

Faculty Association

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March 23, 2010

The Hon. Chuck Strahl, MP
Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

Re: Federal Funding for First Nations University of Canada (FNUC)

I write on behalf of the University of Manitoba Faculty Association to urge that you reconsider the decision to withdraw \$7.2 million in federal funding for FNUC. The University of Manitoba Faculty Association represents approximately 1200 full time faculty members at the University of Manitoba. There are many Aboriginal faculty members at the University and a significant percentage of First Nations and other aboriginal students who attend the University of Manitoba.

We are all aware of the educational disadvantages faced by many Aboriginal students, and the critical importance of post-secondary education in helping to address the socioeconomic disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people in Canadian society. Educational institutions, particularly at the post-secondary level, have not always been welcoming environments for Aboriginal students. Supportive resources have often been in short supply, and programs that affirm traditional Indigenous knowledge and experiences have only recently gained momentum. The creation of FNUC was an historical undertaking in addressing this neglect, and the institution has shown leadership by championing the need for increased focus on Indigenous studies, and a culturally appropriate environment for students and teachers.

At the same time we recognize the serious problems this institution has experienced over the years: lack of accountability regarding financial matters, problems in governance, and denial of academic freedom. These issues have finally begun to be addressed by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) through their actions in dissolving the FNUC Board of Governors, suspending the President and Vice-President (Administration) and appointing an interim board consistent with the 2005 recommendations of its own All Chiefs Task Force. In addition, we understand that a transitional management arrangement between FSIN, FNUC and the University of Regina (U of R) is proposed to allow the U of R to oversee financial matters.

Given that corrective measures have been taken it would be tragic to undercut these reforms by financially crippling the organization to the point where it will have no option but to close its doors. What will be lost will take decades to rebuild. A much better option is to assure continued funding, and to work hand-in-hand with the Government of Saskatchewan and the respective institutions involved (FSIN, FNUC and the U of R) to ensure accountability to all stakeholders-funders, students, faculty members and the public, and to realize the vision set out for FNUC.

The restoration of funding for FNUC is of critical importance to this institution and its students, both now and in the future. It will also demonstrate the commitment that the Harper government has to the advancement of post-secondary education for First Nations and other Aboriginal students across the country.

Respectfully,



Brad McKenzie, President

cc: Mr. Rod Bruinooge, MP