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Candidate for BCAFN Regional Chief

**“Building on OUR Success”
Platform**

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Moving Forward Together

As leaders we all share the same objective: **“To make the lives of our people better”**. For me, this means an **improved standard of living for our citizens and practicing and thriving cultures**.

In pursuit of this objective a change has already begun throughout our Nations. There are now many new and exciting opportunities for our people. This is a direct result of the on-going struggle to recognize and implement our aboriginal title and rights, rights that have been so hard fought for on the ground, in court and through negotiations. Today we are benefiting from the results of that struggle.

While many challenges still remain ahead of us in implementing aboriginal title and rights, we must recognize how far we have come and take advantage of the opportunities that now present themselves. Not just in some of our communities but in all our communities. We must build on success. This requires strong leadership, a lot of hard work and ensuring our citizens are behind us and driving the change from within each of our communities.

The change that is occurring is evidenced by our Nations developing our own modern economies, both on- and off-reserve, moving away from *Indian Act* governance and taking back control of our lands and our lives throughout our entire traditional territories. During this period of change, we must share, communicate and support each other in our common goals.

While there are many opportunities to re-build our Nations, we must always be cautious. In keeping with our objective any change must be put to a simple test: “Will it make the lives of our community members better?”

I will ensure that the office of the BC Regional Chief never loses sight of this test and remains relevant to our communities as we move forward together. The BCAFN is not an office of one person, the Regional Chief, but is an office of all of our Chiefs and communities.

There are four key and interrelated areas that I believe are critical to meeting our shared objective of improving the lives of our people and ensuring we have practicing and thriving cultures. These are:

1. Strong and Appropriate Governance
2. Fair Land & Resource Settlements
3. Improved Education, and
4. Individual Health.

1. Strong and Appropriate Governance

First Nations have an inherent right to self-determination. This is a fundamental right among all Indigenous Peoples throughout the world and is recognized in the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. While Canada has not yet signed the Declaration, the right of self-determination is a right that is protected by s.35 of the Canadian Constitution and has been hard fought for. Across Canada our Nations are beginning to implement our inherent right of self-determinations and are moving away from governance under the *Indian Act* and control by Canada. **Strong and appropriate governance is necessary if our Nations are to reach their full potential and maximize our opportunities. This is a prerequisite for sustainable and long-term economic development.** A key to success for both Canadian and US tribes has been effective self-determination. However, many of our Nations' citizens are afraid of 'self-government' or do not support it. This paradox needs to be understood and overcome if opportunities are to be realized.

In order to re-establish appropriate institutions of governance, every Nation, as part of its own critical path, requires 'an exit strategy' for getting out from under Canada's control and a plan to rebuild their own governance structures from the community up. This is challenging work and requires leadership and the dedication of resources and time.

The BCAFN, in my view, has a role to play to help empower, support and connect our Nations as each develops and executes their own 'exit strategy' from colonial governance structures to implementing appropriate governance structures today. In many cases, in order to move forward some degree of negotiations with the Crown is necessary and navigating the bureaucracy and the hurdles put in a Nation's way can be a challenge. While the BCAFN should never negotiate a Nation's governance arrangements, the BCAFN can help to ensure the path is clear for our Nations to make their own arrangements.

When rebuilding appropriate and strong governance, regardless of the process, our Nations must be free to consider decision-making systems that reflect our unique cultures and traditions. Jurisdictional arrangements will reflect our multiple structures of governance. Where Nations have hereditary or other traditional forms of governance, the Crown must recognize these systems and not stand in the way of their operation. While sometimes our traditional systems are a challenge for Canada and BC, this is a challenge that must be overcome if our self-determination is going to be meaningful and legitimate.

BC has been at the forefront in implementing the inherent right of self-government in Canada. BC leaders were instrumental in protecting our rights of governance in the *Constitution Act* 1982. BC Nations have had success in negotiating modern governance arrangements with the Crown, litigating Aboriginal governance rights or simply implementing governance on the ground. We need to share our experiences and build on our success. Some of the governance opportunities, either on-reserve or throughout the traditional territory include:

1. Incremental Jurisdiction through the *Indian Act*;
2. Sectoral Self- Government initiatives, including;
 - a. Land Code development under the First Nations' Framework Agreement on Land Management,
 - b. control of education under the Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement,
 - c. property taxation, financial management and public financing under the First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act, and,
 - d. Financial Management and control of 'Indian monies' under the First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act,
3. Constitution Development;
4. 'Shared Decision-Making' and Land Use Planning; and,
5. Comprehensive Self-Government Agreements (both inside and outside of treaty);

These opportunities are discussed below.

Incremental Jurisdiction through the *Indian Act*

For many of our Nations moving away from federal control has started through the exercise of delegated authority under the *Indian Act*.

While the *Indian Act* is obviously not the right tool to implement our inherent right to self-government, there are, nevertheless, a number of opportunities to build our governance and our jurisdiction using the *Indian Act* as a stepping stone to eventual full self-determination. Many of our communities have developed our own custom election rules and membership/citizenship codes (approximately 232 in Canada). There are currently 50 First Nations in BC that are collecting property tax under s.83 of the *Indian Act*. These communities now raise much needed revenues for local purposes that support economic development and community enhancement.

Many of our communities are making by-laws under s.81 of the *Indian Act*. While the bylaw powers are limited and do require Canada to review the bylaws made, they are, nonetheless enforceable and are one way to begin exercising decision-making authority on-reserve.

The exercise of authority under these *Indian Act* provisions has helped many of our communities begin on the path towards self-determination and we can build on the positive examples, best practices and share our experiences. Many of these elements of governance that could be advanced by drawing down powers through the *Indian Act* could eventually find their way into a Nation’s constitution or inform negotiations with Canada when it comes time to implement comprehensive governance arrangements based upon the inherent right.

Sectoral Self-Government Initiatives

Land Management: Beyond the *Indian Act*, but short of comprehensive self-governance, there are opportunities for our Nations to exercise jurisdiction and authority through sectoral self-government arrangements. Seventeen communities in BC have passed Land Codes under the First Nations Land Management Act. Eight more communities are in the developmental stage.

Having a Land Code removes a community from under the restrictive land management provisions of the *Indian Act* and the involvement of the Minister of Indian Affairs. There are currently limitations on the number of communities that can develop a Land Code at any one time and I will work to see that these limitations are lifted. If a community wants to develop a Land Code it should be able to do so without a ‘gatekeeper’. **For Nations that want to develop Land Codes I will support our leaders as they push Canada to move more quickly in supporting the implementation of land code development.**

Education: There are over fifty of our communities that have indicated they want to be a part of the new educational arrangements being implemented pursuant to the Education Jurisdiction *Framework Agreement*. The Education Agreement is unique to BC and provides an opportunity for communities who want to begin the process of asserting jurisdiction over education to do so. It is important that communities that wish to take control over education are aware of this initiative, have the opportunity to participate in it, and learn from the experiences of others. I will work with our leaders in promotion of this opportunity.

Financial Management: Another BC led initiative was the *First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act* (FSMA) initiative, where communities are moving beyond the *Indian Act* and are raising revenues and passing financial management and borrowing laws under the FSMA. There are over 35 First Nations communities under the FSMA.

This Act provides jurisdiction beyond the *Indian Act* to make financial management laws that govern financial administration in our communities. It also provides opportunities for communities to collectively borrow monies for their public purposes through the First Nations Finance Authority using multiple revenue streams. A Nation, if it so chooses, can build upon the opportunities created by the FSMA. **As Regional Chief, I will work with our leaders in facilitating greater control of our financial affairs including access to capital for public and other purposes whether or not through this initiative or others.**

In addition to the FSMA the *First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act* provides an opportunity for our Nations to pass financial management rules and then take over control of their ‘Indian monies’ (revenues and capital accounts that are under the control of Indian Affairs derived from economic activity on-reserve).

Constitution Development

Many of our Nations have developed or are developing their own Nation’s Constitution, either as part of negotiations with the Crown or independent of negotiations (such as the Haida, Laich-Kwil-Tach, Tahltan, Westbank, Gitanyow, and many, many others). This is one of the most important activities occurring across our Nations. It is important because a Constitution, from the community up, establishes the foundation for the government and all activities of the Nation. A Constitution sets out the basic fundamentals of how a Nation is governed, how decision-makers are chosen, how laws are made and enforced and how accountability to and by the citizens is maintained. Regardless of whether or not a Constitution is being developed as part of a broader self-government negotiation or simply as an initiative of the Nation there are many examples of successful Constitution development in BC that can be shared. Ultimately all Nations will no doubt want to have their own Constitution setting out how their Nation is governed. We need to support and build on our success in working with Nations that want to develop their own Constitution. Building a Constitution can be a first and very powerful step to engaging community members and charting a First Nation’s own governance course. **As Regional Chief I will work to ensure our Nations have the resources and the networks to develop their own Constitutions where this is part of their critical path.**

Shared Decision-Making Arrangements

Many of our Nations are not simply looking to exercise jurisdiction on their limited reserve land base but are pushing for broader jurisdiction within their entire traditional territories, including true ‘shared decision-making’. The opportunities for self-government off-reserve over our traditional territories where jurisdiction is shared with BC (and in some cases Canada (i.e. for fish and National Parks for example)) are relatively new and are a result of recent Court cases and successes at the negotiating table. Some examples of shared decision-making arrangements that I have reviewed include: the Taku River Tlingit *Framework Agreement Respecting Land Use and Wildlife Management*; the Gitksan *Short Term Forestry Agreement*; the Haida *Strategic Land-Use Agreement*; and, the Clayoquot Sound *Interim Measures Agreement*. There are many others.

With our Nations beginning to enter into shared decision-making arrangements over their traditional territories we need to understand these agreements and build upon them. There are now opportunities to exercise some control over resource development and ensure that it is sustainable development where our traditional lands are protected and where we can participate in decision-making concerning economic development and ensure our Nations’ involvement in that economic development.

Land Use Planning

Some of our Nations have developed or are developing comprehensive land use plans for their Traditional Territories. These plans set out how the Nation sees land use throughout their Traditional Territory, including areas protected for traditional practices as well as areas for economic development. These plans can inform negotiations, including those leading to shared decision-making arrangements, but more importantly they are an assertion of governance rights to determine what can happen on our lands. Where these plans have been developed by a Nation, governments and third parties are increasingly relying on the plans and having to respect them, particularly as the legal rights of our Nations become clearer through the Courts. Examples of such land use planning include the Gitanyow Land Use Plan and the Squamish Nation Land Use Plan. **All Nations will, at some point probably seek to develop a land use plan for their entire traditional territory. Again, this is an important area where Nations can work together, particularly where there is overlap between Nations’ plans.**

Comprehensive Self-Government Agreements (inside or outside of Treaty)

Some Nations want to exercise broad self-government powers beyond the *Indian Act* and sectoral self-government arrangements and to build upon their governance work to date (whether it is Constitution development or land use planning etc). Short of securing a declaration from a Court that a Nation has an inherent right of self-government over a broad range of subject areas, or simply just exercising rights, it is still necessary to negotiate agreements with the Crown on the extent of the inherent right across a range of subjects (lands, resources, health, education, financial management etc.).

Over the past 20 years a number of our Nations have gained experience in negotiating comprehensive governance arrangements and are now implementing aspects of the inherent right.

Each of our Nations must have the opportunity to have a meaningful and true negotiating table with Canada and where appropriate with BC. Self-government arrangements can apply to existing reserves but can also apply to the broader traditional territory as part of claims settlements, however negotiating comprehensive agreements cannot be restricted to negotiating agreements under the BC Treaty Process.

All Nations, whether negotiating treaties or not, need to be able to negotiate their own comprehensive governance arrangements with Canada and BC when they desire to. At the very least, Canada should engage with Nations that want to negotiate new jurisdictional arrangements over existing reserve lands, with or without BC’s involvement. **I will continue to push Canada and BC to open the doors to establishing governance negotiating tables with our Nations that desire such tables without the requirement to go through one process of negotiations or another.**

Moving Forward Together

As Regional Chief I will work to ensure that where Nations are implementing their right to self-government through **whatever initiative or approach they have chosen as part of their critical path, that they are supported in that decision and connected with other First Nations moving in the same direction.** Where our Nations’ require Canada or BC to undertake some form of action as they remove themselves from the affairs of Nations, I will work with our communities and their leadership to ensure Canada or BC take appropriate action where necessary.

I will also work to pressure Canada to become a signatory to the United Nations’ *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

2. Fair Land and Resource Settlements

BC is subject to Aboriginal title and rights, including Treaty rights. BC is unique within Canada and our interests are different than for other Nations across Canada. Our interests with regard to addressing the 'land question' require strong leadership at both the provincial and national level. **Settlement of the land question remains fundamental to the overall success for our Nations in BC. Without adequate access to land and resources our Nations will never reach our full potential. In addition to sustaining our traditional practices, access to land and access to resources provides our capital - our equity - and therefore our ability to build our economies and support our governance.**

Our Nations currently do not have fair access to their lands and resources. However, building on the work of the leaders that have come before us, the opportunity to change this now exists. For example, there are now hundreds of land and resource agreements that our Nations have entered into known as 'benefits' agreements (also known as interim measures, project support, cooperation, development, protection and benefit, market access, standard-setting or certification, participation and accommodation). **We need to be strategic and work together to maximize these opportunities and ensure all Nations have access to land and resources whether through benefits agreements or other arrangements.**

Our Nations are demonstrating success in implementing aboriginal title and rights on the ground through three interrelated approaches: 1) Litigation 2) Negotiations and 3) the Exercise of rights. **Our Nations are playing different roles in what is becoming a collective approach to moving forward.** We need to build on our experiences and support one another in developing a collective strategy; the result of which will be each Nation strengthening its own relationship with Canada and BC.

Litigation

BC First Nations would not be so far ahead with the recognition of title and rights and settling the 'land question' had it not been for litigation. Litigation drives negotiations and sets the bar for agreements. We have made significant progress through the courts with title and rights cases such as *Calder* (Nisga'a), *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* (Gitksan & Wet'suwet'en), *Haida*, *Taku* and *Sparrow* (Musqueam) etc. There are dozens of cases, many still before the Courts and many more to come. We are currently waiting for a decision in the Nuu-chah-nulth fishing and title case which is due sometime this month.

My campaign message is "Building on OUR Success". One of the biggest legal successes we have had in recent years is Justice Vicker's trial decision in William, otherwise known as *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2007 BCSC 1700. In this case the Xenigwet'in, as caretakers of part of the Tsilhqot'in Nation's territory, argued they had aboriginal title and rights to and over 438,000 hectares of land. This was no small undertaking. We all truly appreciate the dedication and effort put into this case by the Xenigwet'in and Tsilhqot'in people. Although only a trial level decision and being appealed, the William case is the first time any of our Nations has proven its aboriginal title in court and to a substantial portion of its claimed territory (40%). In addition they won by having their trapping and other aboriginal rights being recognized over the entire claimed area. While the judge fell short of issuing a declaration for the title proven for technical reasons the opportunities this case creates are huge.

Since the decision we have been meeting regularly in BC as First Nations to develop a **litigation strategy** as we move forward collectively in advancing Aboriginal title and rights through the Courts and to enhance our negotiating position. I am optimistic about the impact of the *Tsilhqot'in* decision and other recent aboriginal title and rights cases are having. As a result of cases like William and the *Haida* and *Taku* cases dealing with consultation and accommodation we are already seeing our Nations entering into benefits agreements and shared decision-making arrangements with third parties and the Crown.

A number of our Nations are favouring getting behind the Tsilhqot'in and pooling our resources to help them conclude their legal battle; the outcome of which will have far-reaching consequences for all our Nations. Title cases are mammoth in scale and require years of planning and much evidence. It simply makes good sense for other First Nations to rally behind the best title cases which can advance our issues in a cost-effective and organized manner. I have conveyed my support to the Xenigwet'in people and how important I feel this case is for all First Nations. **As Regional Chief I will continue to work with our leaders as we develop and refine our litigation strategy which must include supporting and promoting the Tsilhqot'in case, among other cases.**

Negotiation

Whether involved in litigation or not, at some point all Nations will end up at a negotiating table negotiating arrangements with the Crown respecting the recognition and implementation of their aboriginal title and rights.

Some of our Nations in BC have been able to reach accommodation with the Crown by adhering to pre-existing treaties, such as the First Nations that are signatories to Treaty 8 (Blueberry River First Nation, Doig River First Nation, Fort Nelson First Nation, Halfway River First Nation, McLeod Lake/Tsekani First Nation, Prophet River Band, Sauleau First Nations, and West Moberly First Nations). Others have concluded modern treaties outside of the BC Treaty Process (such as the four communities that form the Nisga'a Lisims government), and others have completed treaties under the BC treaty making process (Tsawwassen First Nation and the five First Nations who form the Maa-Nulth). Still other Nations have historic treaties (i.e. the 14 Douglas Treaties on Vancouver Island). **For Nations that have a treaty, the challenge has been and now becomes one of implementation and ensuring that the Crown lives up to their end of the agreement and that there is capacity in the Nation to recognize and build upon their opportunities.**

While a handful of other communities may be able to reach accommodations through the current BC Treaty process, the vast majority of First Nations negotiating treaties (there are 49 Treaty Tables representing 2/3s of the First Nations in BC) will not be able to complete agreements unless the federal and provincial governments move significantly on their negotiating mandates. Because of the inability of some First Nations to resolve difficult treaty issues at their individual tables, 63 First Nations joined in a 'Common Table' to press six fundamental barriers to settling the land question through the Treaty process (Recognition/certainty, including overlapping claims/shared territories; constitutional status of lands; governance; co-management throughout traditional territories, including structures for shared decision-making; fiscal relations, including own source revenue and taxation; and fisheries). I would argue that these are essentially the same issues that Nations outside of the treaty process are also facing in their discussions with the Crown in other venues.

There is, in short, a lot of negotiating going on in BC and it is important that we continue to share our experiences as we each develop our own negotiating positions to take to whatever rights and title table we are sitting at. While we may have dozens of negotiating teams around the Province, at the end of the day, decisions made by BC and Canada are really made by a small group of people who are very familiar with what is happening at all our individual Nation's negotiations. **Working together we can share our experiences and be stronger at our individual negotiating tables.** It was for this reason that I particularly liked the approach taken by the Nations participating in the 'Common Table'.

As Regional Chief, I will convene regular assemblies to facilitate information sharing and strategy development among our Nations.

Exercise of Rights

The ‘just do it’ strategy. Instead of going to Court and proving that title and rights exist or negotiating a settlement, some Nations are simply choosing to exercise their rights and title and encourage their citizens to do so. This means using the land and resources in a suitable and sustainable way to, for example, harvest timber, carry out traditional practices such as hunting, fishing, trapping or gathering. For others it means using or redirecting water sources or building cabins or homes on ‘Crown Land’. For some Nations, exercising rights is also about exercising governance within a Nation’s traditional territory, such as land use planning. In all these situations where a Nation or its citizens are exercising rights it becomes incumbent on the Crown to try and stop the activity or prove there is no right to carry out the activity. The ‘onus of proof’ shifts to the Crown and in many cases the Crown turns a ‘blind eye’ for fear of losing. **Where our Nations have been successful in simply exercising their rights and title in a controlled and disciplined manner our Nations are becoming empowered and stronger. We need to continue and expand this approach.**

Proper Title Holder

Underlying all strategies to benefit from our aboriginal title and rights there is a fundamental question of “who is the proper title holder?” In court, First Nations claiming aboriginal title have to establish they are the proper title holders or have the agreement of the proper title holder to be bringing the action. In negotiations, there has sometimes been the requirement for some proof of title (i.e. the federal “Comprehensive Claims” process) and in other circumstances not. For instance the BC Treaty Process is a “political process” where Nations submitting Statements of Intent to negotiate a treaty did not have to prove title. In exercising rights on the ground, a Nation would presumably only exercise rights where it understands it has title or the right to use a resource (such as to hunt or fish). The question of proper title holder has intensified over the last number of years as we are beginning to see the benefits of accommodation agreements and other arrangements where there may be ‘overlaps’ or ‘shared territories’ with other Nations also claiming title.

“Who is the proper title holder?” and “Who has the right to negotiate?” are not easy questions to answer. There are no simple answers. Before our Nations will collectively be able to enjoy the full recognition of our title and rights, these questions will, nevertheless, have to be answered one way or another. An example of the complexity of the issue was the rejected ‘discussion paper’ for the proposed Recognition and Reconciliation Act developed by the Leadership Council. The discussion paper suggested that there needs to be a reconstitution of our Nations into approximately thirty Indigenous Nations based on linguistic and cultural affiliation. This approach, ironically, did not consider individual indigenous laws and the proper title holder but was a proposed ‘political fix’ to a complex legal reality.

If elected Regional Chief, I will work with our leaders to explore options for addressing how our Nations can sort out the proper title holder question amongst ourselves. There are already a number of protocol arrangements between communities as between tribes and we can look to build on this success. This issue is a priority and needs to be worked out in processes that are acceptable to our Nations and that do not involve BC or Canada other than to provide financial assistance.

Moving Forward Together

All Nations whether a part of the treaty process or not, whether in Court, or whether negotiating with the Crown, share the same common objective; to have a fair land and resource settlement. **Whether through agreements or what we ask for in Court or simply take on the ground, what is essential for our long-term success as Peoples is access to adequate lands and resources to maintain our cultural identities and ensure economic opportunity.** Economic opportunities on-reserve, with the exception of well located communities, is limited, so opportunity will have to come from within our broader traditional territories.

Land and resource settlements must be sustainable and durable. Every Nation should have access to adequate land and resources that provide access for traditional practices, such as hunting, fishing and gathering, but also adequate resources to fuel an economy through revenue sharing, economic opportunities and accommodation arrangements. Many of our communities are now beginning to see the rewards after years of litigation or years of negotiations, where new and exciting accommodation and benefits agreements are being executed with third parties and government. We can build on this success and ensure all of our Nations have the capacity to take advantage of the opportunities.

As Regional Chief I will ensure our issues regarding the land question remain central to the national debate in Ottawa and at the same time relevant to our communities as we each exercise our title and rights within our respective Traditional Territories. In moving the land question forward I will work with our Nations’ leadership to ensure that our multi-pronged approach to settling the land question is coordinated and advanced. All our Nations regardless of which approach they are taking to implementing their land and resource rights have stories to tell and experiences to share. Understanding these experiences and building on our success we can move forward cooperatively and in unity to overcome obstacles put in our way by the Crown.

While there is clearly a need for regional and provincial organization to ensure coordination, I will never lose sight of the fact that each of our Nations are independent with their own right to self-determination as the proper title holders of their lands. This is why I stress ‘**Nation Building**’ with each Nation responsible for developing its own institutions of governance so that when we meet collectively, regardless of the political forum in which we meet (BCAFN, FNS, UBCIC or other), with each Nation being able to articulate its position and constructively participate in the provincial debate respecting aboriginal title and rights. **I will continue to work with our leaders and whomever the leaders of our Nations determine are their regional political representatives in order to advance our Nations’ interests. I will work to ensure there is limited duplication of administration and the most effective use of our political and financial resources in advancing our rights and title based on a platform of empowering, connecting and supporting our individual Nations.**

3. Education

We need to invest in our future. We need to invest in our people. **To make the most of opportunities resulting from fair land and resource settlements and true self-determination we need well educated and well trained citizens.** We need trades people, we need business people, we need professionals, we need healthcare workers, and we need educators. As re-emerging Nations developing our own economies we cannot truly flourish without trained people to work in our new First Nation businesses (whether privately owned or owned by our communities), who can take advantage of new economic opportunities both on- and off-reserve. We also need to fill many positions in our emerging public service; the people who work, or will work, for our governments. And we also need an educated population to participate in our Nation building; a population that can make informed and educated decisions in our very participatory systems of ‘grass roots’ democracy.

Over the years ahead, as more and more of our communities move away from *Indian Act* governance or settle land claims, our people, perhaps more than any other people in Canada, are going to be asked to make very important decisions about their future. They are going to have to vote on governance initiatives, land claims and law development among other important decisions regarding their future, their family’s future and the future of their community.

First Nations are the fastest growing population in Canada and employers will need to rely more and more on our citizens to fill existing and new jobs in the future. This means there will be more opportunities for qualified and trained First Nation workers. Also, many employers now have affirmative action and preferential employment programs for our citizens; often a result of political pressure or negotiations. Organizations are now often required in title and rights

benefits agreements, or when development is taking place on-reserve, to hire qualified First Nation workers. There is limited benefit in having employment preference/rights if there aren't people to take the jobs because they do not have the skills needed.

Education must be a lifelong endeavor from pre-school through to continuing education in adult life. We never stop learning. **I will work with our leaders to ensure we have the necessary financial resources and the jurisdictional tools to assist the citizens of our Nations with meaningful opportunities for lifelong learning.**

The Child

Starting with our children, we can build upon the successes in many of our communities that have established quality daycare and early learning centers in their villages.

We need to ensure all communities have appropriate access to quality elementary and secondary schooling. This means where a First Nation runs its own 'band' school or independent school, there is adequate financial support to run the school properly; from building the infrastructure to classroom instruction. Where our communities purchase education services from adjacent non-aboriginal school districts we can build upon the successes of those communities that have negotiated creative and strong Local Education Agreements; in many cases now requiring the public schools to provide aboriginal language and cultural programming.

The Young Adult

Society has become more complicated. There are fewer and fewer jobs that do not require a university degree or college diploma of some sort. There are almost no jobs that do not require a high school diploma. We need to continue to work to improve the high school graduation rates of our young adults and support them through high school; particularly during their most formative years when the distractions of teenage life can be the most stressful. I will work with our leaders as they implement their plans to improve graduation rates and support their students.

However, in the modern economy simply graduating from high school is not always enough and, therefore, cannot be the only goal for our young adults that want to and can go further. It is not always enough to graduate with a simple Dogwood Diploma. While high school graduation rates have been increasing for many of our communities, and we need to build on this success, there is an unfortunate trend in some School Districts to push our students through high school without them actually taking the classes they need to move forward into higher education. Students need to be directed to the proper mix of classes that will allow them to go to university.

For our high school students who qualify and want to attend university or go to college we need to ensure that they take the right courses and then have the opportunity to actually go. Financial support for our students to attend college and university has meant there are now many more of our people graduating from University and college; again success that needs to be celebrated. This is a positive trend that must not reverse. I will encourage increased investment by both the federal government and our own governments to support post secondary education and will work with our leaders to ensure that the education systems are responsive to our needs. I will work with the National Chief and the Executive of the AFN to demand greater investment in Post Secondary Education as support funding rates have not increased to meet current demand nor kept pace with inflation. Investment in Post Secondary Education is an investment which is paying huge dividends in our communities. We need to ensure this continues. I will also work with our leadership to encourage BC to offer trades support funding to First Nations' students.

The Adult

For our citizens that have not graduated from high school but who want to, we must continue to build upon our success in developing Adult Basic Education programs. These programs have been very effective in getting our citizens back to school and then into the workforce. Also, not all our citizens are ready to go to college or university as a young adult and may want to go back to school as a ‘mature student’. For instance, some of our citizens that are working in our governments may not have a degree or a diploma but have years and years of practical experience and then want to go back to school to get their formal qualifications. Opportunities need to be created to help these people get the higher education they may need to take their careers further and, in the process, share valuable skills with younger students and bring new skills into our communities. If this is part of a community’s vision I will work with your community to advocate for increased professional development programs.

Nation Building

Our Nations are in an exciting period of ‘Nation Building’. Change is occurring in our communities and our citizens are directing that change. There is a need to focus on educating our citizens about the changes that are occurring to our world as we move away from governance under the *Indian Act* and as we take greater control of our own lives. As First Nations’ leaders we expect a lot from our citizens just as they expect a lot from us. We are all expected to make important decisions about our future, including participating in referendums and verification votes concerning complicated agreements. Many of our communities have developed effective communication and education tools for their citizens to ensure they are well informed. We can build upon this success and ensure that all our citizens can meaningfully participate in the public policy debates that communities must inevitably go through in order to take advantage of opportunities and maximize their potential for success. **An educated electorate is part of the key to unlocking the opportunities that lie ahead of us. Informed decision making results in better decision making and stronger community.**

Jurisdiction

In BC, access to quality lifelong learning is not just a question of vision and financial resources, it is also a question of ‘jurisdiction’. Many of our Nations want to take more control over jurisdiction for education and we must support this goal and build on our success. On July 5, 2006, BC and the First Nations Education Steering Committee signed an historic agreement to recognize First Nations’ jurisdiction over First Nations education on-reserve in BC. There are over fifty communities that have expressed an interest in assuming jurisdiction for education on reserve, not including those nations that already have jurisdiction by virtue of self-government arrangements. With jurisdiction, our Nations have the opportunity to design the k-12 education programs that meet their Nations’ education needs. This is important work.

Ultimately as we move away from control by Victoria and Ottawa the majority of our Nations will be making laws in relation to education and managing their own education. With jurisdiction comes responsibility but also the ability to direct resources where they are most needed and to ensure the content of what is taught to our children is appropriate and relevant.

With respect to post-secondary jurisdiction, we can build on the partnerships that have been developed with post secondary institutions to advance this agenda. We can help focus courses on our needs as aboriginal people and what is needed in our communities, whether it concerns public administration in our governments, doing business on our lands, or providing appropriate healthcare or education in our communities.

Moving Forward Together

Education must be part of each Nation’s critical path. As such I will do my best to further the networks of our people working in this area so we can build on our success. I will work to ensure that resources are available to continue our efforts to ensure we have an educated and trained population that is well suited to take advantage of our opportunities.

4. Individual Health

In order to prosper, we must be healthy. Being healthy is a challenge for all people and has more challenges for our citizens. Since colonization our communities have been ravaged by disease and social problems that have left deep scars which require individual and collective healing. Our families have suffered.

In order to take advantage of our very real opportunities arising from the settlement of land claims and self-determination we need strong families and healthy citizens. Good health starts in the home with the family and with the individual, and in particular with the child. Steps must be taken to improve our health and we must continue to place health as the priority.

It is our traditional teachings that guide us and direct us to care for our entire families. Sadly, however, poverty remains a critical factor in the lives of many of our citizens and is especially hard on our children. As we all know, with poverty comes overcrowding in substandard housing. The structure of many of our on-reserve homes have inadequate insulation, poor wiring, and often have mould. These physical conditions severely affect our health. With overcrowded homes we have found that it is very difficult to prevent contagious diseases such as the common cold, the flu, and now we face the H1N1 Virus with the same concerns. Poverty also restricts our ability to acquire adequate and correct food which also leads us toward diabetes and other diseases.

The health of our citizens is a shared responsibility. It is the responsibility of our Nations, Canada, BC and our citizens. We must work cooperatively if we are to be comprehensive in addressing our health issues. Every effort needs to be made to ensure support is provided by all levels of government to our citizens as we walk our own path in life. The First Nations Summit, the UBCIC and the BCAFN must also work collectively for the greater good in support of our Nations, our families and our citizens.

The National AFN has developed a “Blueprint on Aboriginal Health”, a 10-year plan to close the gap in quality of life between our citizens and other Canadians. This plan provides a good guide to help decision-makers develop appropriate health policy.

In looking at ‘health’ we also must consider the governance of health. Some of our Nations are moving to take over jurisdiction for healthcare and healthcare management. Others are under delegated arrangements through local health authorities. We also have the BC First Nations’ Health Council. This is the result of the First Nations Leadership Council and BC signing the *Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan* (Nov 2006). The Health Council currently serves as an advocacy voice of BC First Nations. We also must ensure that front-line health workers in our communities work closely with one another and where appropriate regionally, to ensure that the health needs of all our citizens are met and delivered consistently across BC regardless of geographical location.

Regardless of the preferred approach a Nation may favour for delivering appropriate health care, health care, in any jurisdiction, remains one of the biggest costs to any government. And these costs are only increasing.

In looking to meet the needs of our people as we overcome the legacy of colonialism, significant resources are needed for healing and healthcare. It is important that First Nations work together with both the federal and provincial governments in order to develop a long-term strategy towards securing a sustainable First Nations health system, and to create meaningful steps towards closing the socio-economic gap between our communities and those of non-aboriginals.

On a positive note, it only takes one generation to turn the situation around in a home, provided there is the support and adequate financial and other resources.

In many of our communities and in our homes this has happened, or is happening, as poverty gives way to prosperity and where there have been adequate programs and services to address the legacy of colonialism. We need to share these experiences and build the confidence and hope in those communities and with our fellow citizens where the path to good health is taking a little bit longer. **I truly believe we can turn our health issues around in one generation – we have to. There is too much at stake. With this change, as one of our leaders expressed it to me, “Our social and economic future can soar with only the sky as our limits.”**

The following sets out many of the key issues facing our communities with respect to key health issues as identified by health care professionals and our leaders.

The Child First

When we think of health, we must think first of the child. The poverty, lack of education and opportunities, social oppression, substandard living conditions and the scars of the ‘Residential School Syndrome,’ have brought about severe social issues and social diseases which include alcohol addiction and drug addiction. All of these obstacles create huge challenges for our children. The Chiefs have raised these concerns and have pointed out that there is little or no support strategies in place that can help us improve this lifestyle for the benefit of our children.

In January of 2008 a First Nations’ Forum embarked on positive and solution-oriented dialogue concerning the health, safety and well-being of our children, youth, families and communities and to create a *Child at the Centre Action Plan*. I support the completion of this plan which should be a priority. Focusing on individual health starts with focusing on the individual health of the child.

Jordon’s Principle

Jurisdictional disputes involving who pays the costs of caring for our children happen all the time. These disputes are usually between different federal government departments or between the federal government and the provincial government.

In honor of Jordan, the little boy who died while in the care of the state, there has been a public movement calling upon all provincial and territorial governments as well as the government of Canada to immediately adopt a ‘child first principle’ to resolving jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations’ children. Under the ‘Jordon Principle’, when a dispute arises regarding paying for services to one of our Children, the agency that is first contacted must pay for the services without delay. This way the needs of the child get met first. We need to support Jordan’s principle.

Health Education

We need quality health education to assist people in living a healthy lifestyle. We must build on programs and services that promote healthy individual lifestyles such as: having a proper diet; knowledge about substance abuse (alcohol and drugs) and their impact on family and friends; safe sex and family planning; proper hygiene; and the importance of physical activity, including the promotion of youth and adult sport.

Non-Insured Health Benefits

Non-insured health benefits for our citizens have decreased and are continuing to decrease. Many of the services to our citizens now fall short of the benefits provided to the employees of our governments. We need to look at ways to reinstate and improve our benefits to all our citizens. Some examples of reduced benefits include: sufficient dental services have all but stopped due to severe funding cuts and there is no access to regular dental care in many rural and remote communities; inadequate medical testing for detection of infectious diseases; lack of early detection procedures and follow-up for chronic disease; limited eye care services such as poor eye glass frame selection; hearing aids can only be replaced after several years which is proving too long; and counselling for mental health issues is too limited.

All those responsible for our citizens' healthcare need to be aware what the sum of these changes will mean to our plans for becoming healthy communities.

Nursing/Specialist Shortages

Nursing shortages in our communities are resulting in the closure of health facilities and we are finding it difficult to be able to keep and attract staff. It is also becoming harder for us to have specialists travel to our rural and remote communities to provide services. This problem is not just due to lack of money. We need more of our own people going into health care and then working in our communities.

Patient Travel

Where there is no local or primary health care available, our citizens have to travel to urban centers. For the rural and remote reserves funding to help our citizens travel to receive medical care is not adequate and does not permit our citizens to become or remain healthy. A full review of this program and its policies must be conducted in order to better serve our citizens.

Safe Drinking Water

It is hard to imagine that in Canada there are still communities that do not have safe drinking water. Walkerton was a wakeup call for all Canada and the federal government responded with respect to our communities by announcing a significant investment in water infrastructure on reserves and looking at how water systems are managed. The communities most at risk in BC need to be addressed as a priority. This is a basic human rights issue. However, in moving forward with 'Nation Building' we need to determine how our water systems are to be governed, managed and regulated and to take control of our infrastructure ourselves. This would be part of a Nation's critical path in developing 'strong and appropriate governance.'

H1N1 (swine flu)

H1N1 is a very real threat and the AFN, while not the lead body on this issue, must be prepared to assist the health professionals and our community leaders in preparing for, and dealing with, the pandemic that is already affecting our communities. Some experts are saying up to 50% of the North American population may be affected by H1N1, with higher percentages in our communities. While conditions have definitely improved in many of our communities with better housing there is still significant over-crowding. The H1N1, and especially if it mutates, poses a significant health risk, which could potentially kill hundreds of our citizens. Given the timeliness of this threat, the H1N1 pandemic will be my primary health focus in the first six months of my term and I will work with healthcare professionals to ensure that our communities have adequate dosages of vaccination and ongoing education support about how to prevent the spread of infection. At this point we do not have to panic, but we must be prepared as we are the most vulnerable segment of Canadian society.

Suicide

Suicide is a major issue facing our youth and families and our communities and remains at an alarming rate in many of our communities. Addressing this issue is a priority. Steps need to be taken to identify funds and resources to address this critical issue.

With so much opportunity for our youth already here or around the corner, it is deeply disturbing that so many of our young people still feel such hopelessness and despair that they will take their own life. Suicide at the stem comes from poverty and unhealthy relationships. We need to ensure each child is supported and we need to nurture our youths' self-confidence. Parents need to be able to access quality and consistent service when they need a hand. Suicide is the worst example of what the poverty cycle can do. We can break this cycle by working together and promoting our opportunities to our people as each Nation implements its own critical path to end poverty. As I have said, this can be turned around in a generation.

Residential School Syndrome

Many of the mental health issues, family violence, and abuses facing our citizens emanate from the survivors' experiences at residential schools and the impact on them and their families. Their issues are both psychological as well as physical.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to hear the Survivors' stories and to assist in the process of healing. The Commission's work is very important and the programs and services available to the residential school survivors and their families are critical for many of our citizens to overcome the legacy of the residential schools. However the funding for this must be expanded to ensure that all victims have access to treatment – steps must be taken to ensure these services will be in place after the proposed end date of 2012.

Diabetes

Diabetes affects our People disproportionately to other Canadians. We all have family and friends that are diabetics; including our children. While there are many diseases that affect our citizens this is a particularly unique disease in how it is so pervasive in our societies. We need to ensure that the proper resources are available to help our citizens cope with this disease as well resources available for applied research in our communities.

AIDS

AIDS remains a serious threat to our citizens. While AIDS numbers may be dropping for other segments of Canadian society they are increasing in our communities. We need to ensure AIDS awareness programs are not reduced and that the message of safe sex and the dangers of needle sharing are not lost.

Preventative health care

All of our financial resources for health are usually spent in addressing crucial immediate issues leaving no funds to dedicate to preventative health care. This must change.

The Plan

In reaching our objective of an improved standard of living for our citizens with practicing and thriving cultures, we must have a plan that builds on our success and we must move forward together. **The plan must empower our Nations, strengthen communication, as well as share and voice our stories.**

With respect to the four key areas I have identified (strong and appropriate governance, fair land & resource settlements, improved education, and individual health) and others as may be identified by our Chiefs and communities, the following is my plan for the BCAFN:

1. Understand and identify the specific priorities for each of our Nations.
2. Assist each Nation in charting their own critical path in order to be able to benefit from opportunities, capitalize on success and ensure that the doors are open to move forward with their specific priorities.
3. Support and facilitate each Nation in developing and maintaining strong and open relationships with Ottawa and Victoria to ensure that they can advance their own issues directly with the Crown.
4. Develop and implement a province-wide participation and communication strategy to maintain networks between Nations and ensure that no single community is left out or behind.

"I have had the pleasure of visiting over 125 First Nations communities in BC and know firsthand what we are achieving and what we can accomplish together. I believe that the BCAFN plays an important role in empowering and connecting our people as we strategize and work to achieve our local and collective goals. We must build upon our success."

If you have any comments, questions or views on this platform I look forward to hearing from you.

If you believe this platform meets your interests and will help your Nation advance your agenda then please support JODY WILSON RAYBOULD for Regional Chief of the BC Assembly of First Nations, October 1, 2009.

I look forward to working for you and with you. Thank you for your support.

Gilakas'la!