Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

Thursday March 22, 2007 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

NAN SEES KELOWNA ACCORD AS BEST BASE FOR CLOSING GAP

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Stan Beardy agrees with Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Jim Prentice that self-sufficiency is the key to First Nation progress, however the two leaders disagree that the 2005 Kelowna Accord passed by Parliament yesterday is the way to reach what Prentice calls "financial independence".

"I agree that First Nations people need to become financially independent, however it's the regulatory framework of both the provincial and federal governments that prevents the people of Nishnawbe Aski from participating in the country's economy," said NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy. "With billions of dollars worth of natural resources being extracted from our territory annually, assisting in sustaining the prosperity of all Canadians, you'd think First Nations wouldn't have to be perceived as asking for hand-outs."

Beardy also agrees with Minister Prentice that the Kelowna Accord needs further work to iron out details in terms of addressing the many underlying issues, however says it's a comprehensive package that could improve the on-reserve quality of life across the board.

"I was hopeful coming out of the 2005 First Ministers Meeting that the agreement would lead to meaningful discussion and implementation processes that would prove to lessen the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians across the board," said Beardy of the Kelowna Accord which is the basis of former Prime Minister Paul Martin's Private Member's Bill C-292 passed yesterday in the House of Commons. "The passing of Bill C-292 provides a renewed hope, but without acceptance by the Conservative Government of Canada we'll continue to see the gap grow and continued and increasing frustration among First Nations, particularly the young people, who are seeking quality education and sustainable careers."

The Kelowna Accord, reached by the Government of Canada, provincial Premiers, and Aboriginal leaders in Kelowna, B.C. November 2005, outlined more than $5 billion over the next five years to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians in the areas of education, health, housing, and economic opportunities.

"The Harper government had its chance to present Minister Prentice's theory two days ago when they announced their 2007 budget," said Beardy. "If the Government of Canada isn't going to accept a decision by Parliament, what alternative will they present?"

NAN is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nation communities across two-thirds of Ontario, including Kashechewan and Pikangikum First Nations, which have made recent national headlines exposing Third World conditions in the areas of housing, water, and sewer.

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