



Opening Remarks for the National Chief

Presentation to FINA Study of Bill C-15

February 12, 2026 | 10:30am-11:30am

- Aanii, Boozhoo, Chi Megwetch.
- Good morning, I am Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. I'd like to acknowledge that we are here in the traditional territory of the Algonquin Nation.
- Thank you to the Committee for the invitation to appear today on this critical study of Bill C-15.
- We are pleased to support AFN's technical brief in response to this omnibus Budget Implementation Act, which includes comments on Part 5, Divisions 1, 3, 5, 32, 33, 35, and 44.
- November's federal budget was an opportunity to demonstrate - **through deeds** - that First Nation voices matter to this new administration.
- In the lead up to the budget, when asked about reports of First Nation budget cuts, Canada reassured Chiefs they understood **MORE** needed to be done – **NOT LESS**.
- Sadly, that promise was broken and the 2025 federal budget represents a significant setback.
- When the best we can say is Indigenous Services are **only** being cut by 2 to 3 billion dollars, we know there is a problem.
- Especially when provincial transfers for health, education and social services increased by 5%.
- Instead of closing gaps between First Nations and Canadians, the budget makes things more difficult.
- So, to start, we highlight examples of sunseting programs **NOT** being renewed in this budget.
- The Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support program.

- The Indian Day School health support program.
- Mental wellness teams and opioid treatment support.
- Support for vulnerable First Nations children accessing Jordan's Principle.
- Over 300 First Nations adult education programs.
- No matter how you look at it, **less is not more**.
- These sunseting programs must be extended.
- First Nations have been told to be patient. *Another plan has been promised. Just trust us.*
- As we sit here today, six weeks from the expiration of these vital programs, we see no plan.
- Now, First Nations are demanding answers
- Looking at what **IS** being implemented in this omnibus Act, we are equally concerned.
- As an example, Part 5, Division 1 raises many red flags.
- This looks like an end-run around statutory safeguards this Parliament established to address concerns about Cabinet's unchecked power in Bill C-5.
- All Canadian laws, including their final content and process of development, must be compliant with section 5 of Canada's *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.
- Despite Canada's claims that free, prior and informed consent were at the heart of that Bill- these vital references remain absent in **this** Legislation.
- In the case of this Bill's Red Tape Reduction Act, we have concluded that excluding First Nations from the development of this law is likely to result in strong legal challenges.
- Another concern we have with this Act is a strong trend towards devolution of federal authority.
- While First Nations are clearly within federal jurisdiction, Canada continues to delegate authority and fiscal responsibility to Provinces through program design and funding flows.

- In addition to eroding federal accountability and fragmenting service delivery, this approach is fundamentally inconsistent with nation-to-nation relationships.
- Devolution of federal authority goes against the principles of substantive equality and unfairly forces First Nations to compete with Provinces for health, education and police funding.
- Build Canada Homes is a recent example of a federal initiative that could deliver for First Nations through a distinctions-based funding approach.
- In this light, we appreciate Minister Robertson's commitment to set aside minimum funding of 10% to finally start addressing the First Nations housing gap.
- We also recommend C-15 go further and mandate distinctions-based program design and First Nations participation in governance.
- Finally, it is worth noting November's budget was introduced on the one-year anniversary of the passing of our great leader, Justice Murray Sinclair.
- After documenting the Truths of Canada's horrific residential school system, Justice Sinclair called on us to **GET UP** and do the work of Reconciliation.
- He described the mountain we needed to climb. He showed us the path to the top. But he always said it was up to all of us to do the climbing.
- That climb rests with all of us now. Everyone in this room and on this Committee.
- In Justice Sinclair's name, we must keep imagining what a world looks like where all of us have medicines, food and a safe place to live.
- Not just a few - but **truly all of us**. Because budgets are not just accounting exercises.
- They are important instruments for governments to deliver on their obligation to protect the rights of **all** citizens.
- We hope you will listen and respond through both words and deeds. We look forward to your questions.