

Opening Remarks to Métis Nation-Industry Roundtable

Thank you and welcome to the Métis Nation-Industry Roundtable during a very busy week for the Métis Nation in Vancouver.

This two day forum is dedicated to exploring ways in which industry and the Métis people can collaborate in generating employment and wealth.

The Roundtable has its origins in a collaborative process engaging the Métis Nation, the federal government, the five westernmost provinces and industry toward enhancing Métis participation in the economy.

On that note, it is especially pleasing and a great honor for me and the Métis National Council that the moderator of the discussions over the next days will be none other than the former federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs who played such an instrumental role in putting this process together, the Honorable Chuck Strahl.

Chuck made it clear to me at our first meeting in 2008 that he wanted to establish a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with the Métis Nation.

And indeed he not only meant what he said but acted on it.

Within a few months of our first meeting, Minister Strahl and I were signing the Métis Nation Protocol which remains the cornerstone of the relationship between the federal government and the Métis Nation.

Economic development and tapping into economic opportunity was to be a top priority under the Protocol at a time when Minister Strahl and his department were considering a new federal approach to Aboriginal economic development.

The new Federal Framework on Aboriginal Economic Development in 2009 focused on market and business driven development to tap economic opportunity rather than bureaucratic programs.

This was right up the alley of the Métis people with our strong entrepreneurial tradition.

Moreover, given the unique circumstances of the Métis people, Minister Strahl recognized the need to address our issues directly.

The new Framework stated that it would be implemented for the Métis people through the Métis Nation Protocol, setting the stage for a Métis specific process that has served us well.

Minister Strahl also recognized and decided to build on the strong track record of our Governing Members in delivering a variety of economic and business development services through professionally managed arms-length institutions.

Under his leadership, unprecedented federal investments were made in Métis Nation institutions and investment funds.

His department began a transfer of administration of some of its economic programs to the Métis Nation.

He also recognized the need to bring the five westernmost provinces into the process he had started with us under the Métis Nation Protocol and succeeded in performing a remarkable feat in federal – provincial relations, bringing his five provincial counterparts to the table alongside his government and the Métis Nation leadership to squarely confront the need for collaboration on Métis economic development initiatives.

Two Métis Economic Development Symposiums or MEDS have been held, focused on Métis-specific initiatives to expand economic participation.

The second MEDS in Vancouver in January 2011 convened by Chuck's successor, Minister John Duncan, concluded with a communiqué calling on a working group from all the jurisdictions to develop a long term Métis economic development strategy and report back to MEDS Principals in 2013.

This strategy will consider areas such as encouraging Métis entrepreneurship, partnerships with the private sector, and participation in the workforce.

Toward developing this Strategy during the past two years, the Métis National Council and its Governing Members held a series of regional engagement sessions with industry in Winnipeg, Prince Albert, Grande Prairie and Vancouver, with one more planned in Ontario.

These sessions have identified numerous promising corporate practices and collaborative approaches with Métis in the areas of education, training, employment, procurement and partnerships.

These successful approaches with industry will figure prominently in the development of a national Métis Economic Development Strategy by MEDS Principals this year as will federal and provincial policies that can support and accelerate our partnerships with industry.

So again I wish to thank Chuck Strahl for the remarkable role he has played in opening a lot of doors for the Métis Nation and look forward to hearing his comments and insights over the next two days.

We will also be joined by Allan Clarke, the acting Assistant Deputy Minister for economic development within Aboriginal Affairs Canada.

Allan has been an integral part of the new Federal Framework and the MEDS process and has proven to be very supportive of our work on these fronts from the beginning.

More recently he has been working closely with us on the development of a Canada-Métis Nation Accord on Economic Development which we will be concluding with the federal government and I welcome him to the Roundtable and look forward to his comments.

The MEDS process and regional engagement sessions have been accompanied by significant initiatives on the part of Provinces and industry to foster expanded Métis participation in the economy.

When we started this work with the federal government under the Métis Nation Protocol back in 2008, we had Métis capital

corporations in the three prairie provinces providing loan capital to our small businesses and one equity capital provider, the Clarence Campeau Development Fund in Saskatchewan.

All of them have a distinguished record in financing business start ups and expansion and related job creation.

Today, they are joined at this conference by the Métis Voyageur Development Fund, a Métis business financing corporation recently established by the Métis Nation of Ontario with a \$30 million capital contribution by the Province of Ontario over ten years.

I look forward to hearing from its CEO, Steven Morse, on its plan as financier of choice for Metis entrepreneurs in Ontario.

We will also get insight into two dynamic Métis Nation financial groups that have emerged in Manitoba during this period, the first being Metis Economic Development Organization or MEDO established by the Manitoba Métis Federation to provide equity capital to businesses in the energy and resource sectors and is managed by Blake Russell.

The second is the Métis Economic Development Fund, a \$10 million fund recently established by Premier Selinger and MMF President David Chartrand that will be co-investing with MEDO and I welcome its manager, John Coutris, who is with us for the conference.

During the MEDS process, the private sector has been making significant efforts to engage with the Métis and the partnerships that are being forged have figured prominently in our regional sessions.

We will be hearing from a number of major corporations that have entered into various forms of partnerships with our Governing Members and Métis communities including equity participation and Impact Benefit Agreements.

These partnerships are key to drawing Métis into and supporting major projects as will be seen during the panels from the various industrial sectors.

I wish to thank the Ledcor Group for the leadership role they have taken on behalf of industry throughout the regional engagement sessions and I look forward to hearing from them shortly.

Finally, this conference also intends to place a spotlight on skills development in a rapidly changing economic environment, a top priority for the private sector, Métis Nation and the federal government.

We have on hand copies of a groundbreaking study by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce identifying the Métis with their high labor force participation rates, and their demographic profile – a young, urban and increasingly skilled population – as key to filling the gaps in the labor market of western Canada.

On that note, let me turn it over to our Minister responsible for our ASETS programs, David Chartrand, also the president of the Manitoba Metis Federation and a champion of Métis land rights who, a few weeks ago, walked out of the Supreme Court of Canada with a historic decision upholding Métis land claims in Manitoba, itself a game changer in the role the Métis intend to play in the future economic development of Canada.

Thank you.