.
- This is proving to be an important learning in the process for me.
- I have visited Siksika Nation..about one hour east of Calgary...
 - Whitefish Lake First Nation (near St. Paul)
 - Fort MacKay First Nation (near Fort McMurray)

- and Aseniwuche Winewak (Ah-scene-new-wha-chee Win-ah-wah) Nation near Grande Cache.
- I'm extremely impressed by what I have seen and heard. The communities were very welcoming and generous with their time.
- There are a lot of good, solid business ventures operating in these communities. And I think that there is a lot that can be learned from them.
- At Whitefish Lake First Nation I toured the dry cleaning and laundry facilities as well as the factory where protective work wear and overalls are made – the market for both these businesses are the oil sands giants – Suncor and Syncrude.
- The Goodfish Lake Development Corporation is 100 per cent owned and operated by the Whitefish Lake First Nation.

- The laundry facility has been in operation since 1977. More than 80 per cent of their staff is Aboriginal.
- It is also the first – First Nations- company to achieve ISO 14001– 2004 registration. What this means is that this company is very “green.” It has set a high bar for itself by adopting leading edge green technology to meet environmental standards and ensure its economic sustainability.
- During my visit to the Siksika Nation I toured the very impressive and beautiful Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park and Conference Centre.
- I was also given a presentation on the Siksika Nation’s economic development master plan.
- The plan sets out a very clear and promising future for the social and economic development of the Siksika people.

- I was pleased to talk to Chief Leroy Good Eagle about his vision for his community and also about some of the challenges he and his people face.
- I travelled to Ft. MacKay where Chief Jim Boucher showed us his community's latest partnership – a modern day work camp for oil sands workers – a joint venture with ATCO - Frontenac.
- I also travelled to Grande Cache to visit the Aseniwuche Winewak (Ah-scene-new-wha-chee Win-ah-wah) community. What impressed me about this community was the work they are doing to build relationships with industry.
- I toured their welding facility and I met with some local industry representatives who talked about the important steps they are taking in the partnership between themselves and the community.

- I look forward to future conversations about how we can all work together in new and different ways - First Nations and Métis communities, training providers, post-secondary institutions, business and industry to further enhance economic growth and development.
- What I am also learning is that each First Nations has its own unique needs.
- The committee looks forward to visiting Métis communities as well. I expect to visit a Métis Settlement in May.
- In addition to visiting First Nation and Métis communities we will also be meeting with First Nation and Métis people living in urban areas.
- Meeting with people living in urban areas is equally important as the population for both groups in urban settings has been growing rapidly in the last few years.

- Aboriginal people living off-reserve in Alberta have made some inroads in the labour force.
- Between 2001 and 2006 Alberta's labour force participation rates increased by 0.9 percentage points **but** the participation rate for Aboriginal people living off-reserve increased by 4.1 percentage points – 4 times higher than the provincial participation rate!
- Between 2001 and 2006 the Aboriginal working age population rose by over 25,000 or 24.5 per cent - doubling the growth rate for the rest of Albertans whose working age population increased by only 13 per cent.
- This clearly demonstrates that phrase we often hear about Aboriginal people as the youngest and fastest growing population.

- The average income for Aboriginal people living off reserve in Alberta was the highest among Aboriginal people in Canada.
- The economy was strong and labour force statistics for Aboriginal people reflected that.
- But I am concerned now. While the unemployment rate has gone up for all Albertans the increase has been more significant for Aboriginal people living off-reserve.
- In February the unemployment rate was 13 per cent. It was considerably lower than that just a few months ago.
- The unemployment situation for Aboriginal people prior to the economic downturn may not have been where we wanted it to be but it was certainly improving.

- That's why I said earlier that it is even more critical that this engagement process is taking place at this particular time.
- Now is not the time for us to lose momentum. We need to move forward together for the benefit of everyone.
- Success in this initiative means not only success for Aboriginal people and communities but success for all Albertans.
- Whether the economy is up or down we need to make sure the Aboriginal people are represented... not underrepresented in Alberta's workforce.
- I look forward to some good discussions and presentations at today's symposium on your ideas, research, plans and vision on how we can work together to take hold of this situation.

- Government is committed to supporting the desire of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to contribute to and benefit from Alberta's economy and workforce.
- In fact one of the government of Alberta's mandates is to increase the number of Aboriginal people in our labour force.
- The departments who are the co-lead for the FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative are already working on many actions to increase Aboriginal participation in the workforce and economy.
- Last year, the ministry of Employment and Immigration's budget for training and economic development programs for Métis, Inuit and First Nations people was \$11.8 million.
- Some of the projects have been very innovative.

- For example E&I has:
 - worked with the four First Nations in Hobbema to establish a centrally located employment centre on the Ermineskin First Nation;
 - provided support to Treaty 6, 7 and 8 staff helping them to identify labour market opportunities with Alberta businesses;
 - provided Métis Settlement economic development officers with mentors who are helping them make links with Alberta businesses;
 - recently announced support for a training program for Aboriginal women entrepreneurs;

- supports over 50 projects to help people in First Nation and Métis communities gain job skills through partnerships with the communities, organizations, government and industry;
- The ministry of Aboriginal Relations administers the *First Nations Economic Partnerships Initiative* (FNEPI), which is designed to increase First Nations participation in the economy.
- This initiative supports:
 - developing effective partnerships between First Nations, industry, Government and other stakeholders;
 - strengthening First Nations economic capacity;
 - and assisting in the development of a viable First Nations private sector.

- Aboriginal Relations has partnered with Treaty 7 to host *Gathering for Success* an Aboriginal Economic Development Symposium, which is being held June 28-30, 2009 in Banff.
- This international symposium is an opportunity to share perspectives and best practices in the area of Indigenous economic and community development.
- Clearly, the government of Alberta is committed to increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in Alberta's workforce.
- It's a government mandate and the MLA committee is proof of this continuing commitment.
- And even though there are lots of programs for Aboriginal people across many ministries, more needs to be done.

- We need more ideas about how to collaborate and coordinate between ministries, with communities, training providers, post-secondary institutions, employers, industry and the federal government.
- As the Calgary Chamber of Commerce report so aptly puts it we need to complete the circle.
- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Workforce Planning Initiative and engagement process will help us do that.
- In closing, I commend the Calgary Chamber of Commerce for its hard work and dedication to bring all of us together today for this Aboriginal Workforce Symposium.
- I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here today as I am still learning. I have been telling those who I have had the opportunity to meet and to work with on this initiative – to assume I know nothing and that I am open to learning.

- I am here for the rest of the day.
- I invite you to share with me your ideas and perspectives on ways to create greater economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people and on opening the door wider for greater workforce participation.
- Thank you.