



# The Brief

Vol. 7 No. 8

A publication of the NB Media Co-op

May 2016

[nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org)

## Trudeau’s promises of ‘renewed relationship’ with First Nations evaporated with budget

By PAMELA PALMATER



**Prime Minister Justin Trudeau poses for a selfie with an elder while visiting Tsuut’ina First Nation on March 4, 2016.** Photo from Google Images/Huffington Post.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau won the hearts of many Canadians by finally getting rid of Stephen Harper and his decade of oppression, violation of civil rights and vilification of First Nations.

Most breathed a sigh of relief on October 20, 2015, when newly elected Trudeau talked about changing everything in Canada. He gave moving speeches about Canada’s shameful history with Indigenous peoples and committed to implementing all the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Trudeau promised to start this process by implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and respecting the right of First Nations to say no to development on their territories. Most significant were his promises to renew the nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and First Nations that would be guided by the spirit and intent of treaties and that respected constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights, inherent rights and First Nation jurisdictions.

The budget released on March 22 saw these promises evaporate into thin air only to be replaced by an underfunded program and service agenda.

Canadians are being asked to celebrate a budget which is being promoted as “historic” not just by Trudeau and the majority of journalists and commentators in mainstream media, but even by Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Perry Bellegarde.

Canadians are faced with two major obstacles to understanding this budget: one, trying to figure out which numbers are accurate; and two, assessing those numbers in their proper context.

### ‘Real Change’ by shell game

First, it’s important to note that Trudeau’s budget plays a shell game on the actual funding commitment during his four-year (now three-and-a-half-year) mandate. As we all know, monies promised for future mandates are not monies at all. This budget promised \$8.4 billion to First Nations in the next three budget years, but is, in fact, less than \$5.3 billion.

Trudeau failed to deliver on his election promise to First Nations, blaming it on the Conservatives prior to the budget being released, but the failure is ultimately his. Still, without the proper context, many Canadians may think that billions of dollars is a lot of money.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)’s own internal report noted that the housing needs for the 63 First Nations in Manitoba would cost \$2 billion. Since Manitoba First Nations represent only 10 % of all First Nations, the national cost to address the housing crisis would be closer to \$20 billion.

In First Nation education, the 2 % funding cap imposed by the former Liberal government created a cumulative deficit of over \$20 billion. This means First Nations are more than \$20 billion behind the starting line when it comes to infrastructure (schools), staff, training, materials, curriculum development, etc.

That doesn’t include extra costs for post-secondary education that have created a waiting list of thousands of First Nation students. Yet, there was no budget line for post-secondary education; instead there was only a promise that Trudeau’s government would work with students, parents, educators and Indigenous groups to “explore” future options.

First Nation water and sewer should have been an easy budget line to address since there are already independent studies on what the actual costs are to address the crisis. The last report said it would cost almost \$6 billion to fix the current water and sewer stock with an additional \$2 billion for operation and maintenance needed over the next four years. Add to this a conservative estimate of \$10 billion to add new water and sewer infrastructure that will be needed to service all the new houses needed in First Nations and you get a rough number of \$18 billion. The longer houses, water, sewer or any infrastructure system is left without maintenance and service, the worse it deteriorates, costing more to fix.

The commitment to protect and support Indigenous languages is one of the most shocking lines in this budget. The TRC report recommended substantial support to revive and protect Indigenous languages since they are only endangered because of Canada’s purposeful attempts to wipe out our languages in various assimilation policies, including residential schools.

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## From the end of the line: Red Head resident on Energy East pipeline

By LYNAYA ASTEPHEN

Red Head – Every moment I am home I feel compelled to look out my front windows. Why? To make sure there is no pipeline built.

You see I live literally across from where Energy East would propose to end in Saint John, NB.

The pipeline would ship 1.1 million barrels of diluted bitumen from Hardisty, Alberta to a spot across from my house. A forested area filled with animals and streams run from the mountain behind my place through fields that run to the Bay of Fundy.

If I look to the right, I see a beautiful view of the Bay of Fundy, fishing boats, gorgeous sunsets and Partridge Island, where Irish immigrants landed during the potato famine. It is paradise here.

Unfortunately, it’s where a company supported by the New Brunswick and Alberta governments want to put an export terminal for the tar sands. In total, 281 tankers would leave here each year; about a ship and a half a day.

TransCanada plans on putting 22 tanks of 13.6 million litres of bitumen in the field and woods across from my home and in my neighbour’s backyard. Some homes will have the facilities less than 300 metres away. Some tanks would be six stories tall.

Just down the road is the Canaport Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant. In an incident, their flare killed 7,500 birds, some endangered species. Canaport, owned by Repsol and Irving, got charged only \$750,000 for the bird kill. TransCanada plans to transport the bitumen to Irving’s Oil refinery and export terminal.

Why have I decided to fight? In May 2014 I attended an open house for TransCanada. I had questions on environmental issues. Someone with TransCanada pointed me to the head environmental guy. Instead of answering my questions, he reached over to a nearby table and then handed me a pamphlet on jobs. To his surprise, I got angry and said I was not for his pipeline.

When I got home, I decided to find my own answers. For many months, I read about TransCanada, tar sands, climate change and politics. Meanwhile, TransCanada was refusing to have town hall style meetings. They are only meeting with landowners, one-on-one, in their homes or in their own set-up, in their open houses, where they control the message. They do not want open discussion with others to happen. The same thing happened in the U.S. with the Keystone XL pipeline.

Everyday, I watch a pipeline divide my country using arguments that are meant to distract us from real issues. My neighbors, some who have lived here their entire lives, shrivel with fear. We have fishermen here, their livelihoods depend on the Bay of Fundy in the exact same water near their proposed end terminal. This is where they fish for lobster, a creature which is bottom-dwelling. A spill would wipe out these creatures like it did to the fish and wildlife of Kalamazoo River, Michigan when oil spilled there. Five years later, Kalamazoo is still not fully cleaned up and the cost is \$5 billion.



**Hundreds marched against the Energy East pipeline on a foggy Red Head Road in May 2015. The Energy East proposal includes an oil tank farm and terminal in Red Head.** Photo by Tracy Glynn.

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# Trudeau’s promises of ‘renewed relationship’

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I made a conservative estimate of the cost, based on what is currently spent on protecting the French language in Canada; approximately \$2.4 billion annually. Given that there are approximately 53 Indigenous languages spread out over 10 provinces and three territories, and given that the majority of these languages are in critical states nearing extinction, much more intervention would be needed up front to save them.

Thus, \$20 billion over three years would provide enough up front funding to create immersion programs on reserve, develop or expand curriculum, and hire and train staff. This is a massive undertaking that is no less important than protecting the French language and is an essential part of real reconciliation.

### First Nations children still in crisis

It’s hard to believe that Trudeau would not at least ensure that the budget line for First Nation child and family services was consistent with the costs noted in the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in the child welfare case it lost. An increase of \$200 million is needed annually just to get child welfare funding for First Nations children somewhere close to provincial levels of funding.

Yet, the budget shows a mere \$71 million for next year and \$99 million for the year after. These levels are nowhere near what is needed to address the crisis of First Nations children in foster care. In Manitoba alone, 90 % of all kids in care are Indigenous with one baby taken away from its mother every day, average. Nationally, despite being on 4 % of the population, Indigenous kids represent about half of all kids in care. Sadly, it looks like Cindy Blackstock’s fight for justice for our kids is not over.

Even the amount set aside for a national inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls pales in comparison to the costs of past inquiries. But we also have to realize that not all of the \$5.3 billion is even going to go to First Nations. A large percentage is set to go to INAC, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corp., the National Energy Board, various political organizations and even former Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin. Once again, the bureaucracy will benefit first.

There are other funding deficiencies for Indigenous peoples living off-reserve or for the Inuit in the North – which would only compound the grossly underfunded budget presented. There are just too many budget items to go through in this article. However, there are some glaring omissions that have to be highlighted.

All of the above were unequivocal election promises that were reaffirmed after Trudeau’s successful election in his speech to the Special Chiefs Assembly. He told APTN in one definitive word that First Nations’ right to veto a project on their land was absolute. His promise to change everything about the status quo that is currently killing our people was based on a renewed nation-to-nation relationship.

### Trudeau’s honeymoon is over for Indigenous people

Not only did Trudeau back away from supporting a First Nation’s right to say no to development with this budget, he abandoned support for the nation-to-nation relationship. There are no real funds set aside to support this foundational promise and his words say it all.

Nowhere in the budget document does the Prime

Minister refer to this “nation-to-nation” relationship, but instead he refers to a renewed relationship with “Canada’s” Indigenous people aimed at “unifying Canada” and ensuring participation of Indigenous people in the economy.

Throughout the document we have been downgraded from Nations to people, groups, communities and stakeholders. There is no mention of UNDRIP, TRC, or free, informed and prior consent. There is no mention of the “sacred” constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights in need of implementation. In fact, the nation-to-nation relationship based on free, informed and prior consent turned into a “partnership” based on “consultation, and where appropriate, accommodation.” We are back to square one: letting courts determine the relationship.

I think our children deserve better than this. I think reconciliation envisions far more than this. If we don’t use our collective power as Indigenous Nations and allied Canadians to set this government back on track, we risk another lost decade and many more lost lives.

I think I can definitively say the honeymoon is over. Time to snap back to reality and stop being distracted by the shiny beads and trinkets contained in all the flowery speeches and smiling photo ops.

The health of our planet and future generations depends on us taking our role as the real governing power seriously. We need to hold this government accountable for its commitments and hold ourselves accountable to act and speak honestly.

*Dr. Pamela D. Palmater is a Mi’kmaq lawyer and member of the Eel River Bar First Nation in New Brunswick. She teaches Indigenous law, politics and governance at Ryerson University and heads their Centre for Indigenous Governance. This article was first published on Palmater’s blog, Indigenous Nationhood.*

## In Brief



**Members of Idle No More and Black Lives Matter began occupying the Toronto office of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada on April 13, demanding that the federal government take action following the suicide crisis in Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario. A state of emergency was declared in Attawapiskat on April 9, when 11 suicide attempts were reported in one day. Suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading cause of death for Indigenous peoples under the age of 44. High suicide rates are linked to colonialism and systemic racism.** Photo by the Council of Canadians.

**Energy East pipeline threatens drinking water of up to 130,679 New Brunswickers, over 5 million Canadians along entire route.** The drinking water in Edmundston, Saint Leonard, Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska, Grand Falls, Cambridge Narrows, Hampton, Fredericton and Saint John would be at risk from an Energy East pipeline spill. A detailed analysis of the proposed Energy East pipeline route by the Council of Canadians shows that, across Canada, the project could lead to the contamination of drinking water not identified in TransCanada’s application to the National Energy Board.

**Refugee solidarity activists take demands to Fredericton MP.** Refugees Welcome Fredericton organized

## Community Calendar

To list your community event, email [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org). For an updated listing of events, check [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org).

**Suffragette.** A movie about the early feminist movement. Thurs, May 5, 7:00pm. Tilley Hall, Room 102, UNB Fredericton. Hosted by Mayworks Fredericton–The Festival for Working People and the Arts.

**Joe Hill Open Mic “Songs of Struggle.”** A tribute to the life and songs of Joe Hill, an iconic folk singer and an organizer of the working class. “Don’t mourn, organize!” said Joe Hill before being executed. Fri, May 6, 8pm to midnight. Crowne Plaza Ballroom, Fredericton. Hosted by Mayworks Fredericton.

### Red Head resident: Energy East pipeline

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In the case of a spill, what about the fishermen who fish to feed their families and pay their bills? We would lose that money coming into our economy forever as well as the money from the fishing industry. How would tourism be affected by a spill? Tourism is a \$250 million industry here in New Brunswick. Many tourists come here to see the endangered North Atlantic Right Whale. Only 450 such whales are known to exist today.

What’s this talk about Montreal rejecting Energy East? It is actually 82 Montreal area municipalities. The Energy East pipeline would traverse over 820 waterways in Quebec.

Don’t forget that the former Conservative government cut environmental regulations with Bills C-38 and C-45 in 2012. None of those regulations have been restored.

Then there is all the talk of refining our own Canadian oil and how Energy East is a nation-building project, thanks to former Premier Frank McKenna. However, this is no nation-building project, except that many people across the country are united in opposition to it.

Finally, we hear both sides of the rail vs. pipeline arguments. It is another meaningless false debate. The corporations want to get oil to the market in whatever way possible. In fact, the province is looking at adding another 220 rail cars a day in Belledune in northern New Brunswick. Three First Nations reserves in Quebec are suing New Brunswick over lack of consultation on this project.

The real question is how do we get off fossil fuels like the rest of the world has to. We know that 80% of fossil fuels need to stay in the ground to avoid a 2 degrees Celsius increase above pre-industrial temperatures.

Dear politicians, why are we not talking about that? After all, it is 2016 now, right? Let’s get on with it!

*Lynaya Astephen is a Red Head resident and an organizer with the Red Head and Anthony’s Cove Preservation Association.*

an information picket outside Fredericton MP Matt DeCoursey’s office on Refugee Rights Day, April 4. Their demands included the immediate processing of refugee claims, an end to detentions, raids and deportations of immigrants, an end to Islamophobia and justice for communities displaced and harmed by Canadian extraction companies operating abroad and at home. The MP said he would take the concerns to Trudeau and the Ministers responsible.



**Roland Moreno with Filipino-Canadian CommUNITY of NB speaking with Fredericton MP Matt DeCoursey at the Refugee Rights Day information picket outside the MP’s office. Migrant worker advocacy groups want migrant workers to be granted permanent residency status upon arrival in Canada, and the requirement that work permits be tied to their employers removed.** Photo by Gül Çaliskan.

**Canada secretly approves controversial arms deal with Saudi Arabia.** A secret document, signed by Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion, attempts to justify selling billions worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia, one of the world’s most oppressive regimes. Dion also endorsed Saudi Arabia’s military campaign in Yemen, the victims of which are overwhelmingly civilian, according to the United Nations. Trudeau defended the arms deal saying it was “a matter of principle.” Matthew Behrens, a long-time anti-war activist, said, “Trudeau shows his principles, which means calling himself and taking endless applause for allegedly being a feminist while arming misogyny central in Saudi Arabia.”

**Newcomer Scholarship Fundraiser, Dance & Delicacies.** Music by Jukebox Live. International desserts, silent auction & cash bar. Fri, May 6, 8pm, UNB Fredericton Student Union Building. Tickets available at MCAF office (28 Saunders St): \$45. For info: 452-0654.

**ONE LOVE.** Free concert for children celebrating empathy, kindness, and peace for families with Kelly Waterhouse at the Fredericton Public Library. Saturday, May 7, 10:30am. Hosted by Mayworks Fredericton.

**El Jones: Poetry & Power.** El Jones’ spoken word activism empowers the powerless and gives voice to the voiceless. Sat, May 7, 7:00pm. York Street NB Liquor Train Station, Fredericton. Hosted by the Fredericton Youth Feminists and Mayworks Fredericton.

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