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Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable David Zimmer
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
160 Bloor Street East
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Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Zimmer:

Welcome back to your role as Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives. Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress towards creating a better future for First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Ontario. As a government, we worked with Indigenous partners to develop the following significant cross-government initiatives which Ontario will implement over the next three years:

- In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, Ontario made a Statement of Reconciliation and Apology and released a Reconciliation Action Plan, *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Partners*.
- In August 2015, the Premier and Ontario Regional Chief Day signed a Political Accord affirming our commitment to the treaty relationship and the need to work together on priorities that create opportunities for Indigenous people.
- Developed and distributed more than 11,000 copies of the First Nations and Treaties map of Ontario to schools and the general public.
- Launched the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund in October 2014, a \$95 million fund over 10 years to help create jobs and improve economic outcomes for Indigenous people.
- Worked with Ontario's Women's Directorate (OWD) to develop and launch *Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women*, which commits to introduce new programs and legislation to support Indigenous women experiencing violence, provide enhanced training for crown attorneys and police, develop public awareness and prevention campaigns, and improve data collection to monitor progress.
- The Algonquins of Ontario treaty negotiations reached a new milestone with the publication of an initial proposed agreement in principle on June 12, 2015.
- Committed to updating the education curriculum to reflect residential schools.
- In November 2015, Ontario and the Anishinabek Nation signed the Master Education Framework Agreement.
- In December 2015, Ontario worked collaboratively to pass the *Métis Nation of Ontario Secretariat Act*.
- Collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) to develop the First Nations Health Action Plan and, as part of Ontario's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, announced investments to expand access to Indigenous Mental Health and Addictions Treatment and Healing Centres and mental health and wellness programs.

I want to acknowledge the considerable efforts required to develop these plans to respond to historic trauma and address current needs, and ask that your ministry, along with OWD, MOHLTC and their partner ministries, bring the same level of creativity, partnership and dedication to implement these important initiatives over the next three years.

Your mandate is to strengthen relationships, improve social conditions and build economic opportunity for Indigenous communities across Ontario. You will do this by working across government, with Indigenous partners and with the federal government. Your specific priorities include:

Leading Ontario's Action Plan to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, in Collaboration with Indigenous Partners and Ministers, including:

Addressing the Legacy of Residential Schools

- Working with Indigenous partners to establish an Indigenous-led partnership to erect a public monument in the capital city to commemorate residential school survivors.
- Working with the Anti-Racism Directorate, address systemic racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples through an Indigenous-Informed Anti-Racism Strategy.

Reconciling Relationships with Indigenous Peoples

- Operationalizing the Political Accord and the Treaty Strategy across government, including Treaty Awareness Week.
- Working with Canada and Indigenous partners as the federal government moves forward on its national plan to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, including developing a policy on duty to consult.
- Continuing discussions with tobacco pilot project communities (Akwesasne and Chippewas of the Thames) towards reaching an agreement on tobacco self-regulation on reserve and revenue sharing.
- Working with the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and Treasury Board Secretariat, develop and implement indigenous cultural competency training across the Ontario Public Service by summer 2017.
- With Indigenous partners and partner ministers, exploring options to enhance the current consultation processes to clarify roles and responsibilities and reduce burden.

Supporting Indigenous Cultural Revitalization

- Working with the Minister of Children and Youth Services and Indigenous partners within the framework of the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy to co-develop culturally appropriate services and towards the recognition of jurisdiction and control.
- Supporting partner ministers in the development and implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Action Plan including the Indigenous Languages Revitalization Strategy.

Closing Gaps and Removing Barriers

- Improving socio-economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples living in urban communities by continuing to co-develop an Urban Indigenous Action Plan with Indigenous partners.
- Supporting the Minister of Education's work to improve educational outcomes, closing the achievement gap for Indigenous learners by 2020 and significantly increasing graduation rates for Indigenous learners.
- Supporting the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care in the Northern First Nations Health Action Plan and investments to expand access to Indigenous Mental Health and Addictions Treatment and Healing Centres and mental health and wellness programs.

Building Economic Opportunity

- Driving cross-government work and collaboration with Indigenous peoples to ensure that Indigenous people share in the benefits of natural resources, including forestry and mining, and are engaged in resource-related economic development.

Improving Drinking Water for First Nations

- Working with the ministers of the Environment and Climate Change and Intergovernmental Affairs and the federal government, which is primarily responsible for the provision of safe water on reserves, towards a five-year plan to provide First Nation reserves with access to safe drinking water, with a focus on remote communities. The ministers will work with First Nations towards developing measurable, achievable

targets to monitor progress. This will include implementing the trilateral working group, consisting of First Nations, the federal government and the Ontario government, to help improve the state of drinking water in First Nation communities.

Addressing Housing Needs for Indigenous People

- Support the Minister of Housing in developing an Indigenous Housing Strategy, to address the unique housing challenges and needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples by spring 2017.

Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women

- In partnership with the minister responsible for the Ontario Women's Directorate, supporting the implementation of Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and develop a framework to ensure that it meets its intended goals, and provide advice to government on areas for further work.

Engaging in Dialogue with the Federal Government

- Engaging in a dialogue with the federal government and Indigenous partners on key priorities and issues for Indigenous peoples, including working to achieve sustainable and equitable funding processes in First Nation communities.
- Working with the Ministry of Attorney General to support Ontario's membership and participation on the Federal, Provincial, Territorial Working Group on the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- Co-chairing the new federal-provincial-territorial-indigenous forum (FPTI) with the Government of Canada. In this role, you will work with FPTI partners with the aim of improving outcomes for Indigenous people and promoting reconciliation. The FPTI will focus on supporting well-being of Indigenous communities, in particular child welfare.

In addition to the priority activities above, I ask that you also deliver results for Ontarians by driving progress in the following areas:

- Continue to resolve land claims in a timely manner, including progress on the Algonquin land claim.
- Supporting the Minister of Children and Youth Services to implement the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy.
- Incorporate Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge and expertise in the government's efforts on climate change.
- Supporting the Minister of Education to improve education achievements for Indigenous learners.
- Undertake trilateral discussions on the Indian Welfare Agreement.
- Work with the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change to better understand mercury sources in the environment and their potential impacts on Ontario communities.
- Continue to work in partnership with the Minister of Energy and Indigenous communities to reduce reliance on diesel fuels for electricity generation in remote First Nation communities, including through microgrid solutions, where community support exists.
- Working with the Attorney General, continue to strengthen the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the justice system through the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and the Debwewin Committee's recommendations on the jury system, as well as support the federal government's public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.
- Ensure Indigenous communities participate in and benefit from development in the Ring of Fire.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.

Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne
Premier

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