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April 28, 2005

The Right Hon. Paul Martin, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister  
Langevin Block  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Martin:

**RE: Turning the Corner with Canada's First Nations**

Today we have an opportunity to make a difference in the economic and social growth of First Nation communities across Canada. Strategic introduction of broadband technology in economic development, health, education and governance in the remote First Nations, particularly in northern Ontario, has improved both access and quality of services. Costs avoided through effective use of technology, such as travel to health services (\$4 million per year by 2006/2007), are now being invested in health and wellness programs and services in the community. Quality of life and economic well-being in First Nations are enhanced by boldly integrating broadband technology into aboriginal services and programs.

Keewaytinook Okimakanak and the Kuhkenah Network (K-Net) is a First Nation and Canadian broadband and ICT success story that is known around the world. K-Net and its partners have invested \$30 million of Industry Canada and FedNor funds since 1995 to develop effective broadband infrastructure and applications in 24 of the most difficult to serve communities of Canada. We are transferring lessons learned and best practices to other First Nations and regions across the country and around the world.

The challenge now is to build government funding models that reward efficient service delivery. Health Canada and INAC, for instance, pay for expensive transportation and accommodation to provide city-based health and education for First Nations. Both departments however, are struggling to re-allocate funds saved by broadband supported health care or education delivered within the community, to the cost of the broadband technology which brings these efficiencies. Despite the success of these projects, long term operating funds and the necessary programs to adequately support these initiatives have yet to be put in place within the federal government departments.

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Deer Lake

Fort Severn

Keewaywin

McDowell Lake

North Spirit Lake

Poplar Hill

In addition to allocating service delivery funds to the broadband technologies crucial to improved access and results, we are now proposing that a national aboriginal 'E-Community' initiative be established and delivered by Industry Canada. The First Nation e-Community program would provide aboriginal communities with the human and financial resources required to participate in transforming their economic, governance, resource management, health and education sectors. The "one-size-fits-all" model does not work for the different regions and First Nations across Canada. Each community and region requires the capacity and resources to build a best practices solution that addresses their local and regional needs. Aboriginal people have sound ideas and experiences to contribute to the transformation of their communities. They need the resources to participate effectively.

The Industry Canada First Nations SchoolNet (FNS) team have the experience and community-focussed culture to successfully implement the E-Community objectives. They are experiencing great success using K-Net and five other aboriginal regional organizations to provide appropriate and local connectivity and information technology to First Nation schools across the country. E-Community would expand this successful FNS model to support all sectors of the aboriginal community. The six FNS Regional Management Organizations have collaborated on the development of the E-Community concept. FedNor has been using this model for some time to extend it's reach and reduce risk.

At the upcoming Aboriginal roundtable discussions, I would ask that everyone carefully consider the opportunities of investing in both the technology and the applications that promise improved services for the First Nations we serve. As well, it is critical to allocate the necessary resources required for aboriginal communities to successfully apply these best practices in the development of the services that address their present and future needs.

I would like to invite you and members of your team to visit the Keewaytinook Okimakanak First Nations at your earliest convenience to learn first hand how our partnership with the government of Canada is resulting in many positive opportunities in our communities. Our team that is located in our administrative offices in Balmertown is famous for its traditional meals and hosting national and international guests. We welcome your visit and any member of your team or those who you believe should better understand our work.

Thank you for considering this important matter.

Sincerely,



Geordi Kakepetum  
Executive Director

cc: Chiefs of Keewaytinook Okimakanak