



## Romeo Saganash

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Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada,  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

February 6, 2017

Subject: National Canoe and Paddle Program

Mr. Trudeau,

Your government has yet to invest the money required under legal obligations to end the racial discrimination of First Nations youth. However, as an Indigenous person I understand if there may not be enough money for the federal government to meet its legal and moral obligations to our children. You can trust me that I truly understand why the Canadian government may not be able to respect our rights. Over the course of the history of Canada, First Nations children have received more than our fair share so it is probably time for our youth to wait a turn. That is why, if you must make a choice in the upcoming budget, I am writing to you today to express my desire for a National Canoe and Paddle Program.

As a Cree man, not only was I born on the shores of a lake, but I have spent much of my life navigating waters. However, I want you to know that it wasn't until your recent comments that I fully understood the importance of having storage for our canoes and paddles. In fact, I am ashamed for my people that we haven't been listening to our youth in the way you have. But, it did make me thankful that the Prime Minister of this great country can continue to enlighten my peoples when he stated:

*"I've spoken with a number of chiefs who said, 'You know, we need a youth centre ... You know, we need TV's and lounges and sofas so they can hang around.' And when a chief says that to me, I pretty much know they haven't actually talked to their young people because most of the young people I've talked to want a place to store their canoes and paddles so they can connect back out on the land and a place with internet access so they can do their homework"*  
— Prime Minister Trudeau, 2017

It is truly an honour for the first time in the history of Canada to have a Prime Minister as the Minister of Youth so plugged into our kids. As Prime Minister, you wrote to every member of Cabinet affirming that your relationship with Indigenous Peoples is the most important one, so who am I to argue with your recent comments that you know what is best for Indigenous youth facing so many critical issues including a suicide epidemic.

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That is why I believe a National Canoe and Paddle Program is absolutely critical to Indigenous youth. I believe this is also why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made this national program the secret 95<sup>th</sup> Call to Action.

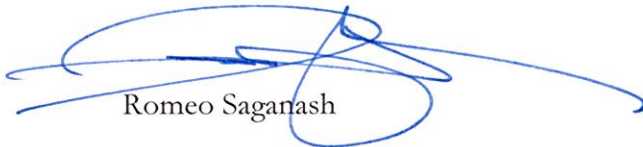
Further, I am heartened and encouraged to see that your government is truly embracing the spirit of the UN Declaration including Article 25, which, reads,

*Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.*

It is time for the federal government to help First Nations maintain our very important spiritual connection with the water. This is a connection that your government further embraces through your approval of projects like Site-C, Kinder Morgan, and the Muskrat Falls Dam. Once the canoe and paddle storage system is in place, I will personally paddle across the country to tell First Nations concerned with the impacts of these projects, not to worry because with these urgently needed budget investment for canoe storage depots our connection to the lands and waters is maintained.

While I am not the Prime Minister whose primary relationship is with Indigenous Peoples, I would like to make you aware of the fact that I founded the Cree Nation Youth Council in 1985. I feel this should provide the tiniest of assurances that I can speak from experience and expertise when say that the biggest issue facing Indigenous youth for the last 150 years has been the lack of sheds to store our canoes. I myself have often lamented the lack of space on Parliament Hill to store my canoe and paddle. I commend your vision, Prime Minister, and look forward to your government addressing this immediate crisis in the upcoming budget.

Sincerely,



Romeo Saganash