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#13 IN A SERIES

FROM A MANDATE FOR CHANGE TO A PLAN TO GOVERN

Building a New Aboriginal Opportunities Agenda

Ken Coates and Sean Speer

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with key Indigenous leaders to begin to chart what he has described as "nation-to-nation" relationships with Aboriginal communities. The meeting did not produce significant results but the prime minister's language of reconciliation and engagement earned the praise of key Indigenous groups and certainly set expectations for next week's federal budget and beyond.

Prime Minister Trudeau's commitment to improving economic and social conditions for Canada's Indigenous people is no doubt sincere. He has frequently talked, for instance, about harnessing economic opportunity to produce "the shared future prosperity we all deserve" (Trudeau 2015). It is a positive sign as the government finalizes its first budget and seeks to develop its broader policy agenda on Indigenous-related issues.

This is the most important public policy question facing the country. It is a national tragedy that Indigenous people experience much poorer economic and social outcomes, have lower life expectancies, and higher incarceration rates than the rest of the population. We must focus on "closing the gap", as Assembly of First Nations chief Perry Bellegarde has described this sad state of affairs (Assembly of First Nations 2016). The goal should be to replace these "conditions of disadvantage" with a new opportunities agenda.

What does such an agenda look like? It must recognize that the solutions lie in less government rather than more – indeed, an enumeration of the roots of current Indigenous despair shows that government intervention is the major source of the economic and social woes. Legitimate complaints about the *Indian Act* and assimilation efforts evidenced by the residential schools policy remind us that government has historically been a lead agent of oppression, financial hardship, and cultural containment. It is more than passing strange that those who seek to rectify serious historical challenges believe that more top-down, government solutions are the answer. Real reconciliation cannot be managed out of Ottawa. It must be a bottom-up, Indigenous-led process of economic development and self-sufficiency.

This is not to say though that government has no role. As we set out in this essay, there are steps that the government should take – such as financing basic infrastructure and services, investing in early childhood care and learning, and bolstering Indigenous families – as part of a positive, forward-looking policy agenda. We must not forget the historical injustices perpetrated against Canada's Indigenous people. But we cannot let a preoccupation with the past cause us to repeat the same mistakes. We can only begin to atone for the past by securing the future.

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute's mission is to help to inform sound public policy at the federal level. Our goal in this essay series is to help the new government best achieve its top policy objectives.

This 13th essay in the series will help Canadians better understand the current economic and social conditions facing Aboriginals in Canada and some positive developments that give reason to believe that we can break the cycle of poverty and despair that has plagued these communities.

We will then offer what we think are some concrete policy options to improve the lives and economic opportunities of Canada's Indigenous people. The ultimate goal is, as the Liberal Party (2015) platform rightly puts it, to "ensure better economic outcomes for First Nations."

To this end, this essay recommends that:

1) policy-makers must recognize that government should be an enabler of market-based, bottom-up economic development rather than top-down, command-and-control policies;

2) an equality-of-opportunity agenda should involve a basic social safety net including fire protection, police services, health care, and core infrastructure that is of the same quality and standard as that available to non-Indigenous communities; and

3) greater attention ought to be placed on pre-natal, post-natal, and pre-school conditions for Indigenous children.

A PRIMER ON CANADA'S ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The purpose of this essay is not to set out a comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution of First Nations governance and the relationship with the federal government. Quite the opposite. The goal is to put forward a series of ideas to replace the current conditions of disadvantage with an opportunities agenda.

Yet we need to understand the starting point. One of us has written about the failures and tragedies of past federal policy (Coates 2015b). The outcomes have been nothing short of disastrous – indeed, the aftershocks continue to reverberate in the form of poor economic and social outcomes. Canada's Aboriginal population leads the country in all of the wrong indicators and lags the non-Aboriginal population in the right ones.

The litany of negative statistics is overwhelming[1] and, as *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson (2015) calls it, "a stain on the country" – repeating a journalistic evocation that we have heard thousands of times over the last century. Some estimates find that one in four children in First Nations communities live in poverty. A First Nations youth is more likely to end up in prison than graduate from high school. Suicide rates among First Nations youth are 5 to 7 times higher than other young non-Aboriginal Canadians. First Nations living on-reserve face tuberculosis rates that are 31 times the national average (Assembly of First Nations 2011). Average unemployment rates on reserve, which understate the extent of disengagement from the workforce, are about 20 percent higher than among non-Aboriginal communities. The graduation rate is 40 percent lower (Bains and Ishkanian 2016a). On-reserve First Nations earn, on average, 55 percent less than non-First Nations. Off-reserve First Nations earn one-quarter less (National Aboriginal Economic Development Board 2015). The list unfortunately could go on and on.

These conditions are the result of a combination of real injustice and bad public policy. The injustices are partly documented in the recent report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The residential school policy was conceptually flawed and a disaster in practice. Its consequences are manifested in the lost opportunities, personal suffering, and long-term damage of the survivors (Coates 2015e). Fortunately we have begun to redress these historic wrongs through Prime Minister Harper's 2008 apology, financial compensation, and a commitment to ongoing commemoration. The residential school chapter may not be fully closed but there is broad-based support to move forward from this tragic history.

There is less of a consensus to cease the development of poor public policy. Top-down welfarism has not produced the positive outcomes its well-intentioned advocates promised and instead has perpetuated the conditions of disadvantage (Ajzenstat 2010). Successive governments have ignored the evidence of policy failure and typically doubled-down on a general policy framework that is marked by the absence of property rights, market mechanisms, and local autonomy. And we now know the results: institutionalized poverty, marginalization, negative stereotypes, and an erosion of personal responsibility and the connective tissue that sustains strong families and communities.

It is important to recognize that many Indigenous communities have ceased waiting for government reform and not surrendered their futures to an endless round of grant applications and accountability provisions – the two common features of contemporary government practice in Canada. Instead, communities have established strategies for wealth creation and independence from government, largely through engagement in locally-directed business and employment development. Independence with respect to local finances and administration appears to offer much greater reason for optimism than incremental reforms to federal programming.

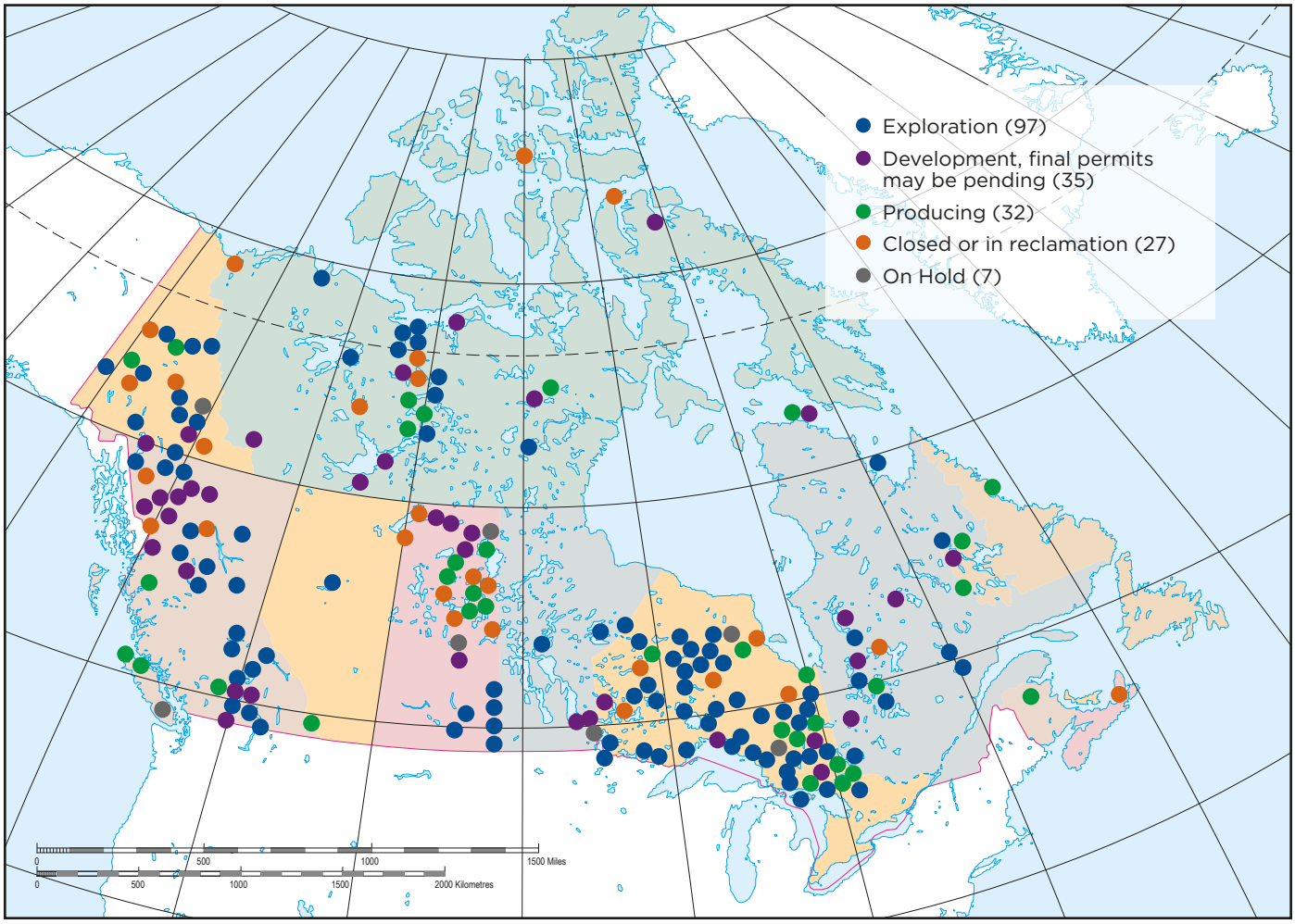
The Indigenous-government relationship – that is, the direct engagement rather than specific details with regards to financing and policy – remains an obstacle to progress. Distrust is still a fundamental element of governance in Canada. Part of it is bred by historical injustices. Part of it is a result of the top-down, technocratic underpinnings of so much of federal policy. The result is that under-resourced Indigenous communities spend an inordinate amount of time applying for government grants and accounting for expenditures. Canadians would almost certainly be scandalized if the total cost – direct financial expenditures and opportunity costs – were added up. As we will discuss in a later section, the federal government should eliminate intrusive oversight for most communities and focus on helping those that need capacity building with respect to governance and financial management.

More generally, it is vital to recognize momentum that has emerged at the community level. Notwithstanding historical injustices and poor public policy, Aboriginal communities are taking matters into their own hands. An Indigenous silent majority – represented by a new generation of leaders – realizes that real progress and reconciliation must be rooted in practical, present-day solutions developed and controlled

by local communities. To the extent that the relationship can be characterized as a tension between financial dependence on Ottawa and community-based economic development, the latter is gaining strength (Bland 2013). As British Columbian regional chief Shane Gottfriedson puts it: "We're open-minded. We're business-minded. We are looking at creating a better future for our communities. We are the poorest of the poor, the most disadvantaged. Everybody's got to win in this process" (Yaffe 2016).

Community-based progress is slow but discernible. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities now have more than 250 Aboriginal economic development organizations with several billion in assets (Coates 2015c). Own-source revenues – that is, monies that do not come from the federal government but from local business activities – compose a growing share of First Nations budgets. Consider that in 2013/14 First Nations communities recorded $3.3 billion in non-governmental revenues (Bains and Ishkanian 2016b). There are now more than 300 impact and benefit or collaboration agreements between Aboriginal communities and mining companies alone (see map 1 for an illustration). The unemployment gap between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals is persistent but, according to Statistics Canada data, is narrowing (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2013a). Some provinces are also beginning to see higher rates of high school graduation and post-secondary attendance (Omand 2015). These are all positive developments.

Map 1: Agreements between Aboriginal communities and resource firms, 2011



Source: Natural Resources Canada, "Interactive Map of Aboriginal Mining Agreements."

The goal should be to further close this gap, as National Chief Bellegarde repeatedly points out. This is a crucial objective for the country as a whole. It is unthinkable that a rich, successful country like Canada would continue to allow so many of its people denied the opportunity to realize their potential.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN ABORIGINAL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Recent improvements to the economic and social prospects for First Nations have been matched by slow yet steady progress with respect to First Nations governance. A series of federal policies often developed at the behest of Indigenous communities are creating the conditions for entrepreneurialism, economic self-sufficiency, and better governance. Yet much of these positive and innovative developments have gone unreported. Scandal and financial missteps by a small subsection of Indigenous governments instead monopolize the news headlines.

Progress in the direction of accountability, transparency, and more effective Indigenous governance is a critical step towards better economic and social outcomes for Canada's Aboriginal population. Good governance may not be a sufficient condition for a real opportunities agenda but it certainly is a necessary one. It is important for a host of reasons, including, but not limited to, its role in building trust and confidence within Indigenous communities. As one of us has written, the Idle No More movement was an expression of frustration with Aboriginal leadership as much as it was about government policy (Coates 2015d). Building capacity and strengthening governance is thus a key ingredient in cultivating the legitimacy to negotiate agreements with resource companies and expand own-source revenues. Community members must have confidence in the system.

And the good news is that this is happening. One example is the successful First Nations Land Management regime. The system was established in 1991 at the behest of a group of First Nations chiefs who wanted to opt out of certain sections of the *Indian Act* in order to obtain greater control of their land and resources. The goal, then, was to allow these communities to develop laws about land use and to take advantage of the economic development opportunities with these new land management powers. Twenty-five years later there are now more than 100 First Nations that have chosen to opt into the regime and are now either developing or presently operating their own land codes (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2013b). It has been a major step in the direction of greater local autonomy and sets the conditions for economic self-sufficiency.

Another is in the area of First Nations taxation. The past 25 years have witnessed a growing interest on the part of Aboriginal communities to enact laws imposing direct taxes within their reserves or settlement lands. Several Aboriginal governments have developed property tax, sales tax, and income tax regimes in concert with the federal and provincial governments (see table 1). The result has been new resources for local expenditures, more independence from Ottawa, and greater political accountability for taxation and spending.

Table 1: Types of First Nations taxation policies and current take-up

Type of Taxation	Number of Participating Bands	Annual Revenue
First Nations Sales Tax	8	$6M
First Nations Goods and Services Tax	26	$11M
First Nations Personal Income Tax	14	$18M
Real Property Tax	124	$70M

Source: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2014.

Reforms to the *First Nations Fiscal Management Act* have also made it easier for First Nations that meet certain financial management conditions to build financial capacity and raise capital. More than 160 communities have registered to become certified under the *Act* and thus gain access to long-term loans at rates below prime. The number of certified First Nations is continuing to grow (Calla 2015). This development is not just important because it opens the door to new sources of financing and the economic opportunities that invariably follow. It has also contributed to higher standards of accountability and transparency driven by local Indigenous governments and their populations. The "opt-in" nature means that these steps toward better governance were not imposed from Ottawa but rather accepted at the community level because of the opportunities that came with them.

One of the consequences of these new financing tools is the proliferation of Aboriginal economic development corporations. There are now more than 250 of these organizations operating across the country. Many of them have more than $100 million in annual revenues and are accumulating substantial assets that can be used to support regional economic development (Coates 2015g). As MLI managing director Brian Lee Crowley has pointed out, there is no reason to think that these corporations will not continue to grow in the coming years and could become some of the largest in the entire country (Crowley 2016). The potential to deploy this capital to support Aboriginal entrepreneurship, partnerships in resource development, and other forms of investment is huge.

The one commonality among these positive developments is that they represent a break from a model of top-down, Ottawa-centric policy-making and transfer payments with no local accountability and responsibility. These communities and their leaders assume financial responsibility for themselves in exchange for strengthened accountability and transparency in order to create better economic and social conditions for their children. The lesson here is incentives matter. To the extent that the federal government has played a role it has been more as an enabler or facilitator than a direct participant. This model must be the wave of the future – it is not only the type of Indigenous-controlled agenda that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis have called for, it actually produces better results than the failed and often harmful policies of the past.

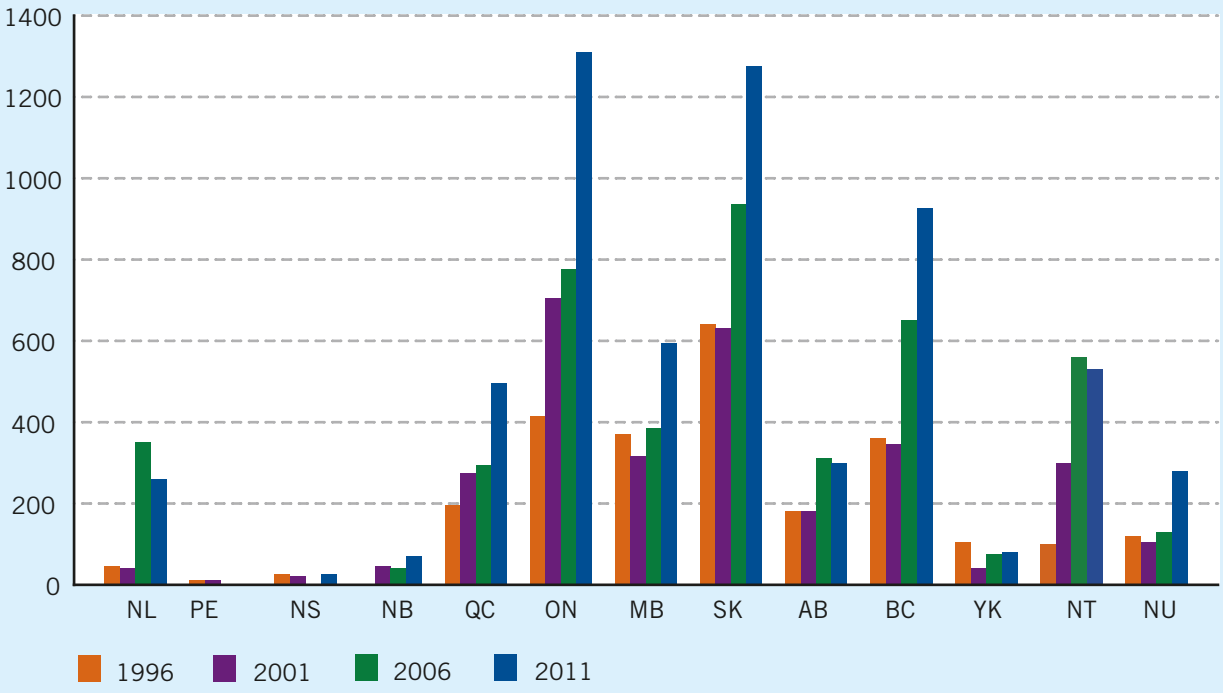
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR CANADA'S ABORIGINAL POPULATION

The resource economy is a key part of this long-term vision of Aboriginal economic and social development. Resource development represents a true "game-changer" – a new impetus for investment, jobs, and economic opportunity – for Aboriginal communities (MLI 2016).

Consider that estimates show that over $675 billion worth of natural resource opportunities are expected across Canada over the next 10 years, most of which will be located on or near traditional lands (Natural Resources Canada 2016). Economic partnerships with these communities are not optional. As Dr. Crowley (2014) writes: "the simple fact of the national interest favoring such projects does not and cannot mean that we can simply wish away the newfound power of First Nations and Inuit. New accommodations must be found." It is a non-negotiable imperative for resource development and thus represents a "win-win" that is difficult to overstate.

These projects can contribute investment, jobs, and opportunities to the affected communities. They can bring purpose and dignity to community members through direct and indirect economic benefits. This is not empty rhetoric. An MLI paper authored by Ken Coates (2015a) highlights 10 case studies where companies have worked with Aboriginal communities to advance resource projects with significant benefits for the communities and their residents. Evidence from the mining sector alone shows a dramatic increase in Aboriginal employment in natural resources since the mid 1990s in all parts of the country (see chart 1).

Chart 1: Aboriginals employed in the mining and quarrying industry by province, 1996–2011



Sources: Natural Resources Canada, Special Tabulation, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal in Mining and Quarrying Sector, Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing Primary Metal Manufacturing 1996 to 2006; Statistics Canada, 2011a, *Canada 2011 Census*; Statistics Canada, 2011b, *2011 National Household Survey*; e-mail correspondence with Denis Dupoint, Statistical Economist, Minerals and Metals Sector, Natural Resources Canada/Government of Canada, November 19, 2015.

Resource development partnerships between project proponents and First Nations communities will need to develop mostly with limited government involvement. Government-driven solutions are not the answer to unlocking the potential of resource development. Ottawa may have an enabling role with respect to revenue-sharing, investing in core infrastructure, or helping some First Nations acquire equity positions in resource projects (Coates and Speer 2016). But much of this progress will occur based on negotiations between proponents and affected communities.

There is a pessimistic strain that runs through most commentary and analysis about the prospect of these negotiations. We do not share it. There is plenty of evidence that resource companies and First Nations communities are finding ways to reconcile their interests and priorities. Suncor Energy (2015) reached an agreement with the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in July 2015 on a 25-percent equity stake in a wind project. The company is poised to build on this successful arrangement with other First Nations. First Nations equity partners in the prospective Northern Gateway project have become among its most powerful proponents (Dumont et al. 2016). A new joint venture between Encanto, a Vancouver-based company, and the Muskowekwan First Nation in Saskatchewan will develop the first on-reserve potash mine in Canada that will generate 2.8 million tons of potash annually and create approximately 1000 jobs (Bains and Jackson 2016). These are just a few examples of the progress that is being made to build economic partnerships between Indigenous communities and resource companies.

While this progress has been slower than some proponents would like, Indigenous communities are undeniably moving in the right direction and we have only scratched the surface. The goal should be to build on these developments and find ways for Indigenous communities to fully realize the benefits of resource development. Part of this will involve government reforms in the areas of education and training. But most of it will be driven by market forces and community leadership.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S PLAN

The key question, then, is what can the new government do to maintain this momentum towards economic empowerment and greater autonomy and self-sufficiency?

The new government arrives in office with a clear commitment to advancing Indigenous issues. This requires more than a symbolic meeting with community leaders. Of course the government's policy agenda is still in development but it would be wrong to dismiss its focus on these issues as superficial or insincere.

The early consultations on the design and structure of a public inquiry into the question of missing and murdered Indigenous women are a sign of how high up the policy agenda the Trudeau government places these files. It helps that the Liberal caucus comprises 8 Indigenous Parliamentarians, including the Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould and Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Hunter Tootoo.

But there are potential pitfalls. One risk is inflated expectations. Another is the tendency for Aboriginal files to get bogged down in process. There are practical limitations to engaging over 600 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis authorities in Canada, exacerbated by the absence of a national body with a mandate to consult and negotiate on behalf of these communities (Fiscal Realities 2010). The government will therefore need to balance expectations for a new type of government-to-government relationship with its own objectives to improve the economic opportunities for Indigenous people. This is not to say that these goals are incompatible. It is only to reinforce that respect, cooperation, and partnership cannot substitute for better basic services, education and health care reforms, and more economic opportunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A FIRST NATIONS OPPORTUNITIES AGENDA

The government's first budget is less than a week away. Expectations are high that Aboriginal policies will be a central theme. There is also good reason to believe that they will loom large for the government's entire term. In the spirit of contributing to the discussion on this vital public policy issue, we offer three key ideas to help the government inform its policy thinking. The goal is to set out, as one of us has put it, "practical, targeted policies that could make a real difference" (Coates 2015f).

The first recommendation is to remember that Ottawa should play an enabling role rather than a top-down one that sees Indigenous people as charity cases. A change in mindset is critical for shifting the underlying assumptions for federal Aboriginal policy. It means taking positive action to create the conditions for opportunity rather than reactive policies that redistribute wealth and seek to equalize results. It means creating a legal framework that places political accountability for taxation and spending with Indigenous communities rather than Ottawa. And it means empowering Aboriginals and their communities to be responsible for defining their goals and realizing their potential.

These may not seem like radical ideas but in the face of more than 100 years of historical injustice and poor public policy they most certainly would be if put into practice. This is far from an anti-government argument.

The government has a critical role to play in setting the conditions for better social services, more effective governance, and expanded opportunities, as we discuss in subsequent recommendations. But it does not mean that Ottawa should dictate the services, micromanage First Nations governments, and issue cheques instead of supporting investments and jobs.

What does an enabling agenda look like? It is mostly about removing the obstacles to Indigenous communities to pursue their own goals. Take the prospect of revenue-sharing from resource development, for instance. The concept of resource revenue-sharing with Indigenous communities has attracted considerable attention in recent years and yet there has been limited progress in establishing a systematic revenue-sharing regime.

Resource revenue-sharing is no longer a radical idea – it has been experimented with on a project-by-project basis and reflected in modern treatises – and has the potential to unlock resource-based wealth for these communities (Coates 2015a). The federal government should therefore work with interested communities and provinces and territories to develop a systematic revenue-sharing regime. The federal role may be largely limited to stipulating that new revenue sources will not be clawed back by reduced transfer payments to participating communities.

Another example is the concept of Aboriginal ownership in resource projects in the form of an equity position. We mentioned earlier that some companies have already experimented with this type of partnership and that a growing number of communities have expressed interest in it. This is a proposal that the Trudeau government ought to support.

A partial ownership stake would not only satisfy a project proponent's "duty to consult", it would make the affected communities full partners in the long-term financial viability of a project rather than one of many special interests that must be placated. It could thus help to break the resource "logjam" and, in so doing, provide a basis for greater economic self-sufficiency for the partner communities. A true win-win (Crowley and Coates 2013).

The role for government may be limited to exempting dividend income from an equity investment from any federal claw back schemes. It could involve backstopping loans so that communities can obtain the capital to make an investment (Bloomberg 2014). It may even require that the government provide upfront payments to facilitate an investment. Irrespective of Ottawa's short-term role, Aboriginal equity presents a long-term vision that sees a diminished financial dependence on the federal government.

The second recommendation is that the federal government should work with Indigenous communities to improve service standards related to water quality, fire protection, housing, education, and health care. The woeful conditions in many communities should be unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Canada. Calls for an improved basic social safety net do not contradict a vision of local empowerment and self-sufficiency. As part of an opportunities agenda, there is a role for the state in ensuring that basic infrastructure and services are comparable to those available to non-Aboriginals. That should be the rock on which the rest of Aboriginal public policy is based.

Of course, bringing infrastructure and services up to national standards is an aspirational goal that will not be achieved overnight. It is a bold objective and will no doubt carry significant financial costs. But it is a powerful signal that the federal government is serious about creating a positive future for Indigenous people.

How these basic standards are financed and delivered need not be under the purview of Ottawa. Some communities may wish to experiment with fee-for-service models. Others may wish to test other approaches. The point is that basic services must be available to all Canadians and there ought to be accountability to ensure that progress is made.

A short-term step could be to focus a significant share of the new government's federal infrastructure investments in First Nations communities. So much of federal infrastructure spending is now being directed to municipal projects that have a tenuous link to federal responsibilities such as interprovincial commerce or global trade promotion. The federal government should therefore focus its resources on clear federal responsibilities and priorities including First Nations communities. It is hard to justify contributing to a local hockey rink in Toronto or Winnipeg when some Aboriginal communities do not have clean drinking water.

A practical investment idea would direct federal infrastructure funding to a national survey (similar to the National Geographic Survey) aimed at identifying and cataloguing all sites of ceremonial and historical importance to Indigenous communities. No such register currently exists. This means that each prospective resource project must search for these sites on a case by case basis. Establishing such a registry would provide greater certainty for resource development and would commemorate traditional knowledge. It would be a positive, tangible step particularly in the context of the upcoming sesquicentennial in 2017.

As part of a longer-term plan, federal officials should undertake a comprehensive audit of existing conditions and services. Much of this work has already been done. The review must include services provided by and through Aboriginal governments, providing a complete assessment of the current level of government-delivered services. Then the government should work with provinces and territories and local communities to develop a plan for closing the gap in service delivery. Annual progress reports will ensure that the process is transparent and that First Nations can hold their leaders – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – accountable.

Yet it must be remembered that government cannot and should not do everything for Aboriginal people, any more than it should for every Canadian. It will thus be important not to ignore the responsibilities of individuals and communities for providing their own services and support, where financial resources permit. The goal is to establish the conditions for economic and social opportunity rather than equalizing results. Put differently: it is not about penalizing poor or marginalized people, but rather ensuring that they are full participants in and contributors to the step-by-step improvement of conditions in their communities.

The third recommendation is to focus on pre- and post-natal services and care for Indigenous families and their children. Evidence shows that early development is critical for a student's long-term success. It is frankly too late to focus on intermediate or high school education (Coates 2015f). The reality is that young First Nations students often come out of traumatic home environments and without adequate nutrition, sleep, and personal support. This is a symptom of the loss of social and cultural resilience that we raised earlier in the essay.

Dealing with the contributing causes to the risks faced by so many Aboriginal children – poverty, poor housing, poor diet, domestic turmoil and the like – will be extremely difficult. There is a large inter-generational cost, however, of not doing something soon – and something dramatic – for present-day youth. This likely involves day care arrangements, community nutrition programs, pre and post-natal care for expectant mothers and babies, and various other interventions that are ideally managed, designed, and delivered by the community. Failure to look after children before they go to school reduces educational outcomes and undermines individual prospects and opportunities.

But fundamentally it is about strengthening Aboriginal families and communities. This has a range of public policy implications. It means expanding direct payments to families to help offset the cost of child-raising. It means tackling domestic violence and substance abuse. It means providing better education and support for new parents with respect to nutrition and health. It means ensuring that income-support programs do not inadvertently reward family breakdown by pricing fathers out of the marriage market (Crowley 2009).

Most of these solutions involve Ottawa ceasing poor public policy and working with local communities to strengthen community-based services and support systems. Some of them may require that the federal

government reorient how its welfare programs function or how it finances child care. But the key is empowering local communities to tackle these issues directly. A helping neighbour is bound to have a more lasting impact than a bureaucrat in Ottawa.

CONCLUSION

The prime minister has sent numerous and powerful signals of his commitment to expanding economic and social opportunities for Indigenous people and communities across the country. Next week's budget will provide some insight in how his government intends to move this file forward.

It is fair to say that this is the most important public policy question facing the country. It is a national tragedy that Aboriginal people face poorer economic and social outcomes than the non-Aboriginal population. The question is how public policy can go about "closing the gap", as National Chief Bellegarde describes it.

The Trudeau government must recognize that the solutions are not the exclusive domain of the state – indeed, government intervention has historically been the major source of First Nations economic and social woes. Real reconciliation cannot be managed out of Ottawa. It must be an Aboriginal-led process of economic development and self-sufficiency.

This essay has set out clear, concrete recommendations on how the new government can replace the conditions of disadvantage with those of opportunity. There are steps that the government should take – such as investing in early childhood care and basic infrastructure – as part of a positive, forward-looking policy agenda. We should never forget the historical injustices perpetrated against Canada's Indigenous people. But we cannot let a preoccupation with the past and process over substance cause us to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again. We can begin to atone for the past by securing the future.

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ENDNOTE

1 For a comprehensive review of relevant economic and social indicators, see National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, 2015, *The Aboriginal Economic Progress Report.*

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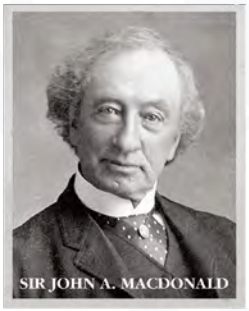
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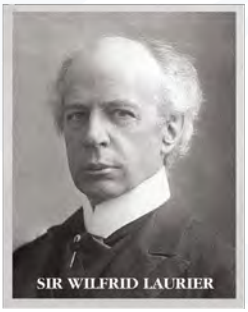
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