



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Aboriginal health problems

“THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST ASSUME ITS RESPONSIBILITIES AND IMPROVE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS”

– Marc Lemay

Ottawa, Tuesday, September 12, 2006 – “The results of the study of the health and social situation of First Nations is very disturbing. Aboriginals are still thought of as second-class citizens. It is up to the ministers of Indian Affairs and Health to immediately assume their responsibilities and fix the situation,” the Bloc Québécois Critic for Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Member for Abitibi–Témiscamingue, **Marc Lemay**, said off the bat.

Marc Lemay was reacting to the release today of the report *Enquête régionale longitudinale sur la santé des Premières nations de la région du Québec* [longitudinal regional survey on the health of First Nations in Quebec] of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador. The study was carried out in 2002.

“What is clear from this extensive report is that the serious health problems, whether obesity, diabetes or smoking, like the social, economic and family problems that stem from the loss of identity and poorly paid menial jobs, are in many cases the result of an educational program that is inadequate and ill-suited to the socio-cultural reality of Aboriginal nations,” said **Marc Lemay**.

The Bloc Québécois Critic for Health and Member for Quebec City, **Christiane Gagnon**, is shocked by the results of the study. “That 52% of Aboriginal children and 47% of adolescents are obese means that they do not have the information they need on healthy eating habits. One of the responsibilities of Health Canada is prevention. It is responsible for informing young people about the consequences of poor eating habits, such as diabetes, which can be fatal. This study clearly shows that Health Canada and thereby the federal government are not fulfilling their constitutional responsibilities,” she said.

Marc Lemay believes the first step the Harper government must take to gain even the smallest amount of credibility regarding Ottawa’s responsibility for Aboriginals is to commit to giving them the means to fix the situation themselves and granting them self-government so that they can confidently manage the programs that truly meet their needs and suit their socio-cultural reality.

“Stephen Harper will have an opportunity to take this first step at the socio-economic forum of the Quebec and Labrador First Nations, to be held next month. Rather than aligning himself with Washington’s vague policy on American Aboriginals and dismissing the recent Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Stephen Harper could tell the First Nations of Quebec and Canada that he has listened to them, that he understands their problems and that he is prepared to recognize them as full-fledged citizens, capable of effectively and independently managing their services, thereby putting an end to their misery and humiliation, as this recent study reveals yet again,” said **Marc Lemay**.

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