

Opening Remarks of

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To all Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to identify the main challenges and opportunities facing Métis youth.

My name is Mitch Case and I am with the Youth Council of the Métis Nation of Ontario, one of the five Governing Members of the Métis National Council.

Like other young people in this country, youth across the Métis Homeland dream of having the opportunity to pursue their goals and be as confident in where they are going in life as where they have come from.

In some cases, these goals are finding a secure job, getting better training, or gaining a higher education.

We also want the freedom to express our Métis identity in our daily lives and to do so either in traditional or modern ways.

The Métis population is growing rapidly and more than half of our people are below the age of 19.

It means within the next 10 to 15 years, more than 100,000 Métis youth will be ready to enter the labor force or pursue higher education. The time is now to put the supports in place to ensure Métis youth are fully prepared to take these crucial next steps.

The gap in high school graduation rates between the Métis and the general population has narrowed considerably over the years.

Our labour force participation rate is close to that of the general population.

However, as Métis, we also face certain challenges in getting ahead.

There is still an enormous gap in post-secondary education participation between Métis and the general population, about 7 per cent of our population versus 18.2 per cent of the general population.

For Métis youth, a major barrier to post-secondary education is financial.

Unlike First Nations and Inuit, the Métis are excluded from the federal government's Aboriginal education funding.

Most of the Métis National Council's five provincial affiliated Governing Members have established endowments, with matching funds from universities, that provide scholarships and bursaries for Métis attending post-secondary institutions.

However, only the investment income from these endowments can be paid out in scholarships each year, limiting the number of students who can benefit. The demand for post-secondary assistance

continues to far outweigh the available supply of funding and many Métis young people will simply not be able to pursue that goal.

One of the best investments the federal government and the provinces can make would be to make a direct investment in Métis students through dedicated funding for Métis post-secondary and by strengthening the existing Métis Nation endowment funds.

These important investments would result in better employment and career prospects for Métis with post-secondary degrees and ultimately higher tax revenues for governments.

Another good investment for the federal government would be to expand its support for the five province-wide Métis employment and training agencies or ASETS that have assisted over 35,000 Métis, many of them youth, to find employment between 1999 and 2007 alone.

The federal government can be an important partner in Métis education by supporting the Métis Nation education institutions like

the Gabriel Dumont institute in Saskatoon and the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg and the additional educational programs of all governing members. Currently these initiatives are funded primarily by the provinces.

The Gabriel Dumont Institute's Saskatchewan Urban Native Teachers Education Program has graduated 1,000 students with a bachelor of education.

Many of its graduates are working with Métis youth encouraging them to achieve success in the K-12 system.

The Métis National Council's five Governing Members have done a lot to involve Métis youth in their decision-making councils.

Métis youth have their own representation on most of the provincial councils.

Unfortunately, there is little funding for our activities and some Governing Members struggle to find the funds to organize a youth gathering once a year when possible.

While Métis youth groups do seek out their own funding or secure funding in-kind to hold activities focused on cultural learning and healthy living activities there is so much more that could be accomplished.

Currently, the main funding source for Aboriginal youth driven activities is through Canadian Heritage's Cultural Connection for Aboriginal Youth program.

The MNC's Governing Members have difficulty accessing the Canadian Heritage funds because its program does not reflect demographic reality of the Métis population that is spread across the cities, towns, rural areas and hinterland regions of the five westernmost provinces.

The funding conditions of the Cultural Connection for Aboriginal Youth favour activities in concentrated Aboriginal population areas.

The funding is limited in its scope and can inhibit Metis youth groups from effectively engaging youth and executing these projects on their own. MNC Governing Members are forced to draw from their alternative program budgets to pay their own staff members, and to bring in youth from distant locations.

This is unfortunate because Métis youth representatives, who are serving on a voluntary basis, are thirsting for opportunities to tap into the energy of their members from across their individual provinces and project their views into the decision-making councils of the Governing Members

There is also a desire for a national youth body to promote cross-Homeland dialogue and opportunity for learning as well as to ensure that the Métis youth voice is being used and heard at the national level.

In the past, there was a National Métis Youth Council at the MNC but due to funding cuts, it is dormant.

Despite the lack of reliable youth funding, the Métis National Council plays the role of coordinating national gatherings such as the Métis Youth Leadership Camp, a four-day camp that was held at the historic site of Batoche during the Back to Batoche Days this past summer.

The camp focused on the *Legacy of Residential Schools and its impact on our Families, and Communities.*

The goal of the leadership camp was to combine social networking tools and resources to essentially “share the story” of the Métis residential, boarding and day school experiences through the development of a social media framework that will be used by the Métis National Council to inform the public of this issue.



The youth heard stories first hand from Métis survivors on their experiences and how it affected their lives and their ability to parent and build relationships.

Other sessions included Métis Nation history, social media planning, strategic communications as well as the creation of a 'Past, Present and Future Mural'.

This was the first time that youth have been engaged as educators on the issues of residential, boarding and day schools.

Having youth utilize the tools of today to promote healing and help Canadians understand the impacts that have been left on our families and communities was a unique and significant approach to the sharing of knowledge.

This is the type of project the Cultural Connection for Aboriginal Youth program should be funding.

Thank you.

