

Dear Messrs. Hill, Day, and Board of the N'Amerind Friendship Centre,

Thank you for forwarding your questions to me. Over the six years in which I have now had the honour of representing the riding of London North Centre in parliament, there has been no greater aim for me than to be accessible for all of my constituents, with a special focus on those that government has often failed in the past. Our Liberal team is building off a proven track record this election, but there is always more to be done to move forward towards real reconciliation. As such, I truly appreciate the opportunity you have given me to provide you with concrete answers to your questions.

Sincerely,

Peter Fragiskatos

### Candidate Questionnaire

#### **Adequately Supporting Friendship Centres**

Federal funding cuts to core programming and capital needs have hurt Friendship Centres at a time when urban Indigenous communities are growing rapidly and experiencing multiple and overlapping crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our Friendship Centre supported food security and safety efforts and vaccine uptake in addition to a range of critical culture-based programs and services that contributes to a more vibrant and healthy community.

- **If elected, how will you and your government support capacity and capital investments for Friendship Centres?**

*We recognize that the work of Friendship centres in fighting the pandemic and in supporting urban Indigenous populations over the past two years has been tremendous. In addition to the usual federal programs, in budget 2021 we worked hard to ensure we were helping charities and community organizations who have seen demand grow and revenues plummet, that's why we earmarked \$15 million for friendship centres to ensure they had the resources required to keep their work going throughout the pandemic. Budget 2021, tabled this April, looks further forward, to late-stage pandemic and re-opening needs, proposing to renew the Investment Readiness Program for \$50 million over two years, starting in 2021-22. This program supports charities, non-profits, and social purpose organizations in capacity-building activities such as business plan development, expanding products and services, skills development, and hiring. Similarly, our budget provides \$400 million in 2021-22 to Employment and Social Development Canada to create a temporary Community Services Recovery Fund to help charities and non-profits adapt and modernize so they can better support the economic recovery in our communities. The budget also proposes to provide \$108.8 million over two years, beginning in 2021-22, to re-establish and revitalize Indigenous cultural spaces. During the election, we've renewed our commitments to Indigenous reconciliation through concrete actions such as increasing program funding in our*

*platform, with a special focus on Indigenous housing, which will be further developed in the response to your next question*

### **Affordable and Safe Housing for Urban Indigenous Families**

In the province of Ontario, insufficient and inadequate housing is of crisis proportions and this disproportionately affects Indigenous people in towns, cities, and rural areas. Current waitlists for adequate housing span years and limit individuals' and families' stability and safety in their communities including their ability to meaningfully engage in their communities.

- **If elected, how will you and your government address the crisis in affordable housing and homelessness in Ontario that disproportionately impacts Indigenous people?**

*It is unfortunately clear that the housing crisis which has hit both Ontario and Canada as a whole has had a disproportionate effect on often chronically underhoused Indigenous people. We've been working on this issue for a while, launching the \$40 Billion National Housing Plan back in 2017, with a stated goal of prioritizing access to housing for Indigenous and other vulnerable communities, in compliance with cultural needs thanks to a collaborative government-to-government approach to planning and construction. We've since continued to develop the housing strategy through budget 2021, increasing its scope, as well as its expected funding to \$70 billion. With regards to off-reserve homelessness, through the NHS and Reaching Home - Canada's Homelessness Strategy, a total of \$413 million has been dedicated to addressing Indigenous homelessness predominantly in urban centres, such as in London. Of this, \$200 million is delivered through new and more progressive bilateral agreements with provinces and territories and \$25 million is available through the National Housing Co-Investment Fund. Since 2017, we've managed to decrease chronic homelessness in Canadian cities significantly, and have since committed to eliminate it completely. Indigenous peoples and Northerners will similarly benefit from an additional \$300 million, delivered by the territories, to support new construction and repairs to existing affordable housing in Northern communities. This election season, in addition to our efforts to curb speculation, crack down on foreign ownership and introduce a home buyers' bill of rights, we're committing to co-develop a new Indigenous Urban, Rural, and Northern Housing Strategy with Indigenous partners and organizations that will be a stand-alone companion to the National Housing Strategy, supported by a \$300 million initial investment. We're also promising to co-develop and fund Canada's first-ever National Indigenous Housing Centre, through which Indigenous people will oversee federal Indigenous housing programs.*

### **High Quality Employment Opportunities for Urban Indigenous People**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the employment and training landscape and urban Indigenous communities have been significantly impacted. Access to jobs,

training, and opportunities for urban Indigenous people is a necessary component of any national economic recovery plan, post-pandemic. Our Friendship Centre supports Indigenous people to access employment and training opportunities in our region and we want to ensure opportunities for safe, meaningful, high quality employment will be available within our community.

- **If elected, what actions will you and your government take to improve training and employment outcomes for urban Indigenous people, including youth?**

*Building back better from the pandemic requires us to facilitate opportunities for forward-looking training and job creation. With regards to education, in 2015 we promised to invest \$50 million to improve outcomes for Indigenous post-secondary students, we hit that number and kept going, with budget 2019 increasing our commitment to \$320 million over five years. For the last two years we've supported students through the pandemic by doubling the Canada student grant to \$6000 while creating 300,000 new work opportunities and experiences for young Canadians and providing income support to over 700,000 students through the Canada Emergency Student Benefit. Moving forward, we're committed to permanently eliminating the federal interest on Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprentice Loans as well as increasing the repayment assistance threshold to \$50,000 for Canada Student Loan borrowers, to ensure students can settle into their careers before they have to start repaying their loans. As to jobs and opportunities for urban Indigenous people, last year, we as a government set ourselves a target to create one million new jobs. As of July, we had almost achieved it, and now, we are looking to exceed it. Going forward, in addition to our continuing support for Canadian small businesses, we're also committing to target Indigenous people specifically by doubling the Union Training and Innovation program to \$50 million a year to support more apprenticeship training opportunities and additional partnerships in the Red Seal trades across Canada.*

## **Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People**

Indigenous women are far more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience violence. In our community, programs and services to end violence against Indigenous women change individuals' lives and we want to sustain this important work. The recently released National Action Plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People (MMIWG2S) has the potential to effect generational change across our communities.

- **If elected, will you and your government continue to support the MMIWG2S National Action Plan priorities?**

*Concrete reconciliation has always been a personal and governmental top priority. Our Liberal government both created and saw through the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We welcomed the report of the core working group this spring; we recently followed through on one of the key recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation commission's final report by enshrining the UN Declaration*

*on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into law, and we intend to follow the same path with the MMIWG core committee's recommendations through the National Pathway. We are committing to accelerating this process, as well as to creating a standing Federal-Provincial-Territorial table on MMIWG and 2SLGBTQIA+ people to facilitate and coordinate this work.*

## **Supporting Universal Urban Indigenous Childcare**

Universal childcare will have a disproportionate impact on both Indigenous women and our community's economic recovery and labour force participation, not to mention childhood wellbeing and generational poverty reduction. Initial data shows that women's labour force participation has been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Through a nationalised program, strategic expansion of culture-based, urban Indigenous childcare in Friendship Centres will be critical to accelerating economic recovery in urban Indigenous communities, alleviating poverty, and supporting culture-based preventative supports that will encourage positive childhood development and promote social cohesion.

- **If elected, will you and your government implement a universal childcare program across Canada?**

*The importance of affordable childcare to the ability of parents, and notably women, to fully participate in the Canadian economy by holding good, well-paying jobs cannot be understated. That is why, the Liberal government has worked to provide Canadian families with support through the Canada Child Benefit and the Parental Sharing Benefit, which have allowed us to raise over 435,000 children out of poverty. This election, we're committing to universal \$10 a day childcare as well as to opening 250,000 new spots and hiring 40,000 new early childhood educators. We've laid the groundwork for the program, reaching deals with seven provinces, and intend to get it done. Building a publicly funded Canada-wide system of accessible, high-quality early learning and child care will not only support working parents and make life more affordable for families, but it will also create jobs, strengthen our economy, grow the middle class, and give every child in Canada the best possible start in life. Affordable, high-quality childcare has the potential to add 240,000 workers to the Canadian workforce. Every dollar invested in early childhood education can generate up to \$3 in economic return.*

- **Will you and your government ensure a national urban Indigenous specific strategy is developed as part of a national childcare program?**

*Providing culturally appropriate education, is an important part of protecting Indigenous languages and correcting the errors of the past. We intend to empower Indigenous resurgence, not hinder its progress. We are lucky in London, to host a group of highly successful examples of culturally and linguistically appropriate childcare centres for the Francophone community through the CCFL. Empowering our Indigenous communities*

*to build their own model of childcare is incredibly important. In the 2021 budget, we earmarked \$2.5 billion for Indigenous early learning and childcare in order to create new childcare spaces, support Aboriginal Head Start in urban communities, and develop before and after-school care on reserve. Now, as part of our election commitment to \$10 a day childcare, we are further pledging to work with Indigenous partners to ensure Indigenous children have access to culturally appropriate, affordable, high-quality early learning and childcare.*

## **Ensuring Food Security through Food Sovereignty**

Forced disconnection from traditional food harvesting methods and access to traditional territories has contributed to food insecurity in our community. Throughout the pandemic, our organisation supported a high number of families including children, youth, and seniors, who would have gone hungry without our food security mobilization. We envision the development of new approaches to food security post-pandemic that are culture-based, sustainable, climate-conscious, and aligned with our community's priorities.

- **If elected, how will you and your government support food security in urban Indigenous communities?**

*In 2019, the Liberal government instituted the first Canadian Food Policy, which we described as a roadmap for a healthier and more sustainable food system in Canada. We ensured that Indigenous voices were well represented in its creation, including through the appointment of Indigenous representation to the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council, and through the setting of a short term goal of ensuring support for food security in Indigenous communities, and a long term goal of building strong Indigenous food systems and supporting Indigenous food self-determination. As well, during the pandemic the Liberal government provided a \$100 million top-up for the Emergency Food Security Fund, to provide support for 4000 food banks and similar community organizations in need, in addition to a separate \$25 million for Nutrition North, \$30 million was specifically earmarked for Indigenous organizations and was distributed amongst 1050 groups and communities. Building off this record, we are committed to continuing to partner with, and support, community-based food security organizations to make sure all Canadians have access to healthy food.*