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2023 - 24 PROVINCIAL BUDGET REDUCES OVERALL FUNDING TO FIRST NATIONS BY -8.76 PER CENT

Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatoon SK – The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) says the “Saskatchewan Strong Economy” is largely driven by natural resources taken from First Nations’ ancestral and Treaty territories. Aside from gaming payments, the province reduced overall funding to First Nations by -8.76 per cent in the 2023 - 24 Budget.

The Government of Saskatchewan announced increases in spending on First Nations from \$232.8 million in 2022-23 to \$248.7 million in 2023-24. The total increase is \$15.9 million (6.8%); however, gaming agreement payments are estimated to increase by \$30.9 million in 23-24 (the majority is FN revenue earned under SIGA) meaning that all other investments have effectively decreased by \$15 million.

For Education, Advanced Education and Career Training combined there was a reduction of \$2 million from \$55.8 million to \$53.8 million. FSIN Chiefs say we need to prepare our youth for jobs and inclusion in the economy, however, Saskatchewan is lowering the funding to education and training.

There are currently more than 80 large-scale project commitments in Saskatchewan with an estimated total investment of \$32 billion dollars, with many already under construction, according to the province.

“All of these large-scale projects are near First Nations and taking resources from our ancestral land and Treaty territories. There has not been one First Nation in the province to report a positive experience of consultation or accommodation, let alone revenue sharing but still, the province continues to benefit, sharing its resources with cities, towns, resort towns and villages, and rural municipalities - everyone but First Nations. The province tells the public that First Nations are benefitting from the programs and services it offers while it continues to leave First Nations communities out of programs like the rural marshal’s service and revenue sharing from gas tax revenue. At present, no resource revenue goes directly to First Nations,” said FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron.

The Budget claims to build on Saskatchewan’s position as a global leader in the exploration and mining of critical minerals. Saskatchewan has 23 of the 31 critical minerals on the Canadian Critical Minerals List, says the province.

“Our Inherent and Treaty rights need to be accommodated. The province has a bad track record of leaving First Nations out of opportunities. All of these critical minerals are situated within First Nations' ancestral and Treaty territory. The budget commits \$4.0 million to expand Targeted Mineral Exploration Incentives, including exploration drilling for all hard-rock minerals and increases the funding limit to support emerging commodities. However, before Saskatchewan solicits investments from around the globe, they need to ensure that they consult with First Nations to guarantee Inherent and Treaty rights are not infringed upon, and that we are included in economic opportunities in the province we inhabit,” said Fourth Vice Chief Heather Bear.

The province says the Growth Plan goals for the year 2030 are to increase potash sales to \$9 billion, to double the size of the forestry industry, and increase oil production to 600,000 barrels per day.

The province projects non-renewable resource revenue is forecast as \$3.3 billion, up \$434.5 million or 14.9 per cent from last year's budget; this is largely driven by potash and oil prices.

The province claims elevated commodity prices, particularly potash and oil, contributed to a surplus as well as a rebound in grain prices.

“Once non-renewable resources are extracted from the ground they are gone forever. Once the wealth has been dispersed and spent, it's gone. We'd like to work with the province to create a resource revenue sharing agreement to ensure our First Nations people are included in employment opportunities and First Nations companies are considered for contracts,” said Fourth Vice Chief Heather Bear, Lands and Resources Portfolio holder.

The 2023-24 Budget includes the highest ever Municipal Revenue Sharing at \$297.9 million dollars, an increase of \$35.3 million or 13.4 per cent increase from last year's budget.

First Nations communities are not included in this revenue sharing, leaving reserves to come up with their own way to fund infrastructure, road maintenance, facilities and other expenses on-reserve. First Nations are also excluded from several grants and initiatives set aside for municipal governments.

The 2023 - 24 Budget invests \$7.0 million to establish the new Saskatchewan Marshals Service (SMS) to increase policing capacity in rural and remote areas, but the province is not including First Nations governments in the development of this service.

There was an -18.75 percent reduction in the Aboriginal Court Workers Program.

Funding for the Indigenous-owned contractors' part of the Accelerated Site Closure Program was cut from the 2023 - 24 Budget. The program was funded at \$18.1 million in 2022 - 23 and now has no provincial funding allocated for the 2023 - 24 fiscal year.

The 2023 - 24 Budget includes \$249.1 million in target funding for Indigenous and Métis people and organizations, an increase of more than 6.8 per cent from last year. First Nations as a people are not mentioned in the Budget, although the Métis as a people are distinctly recognized, only the generalized term Indigenous is used in reference to First Nations.

First Nations specific health is status quo. Furthermore, the 6.7% increase in health funding overall doesn't cover inflation meaning that pressures on the health system can be expected to increase into 2023-24 due to factors such as population increase and the ongoing pandemic.

First Nations justice initiatives will see an increase of \$2 million from 30.8 million to \$32.8 million. The Aboriginal Court Workers program will struggle with the decrease in funding from \$1.6 million to \$1.3 million.

The increase of \$3.1 million from \$56.8 million to \$59.9 million in social services also does not keep up with inflation alone and will have little impact on the most vulnerable.

\$7.7 million will continue to support two Indigenous-led pilot projects that provide supportive housing and wrap-around services for people experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon and Regina. Funding is continued for permanent shelter spaces and after-hour services developed with community partners.

About FSIN

The Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations represents 73 First Nations in Saskatchewan. The Federation is committed to honouring the spirit and intent of the Treaties, as well as the promotion, protection and implementation of the Treaty promises that were made more than a century ago.