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Dene Nation supports Onion Lake and other nations in court proceeding

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan - Dene National Chief Bill Erasmus was in court this week to support the Nations challenging the *First Nations Financial Transparency Act* (FNFTA). “The most compelling information shared in court was that monies First Nations receive is not from taxpayer’s - they are “Indian monies” allocated by Treasury Board dating back to Confederation. The Federal government has a legal obligation under Treaty to provide these monies to us” stated Chief Bill Erasmus. In light of these facts, “we expect a formal apology from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation since they played a key role in creating and introducing this legislation into Parliament”.

The information shared in Federal Court about Indian monies, dispels the myth that First Nations are receiving handouts from the public purse and are a financial burden on Canadian society. “It’s unconscionable that the Federal government allows and perpetuates such misinformation to continue thus creating additional distrust between First Nations and the Government. They have manipulated the public into believing that we are not transparent, we are unaccountable and we are criminals thus imposing the legislation” said Dene National Chief Bill Erasmus.

The five Nations in court include Onion Lake, Ochapowace, Thunderchild, Athabasca Chipewyan and Sawridge - they are seeking an Order from the Federal Court to halt the Minister from forcing them to submit their audits under the FNFTA and to release monies currently being withheld. They are contesting the legal standing and constitutionality of the FNFTA on grounds related to lack of consultation and discrimination. Furthermore, the legislation goes against previous court precedence in the Montana Band which found that audits of First Nations are “private and confidential”.

In addition, the Indian Affairs website confirms that there are approximately 250 First Nations across Canada that have not complied with publishing their audits under the FNFTA this fiscal year. “This is significant because it means that at least 2 Billion dollars of “Indian monies” are being withheld from First Nations across Canada. This money would normally be used to build houses, assist with program delivery and provide necessary governance for First Nations” said Dene National Chief Bill Erasmus.

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