



Rethinking the Jurisdictional Divide: The Marginalization of Urban Aboriginal Communities and Federal Policy Responses

by Janice Stokes, Ian Peach and Raymond B. Blake

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“The Committee believes that a genuine window of opportunity exists to implement the kind of positive change needed to ensure that another generation of Aboriginal youth is not sacrificed on the altar of narrow policy thinking” (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, October 2003).¹

Introduction

According to Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the federal government has jurisdiction over “Indians and Lands reserved for Indians”. Nonetheless, as the cost of providing social programs to Aboriginal peoples has increased, and as more Aboriginal peoples have left reserves, the federal government has come to limit access to social programs primarily to reserve residents. As the percentage of the Aboriginal population living in urban centres has grown rapidly, from 7 per cent in the 1950s to about 50 per cent today, this has become a significant issue for both Aboriginal people and provincial governments.²

A growing number of Aboriginal people in marginalized socio-economic circumstances attempt to adapt to city life, often without recourse to federal government programs for First Nations people. Using recent Census data, a case study of Regina’s Aboriginal population, one of the largest Aboriginal communities in urban Canada, shows significant socio-economic disparities between the city’s Aboriginal population and the total population. The results paint a troubling picture of the challenges that Aboriginal people face in urban centres, especially given the youthfulness of the Aboriginal population.

While many factors have contributed to the urbanization of the Aboriginal population, limited opportunities on reserves, particularly for adequate housing, education, and economic development, have undoubtedly played a role in the urbanization trend. Because of the federal government’s unilateral limitations on access to its services, urbanization transfers the social and economic costs of inadequate on-reserve conditions to other levels of government. Further, the willingness of the federal government to intervene in other social and economic policy fields in the name of the national interest has too often been absent in response to the off-reserve migration of Aboriginal peoples.

The federal government seems, however, to be starting to recognize the national interest in responding to the socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal peoples, through such initiatives as the *Urban Aboriginal Strategy*. For recognition to become a serious, effective response to the

¹ Canada, The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, Final Report, *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change*, October 2003, p. 7.

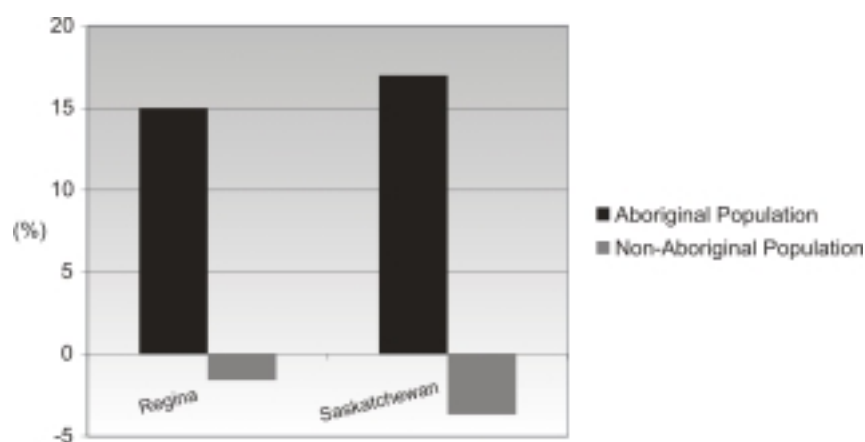
² Statistics Canada, “About one-half of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas,” *2001 Census, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile*, and John Richards, “Neighbors Matter: Poor Neighborhoods and Urban Aboriginal Policy,” C.D. Howe Institute *Commentary* no. 156 (2001), p. 3.

challenges, though, the federal government's policy process will need to coordinate with those of provincial governments and Aboriginal peoples themselves.

Regina Population Overview and Identity Population Trends

Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population has a significant influence on the demographics of the province and its CMAs (census metropolitan area). In the 2001 Census, the province's Aboriginal population was the second largest in Canada at 13.5 per cent.³ Between 1996 and 2001, the Aboriginal community in the province grew at a rate of 17 per cent, despite a decline in the non-Aboriginal and total populations.⁴ Figure 1 shows how the demographic trends experienced by the province, with some variance in magnitude, mirror those in the Regina CMA during these years. Broken down by identity population figures,⁵ the decline in total

Figure 1: Rate of Increase/Decrease in Identity Populations in the Regina CMA and Saskatchewan, 1996 – 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, "Population reporting Aboriginal identity in selected census metropolitan areas (CMA) and census agglomerations (CA) with a population of 5000 or more, 1996 and 2001," *2001 Census, 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*; Statistics Canada, "Census metropolitan area populations and growth rates," *2001 Census, A profile of the Canadian population: where we live*; and, Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Identity Population, Percentage Change (1996-2001), for Canada, Provinces and Territories," *2001 Census, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile*.

³ Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Identity Population Percentage Distribution, for Canada, Provinces and Territories," *2001 Census, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile*. Manitoba's Aboriginal population was slightly larger at 13.6 per cent in 2001.

⁴ *Ibid.*, "Aboriginal Identity Population, Percentage Change (1996-2001), for Canada, provinces and Territories," and Statistics Canada, "Census metropolitan area populations and growth rates," *2001 Census, A profile of the Canadian population: where we live*.

⁵ Another 1,000 persons claimed Aboriginal origin, but did not claim to identify as Aboriginals. Statistics Canada uses the "identity" figures for the majority of cross-tabulated data. The figures in this document are based upon the identity population numbers.

population in Regina between 1996 and 2001 is the net result of a decrease of about 3,000 non-Aboriginal residents (1.6 per cent rate of decrease), and an increase of 2,100 Aboriginal residents (15 per cent rate of increase).⁶

At close to 16,000 residents, Regina has the third largest percentage of Aboriginal residents of the Canadian CMAs at 8.3 per cent of the population (Saskatoon is first⁷ and Winnipeg is second). This percentage contrasts starkly with Aboriginal peoples' small 2.3 per cent share of the population in Calgary and even more with Aboriginal peoples' 0.4 per cent share of Toronto's total population⁸ (see Appendix - Chart 2).

Regina is one of the youngest cities in Canada because of a very young, and large and growing Aboriginal population. The city had the fourth largest percentage of the population in the 0-19 age group of the nation's CMAs in 2001, and is even younger by this measure than Edmonton and Calgary. Regina also ranks as a relatively young CMA (7th place) when median age⁹ is used to determine youthfulness, although the Saskatoon CMA ranks first in this category¹⁰ (see Appendix - Tables 1 & 2).

The size and youthfulness of the Regina Aboriginal population provide the CMA with its overall youthfulness relative to other Canadian CMAs. As Figure 2 illustrates, close to half of the Aboriginal population in Regina is under the age of 20. This is about twice as large as the under-20 proportion of the city's non-Aboriginal population.¹¹ The youth of the Aboriginal population is also evident in the measure of median age. Whereas the Regina CMA total population median age is 35.9 years, the CMA's Aboriginal identity population's median age is significantly younger, at 20.7 years.

⁶ Statistics Canada, "Population reporting Aboriginal identity in selected census metropolitan areas (CMA) and census agglomerations (CA) with Aboriginal population of 5000 or more, 1996 and 2001," *2001 Census, 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*; Statistics Canada, "Census metropolitan area populations and growth rates," *2001 Census, A profile of the Canadian population: where we live*; and, Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Identity Population, Percentage Change (1996-2001), for Canada, Provinces and Territories," *2001 Census, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile*. Meanwhile, the Saskatoon CMA experienced a rise in total population of 3.1 per cent that was distinguished by positive growth in both the Aboriginal population (+25%), and non-Aboriginal population (1.3%).

⁷ Although Aboriginal representation as a percentage of the population in the Regina and Saskatoon CMAs is similar, Saskatoon has a total population of about 33,000 more residents than Regina (+29,000 non-Aboriginal residents and +4,000 Aboriginal residents).

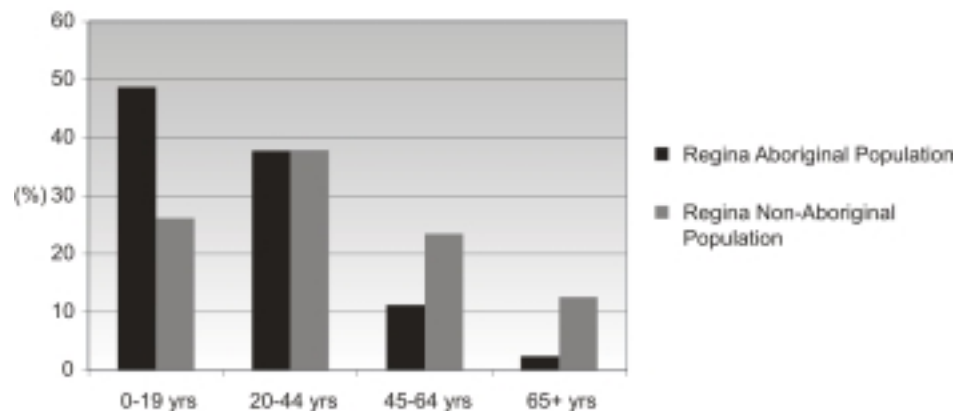
⁸ Statistics Canada, "Population reporting Aboriginal identity in selected census metropolitan areas (CMA) and census agglomerations (CA) with an Aboriginal population of 5000 or more, 1996 and 2001," *2001 Census, 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*.

⁹ Median age is the age at which half of the population is younger and half is older.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, "Age and Sex, Percentage Distribution for Both Sexes, for Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations – 100% Data," and "Age and Sex, Median Age for Both Sexes, for Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations – 100% Data," *2001 Census, Profile of the Canadian population by age and sex: Canada ages*.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Identity (8), Age Groups (11B) and Sex (3) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, *2001 Census* – 20% Sample Data.

Figure 2: Regina CMA Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations as a Percentage of Identity Population and by Age Group, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Identity (8), Age Groups (11B) and Sex (3) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations," 2001 Census – 20% Sample Data.

Regina Labour Force, Income, and Earnings Indicators

Unfortunately, urbanization has not resulted in economic conditions for Aboriginal peoples similar to those of the non-Aboriginal population, particularly in larger centres in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. A national study by Helmar Drost and John Richards found that, while off-reserve incomes were higher than on-reserve incomes in 1995, the median annual income of the off-reserve population was nevertheless only \$12,400 (compared to the on-reserve median annual income of \$8,900). The study also showed that the income gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations (both on and off-reserve) is the most pronounced in western Canada, widening to 50 per cent in the Prairie provinces, where the Aboriginal population forms the greatest percentage of the population.¹²

Other studies show Saskatchewan and Manitoba have the poorest urban Aboriginal communities. Saskatchewan had the largest percentage (59%) and Manitoba the second largest percentage (58%) of urban Aboriginal residents living below the low-income cut-off point in 1996, both more than 10 per cent higher than the national figure.¹³ And, at 25 per cent, Regina had the

¹²Helmar Drost and John Richards, "Income On- and Off-Reserve: How Aboriginals are Faring," C.D. Howe Institute *Commentary*, No. 175 (March 2003), pp. 3-4.. The study found that in 1996, median Aboriginal population incomes were about 70 per cent of non-Aboriginal incomes in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, and approximately 60 per cent in Ontario and British Columbia.

¹³ Andrew J. Siggner, "The Challenge of Measuring the Demographic and Socio-Economic Conditions of the Urban Aboriginal Population," in David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters (eds.), *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, Policy Research Initiatives, 2003, p. 128. The national figure is 47%.

greatest percentage of Aboriginal people living in poverty of any Canadian CMA, followed by Saskatoon and Winnipeg.¹⁴

The Regina Aboriginal population's economic marginalization is also evident in the workforce statistics shown in Figure 3. In 2001, the Aboriginal labour force participation rate (of those aged 15+) was 12 per cent below the CMA average figures, and the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population was more than 3 times that of Regina's total population figures.¹⁵ Additionally, the employment rate of the CMA's Aboriginal population was about one-third less than that for the total population, and represented less than half of those aged 15+ in the Aboriginal community.¹⁶

Figure 3: Labour Force Indicators for the Regina CMA Total Population and the Regina CMA Aboriginal Identity Population (2001 Census)

Labour Force Indicators	Regina CMA Total Population (%)	Regina CMA Aboriginal Identity Population (%)
Participation Rate (15+)	70.5	58.4
Unemployment Rate (15+)	6.0	20.7
Employed Labour		
▪ % of 15+ population (Employment Rate)	66.2	46.3
▪ % of overall population	52.1	28.2
Experienced Labour		
▪ % of 15+ population	68.0	52.9
▪ % of overall population	54.5	32.2

Source: Percentages calculated using figures derived from Statistics Canada, "Work Statistics for Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan, 2001 Census, 2001 Community Profile and 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile, and Statistics Canada, "Population Statistics for Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan, 2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles and 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile.

¹⁴ Canada, The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, Final Report, *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change*, October 2003, p.22. Aboriginals accounted for the second highest percentage of those living in poverty in Saskatoon (22.5%), and third highest in Winnipeg (17.6%).

¹⁵ Participation rate refers to the labour force in the week (Sunday to Saturday) prior to Census Day (May 15, 2001), expressed as a percentage of the total population 15 years of age and over. The unemployment rate refers to the unemployed expressed as a percentage of the labour force in the week prior to Census Day.

¹⁶ Employment rate refers to the number of persons employed in the week prior to Census Day, expressed as a percentage of the total population 15 years of age and over.

Marginal income and earnings statistics show similar disparities between the city's Aboriginal and total populations. Figure 4 shows that the median total income¹⁷ of the CMA's 15+ Aboriginal population was about half that of total population figures in 2000, and a large gap of 15 per cent existed relative to earnings.¹⁸ Further, the average earnings of Regina's Aboriginal workforce were about 68 per cent of total population earnings, rising slightly to 80 per cent when only full-time workers' average earnings were included.

Figure 4: Income and Earnings Indicators for the Regina CMA Total Population and the Regina CMA Aboriginal Identity Population, 2000 (2001 Census)

Income and Earnings Indicators	Regina CMA Total Population	Regina CMA Aboriginal Identity Population
Median total income of persons 15 years of age and over	\$24,064	\$12,996
Government Transfer – % of Income	10.9%	25.2%
Persons with Earnings		
▪ % of 15+ population	72.2%	57.1%
▪ % of overall population	57.9%	34.8%
Average earnings	\$30,127	\$20,469
Persons that worked full year, full time		
▪ % of 15+ population	40.0%	22.6%
▪ % of overall population	32.1%	13.8%
Average earnings (worked full year, full time)	\$41,191	\$32,661

Source: Percentages calculated using figures derived from Statistics Canada, "Income Statistics for Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles* and *2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*; Statistics Canada, "Earnings Statistics for Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles* and *2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*; and Statistics Canada, "Population Statistics for Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan, *2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles* and *2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*."

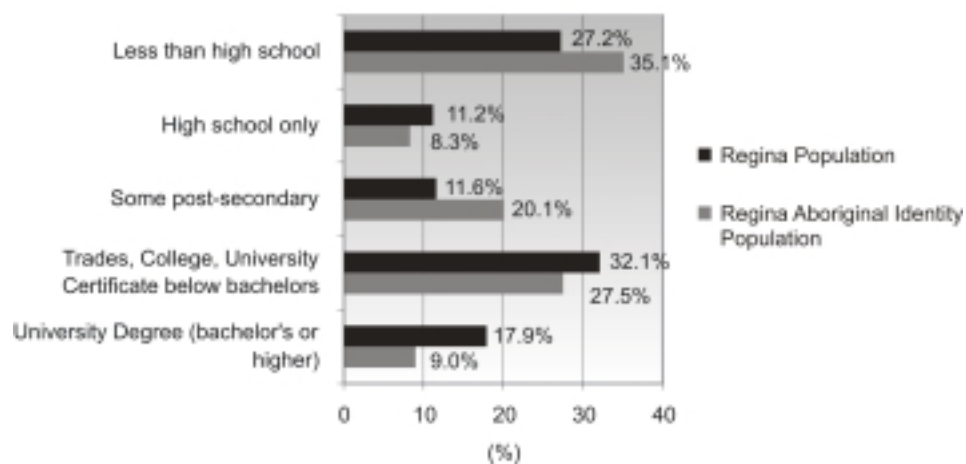
Regina Social Indicators

With economic marginalization comes social marginalization. This is apparent in education, housing, and well-being statistics for Regina's Aboriginal community. Figure 5 shows that the 25+ Regina Aboriginal population's educational attainment levels are, overall, considerably below total levels, especially in rates of high school and university completion.

¹⁷ Income refers to the total money income received during calendar year 2000 by persons 15 years of age and over, and includes wages and salaries, pension income, net farm income, income from government sources, dividends and interest on investment income, and other money income.

¹⁸ Earnings refers to the income of persons 15 years of age and over who received wages and salaries, net income from a non-farm unincorporated business and/or professional practice, and/or net farm self-employment income during calendar year 2000, reporting non-zero earnings.

Figure 5: Highest Level of Schooling for the 25+ Regina Total and Regina Aboriginal Populations, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, "School Attendance (4), Highest Level of Schooling (12), Age Groups (13B) and Sex (3) for Population 15 Years and Over, for Census Metropolitan Areas, Tracted Census Agglomerations and Census Tracts," *2001 Census*, 95F0418XCB01002.

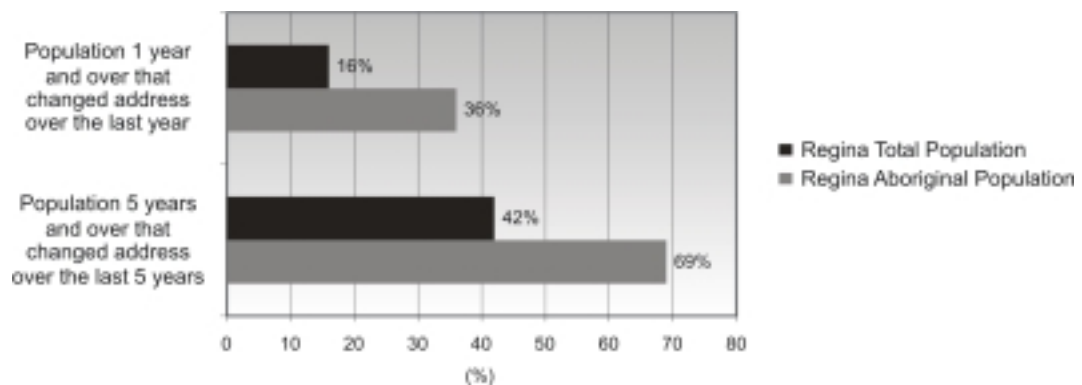
Marginalization within the Aboriginal community in Regina is similarly evident in housing statistics. Extremely low rates of home ownership, high mobility rates, and a very large percentage of families living in substandard housing distinguish the Aboriginal population in Regina from the CMA's total population. While owned dwellings made up more than two-thirds of total population dwellings in Regina in 2001, this proportion corresponds (exactly) to the percentage of rented dwellings occupied by the CMA's Aboriginal population (see Appendix – Chart 1).¹⁹

Not surprisingly, high rental rates in the Regina Aboriginal community coincide with extremely high rates of mobility. More than one-third of the Regina Aboriginal population one year of age and over moved (changed residence from either within or outside of the CMA) within the year before the 2001 Census. Figure 6 shows that this rate of mobility was twice that of the total population. As well, several neighbourhoods with higher proportions of Aboriginal residents showed a significantly higher rate of mobility than the Aboriginal population average.²⁰ Further, the Census showed that 13 per cent of the Aboriginal community (aged 5+) had moved to Regina over the preceding 5 years from another location within the province.

¹⁹ Statistics Canada, "Families and Dwelling Statistics for: Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, Aboriginal Population Profile*, and Statistics Canada, "Families and Dwellings Statistics for: Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles*.

²⁰ The 2001 Census identified 7 census tracts in the Regina CMA where at least 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population had moved within the previous year, and 19 census tracts where 25-49 per cent of the Aboriginal population had moved within the last year. See Statistics Canada, "Change of residence, 1 year ago, as a proportion of total Aboriginal identity population by 2001 Census Tract," *2001 Census, Thematic Maps, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada*, (Regina CMA). To have been considered, census tracts required a minimum of 50 persons reporting Aboriginal identity.

Figure 6: Change of Address for the Regina Total Population and the Regina Aboriginal Population, 2001



Source: Percentages calculated using figures from Statistics Canada, "Population Statistics for Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles* and *2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*.

The picture that emerges from an examination of Regina Aboriginal population statistics is disturbing, particularly because this community is very young and growing. The futures of the city's young Aboriginal residents are at risk because of the community's marginalization in the economy, lower educational attainment, and destabilizing levels of mobility in housing, as well as despairing health and social order circumstances.

Federal Jurisdictional Issues and Urban Aboriginal Populations

Real improvement in the socio-economic conditions of Regina's Aboriginal population within a generation is unlikely unless there is increased and coordinated government involvement. Jurisdictional wrangling between the federal and provincial governments over responsibility for service provision to status off-reserve, non-status, and Métis peoples has been a roadblock to addressing the serious socio-economic issues that the urban Aboriginal population faces. Historically, while asserting its right to exercise its 'jurisdiction', the federal government has maintained that it does not have 'responsibility' for providing services to off-reserve Aboriginal peoples, and it can, therefore, choose whether or not to exercise its jurisdiction.²¹ With the exceptions of health and post-secondary education programs available to the status off-reserve population, the federal government has directed most of its program activity to the on-reserve population, while maintaining that the provinces have responsibility for programs and services for

²¹ Canada, *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Final Report, Volume 4, Chapter 7, "Urban Perspectives."

off-reserve Aboriginal peoples. The provinces, however, have taken the position that with the federal government's jurisdiction comes responsibility for all Aboriginal peoples, regardless of location.²²

Urbanization of Aboriginal peoples over the last fifty years has effectively transferred federal financial responsibilities to provincial and municipal governments. The federal government's actions, or lack of action in some instances, have facilitated the migration from reserve to off-reserve locations because of a lack of adequate housing, economic, and educational opportunities on reserves. For example, the April 2003 Report of the Auditor General strongly criticized the federal government's management of on-reserve housing conditions. The report identified a shortage of 8,500 houses on reserves in Canada, and noted that close to half (44%) of existing housing required renovations. Further, the Auditor General lambasted the federal government's lack of planning and accountability in on-reserve housing.²³

Another report by the Auditor General in November 2003 provided a negative assessment of the federal government's handling of economic development issues on reserves. The report notes gaps in support for First Nations institutional arrangements, but the Auditor also comments that the federal government has impeded economic development on reserves because of problems with coordination across federal organizations and undue administrative burdens. The Auditor stresses the need for economic development on reserves because of high unemployment and low incomes.²⁴ Improved federal coordination and administration, however, would only provide minor improvements to on-reserve economic development. Drost and Richards, for example, argue that most reserve locations, due to their remoteness, "pose near-insurmountable difficulties in terms of generating productive employment at reasonable wages, in attracting investment and in sustaining adequate consumer, health and education services."²⁵

Thirdly, questions surrounding the adequacy of on-reserve education systems received considerable attention in 2004. A briefing document obtained by the media revealed that the federal government believes it will take a decade to close the educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The document questioned the results of the federal government's investment in education on reserves. Ottawa spends twice as much (\$1.4 million) as the New Brunswick government to educate the same number (119,000) of students, while achieving poorer results. In

²² *Ibid.* See also Calvin Hanselmann, "Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies," Canada West Foundation, September 2001.

²³ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons – April 2003*, Chapter 6, "Federal Government Support to First Nations Housing on Reserves."

²⁴ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report of the Auditor General to the House of Commons – November 2003*, Chapter 9, "Economic Development of First Nations Communities: Institutional Arrangements."

²⁵ Helmar Drost and John Richards, "Income On- and Off-Reserve: How Aboriginals are Faring," C.D. Howe Institute *Commentary*, No. 175, March 2003, p. 19.

Saskatchewan, parents protesting at the Piapot First Nation blocked entry to the reserve school for weeks, claiming that they would not allow students and staff to come back until the modified curriculum was brought up to standard. The blockade ended when the federal government agreed to assess the curriculum and offered, if parents so wished, to bus students to Regina for schooling. Inadequate basic education ill-prepares Aboriginal peoples who leave the reserve to pursue post-secondary education, to find employment in urban centres, or to find adequate housing.

The federal government's willingness to recognize and act in the national interest in other policy fields, even those which are in provincial jurisdiction, make the federal inaction on this policy issue all the more irritating for Aboriginal peoples and provincial governments alike. In clearly provincial fields such as post-secondary education, the federal government has been quick to intervene, through such programs as the Millenium Scholarships, often without prior consultation with the provinces. Another recent example of Ottawa's willingness to intervene in areas of provincial jurisdiction is with its *New Deal* for cities. The federal government has chosen to act unilaterally and deal directly with cities in new programming that recognizes the central role that larger urban centres have come to play in the Canadian economy.²⁶ Such interventions make the federal government's typical position on services to urban Aboriginal peoples less than credible.

Even the federal government's own committees and commissions have been highly critical of the constitutional wrangling over programs for off-reserve Aboriginal peoples. More than two decades ago, the Report of the House of Commons Special Committee on Indian Self-Government (Penner Report) concluded that the federal government has continuing responsibility for status Indians living off-reserve, and that status Indians living off-reserve have a right to special federal programs.²⁷ When the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) released its report in 1996, it, too, was highly critical of the federal government's off-reserve policy. RCAP condemned the fact that programs for the off-reserve Aboriginal population had evolved *ad hoc* because of jurisdictional confusion, and blamed the policy vacuums that had resulted in many instances on the failure of both the federal and provincial governments to act. The Royal Commission also charged that the capping of Aboriginal program funding in the 1990s as part of the federal government's deficit and debt reduction initiatives had led to fiscal off-loading on the provinces and, subsequently, municipalities.²⁸

Other studies support the RCAP findings regarding the *ad hoc* nature of service provision for the off-reserve Aboriginal population. A recent report by the Canada West Foundation on urban

²⁶ Canada, *Canada's Urban Strategy: A Blueprint for Action*, Final Report, Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, November 2002.

²⁷ Canada, House of Commons, Report of the Special Committee on Indian Self Government, 1983, p. 67.

²⁸ Canda, *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Final Report, Volume 4, Chapter 7, "Urban Perspectives".

Aboriginal-specific programming in the major western cities found that, while there is overlapping service provision between the three levels of government in some instances, gaps also exist in family violence and child-care, areas of particular concern to the Aboriginal population. The findings demonstrated a wide variation in the availability of urban Aboriginal programs in the different western cities.²⁹

The federal government provided its response to RCAP's criticism of its handling of off-reserve issues in a 1998 document entitled *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*,³⁰ where it introduced the *Urban Aboriginal Strategy* (UAS), led by the Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians. The Federal Interlocutor, a division of the Privy Council Office, had been created much earlier, in 1985, to provide a point of contact between the federal government and Aboriginal organizations that represented Metis, non-status, and urban Aboriginal peoples and to act as the advocate within the federal government for these communities, but it now has a much clearer mandate to serve off-reserve Aboriginal peoples.³¹ The goal of the UAS was to improve urban Aboriginal population program coordination, policy development, and raise awareness within the federal government and with other levels of government.

Until recently, the federal *Urban Aboriginal Strategy* has suffered from weaknesses both in achieving coordinated policy-making and in securing adequate funds to achieve its goals, despite Ottawa's stated objectives in the late 1990s to deal with the problems facing urban Aboriginal communities. Initially, the federal government chose not to allocate funding directly through the UAS in the first five years of its existence.³² There were promising signs that urban Aboriginal issues could be moving higher onto the national agenda with the 2002 *Speech from the Throne*, which acknowledged the serious poverty issues confronting urban Aboriginal peoples, and committed the federal government to working with interested provinces.³³ Yet, despite its verbal commitment to urban Aboriginal peoples, Ottawa provided only nominal funding in 2003-04 for UAS pilot projects. The \$25 million budget for the pilot projects was to be spread over three years to eight cities (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Thunder Bay). Funding was also allocated to support locally designed pilot projects which "test innovative

²⁹ Calvin Hanselmann, "Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies," *Canada West Foundation*, 2001.

³⁰ Canada, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, Ottawa, 1998.

³¹ Canada, Privy Council Office, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, "Role and Mandate," <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/interloc/> and Canada, Privy Council Office, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, "Backgrounder – Urban Aboriginal Strategy," November 25, 2003.

³² Canada, Privy Council Office, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, "Backgrounder – Urban Aboriginal Strategy," November 25, 2003.

³³ Office of the Prime Minister, *Speech from the Throne 2002: The Canada We Want*, "Competitive Cities and Healthy Communities."

ways”³⁴ to provide services to the urban Aboriginal population through a partnership of the federal and provincial governments, and community-based Aboriginal organizations. Following the three-year pilot project phase, the federal government is committed to evaluating the UAS, with the intention that “information will be used to identify and share lessons learned and provide advice for future directions.” To be eligible, cities had to be a CMA with an Aboriginal population of greater than 15,000 residents or constituting 5 per cent of the CMA total population. Federal funding of the projects also requires “matched efforts” from provincial or municipal governments, the private sector, or non-governmental organizations.³⁵

While the Prime Minister has stated that the federal government would not get caught up in “jurisdictional wrangling” in seeking to respond to the needs of urban Aboriginal people,³⁶ the only new spending clearly earmarked for urban Aboriginal communities in the federal 2004-05 budget was a one-time funding increase to the *Urban Aboriginal Strategy*.³⁷ The problem is not that the provinces are unwilling to cooperate. Both Saskatchewan and Alberta, for example, have developed strategies designed to address the socio-economic needs of off-reserve Aboriginal populations, but they have been confronted by a general federal unwillingness to jointly plan and make serious investments in the policy field. Instead, the federal government habitually creates small, “boutique” programs that are unconnected to provincial and Aboriginal peoples’ priorities. Particularly in provinces with a large percentage of Aboriginal residents, such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba, acknowledging the needs of urban Aboriginal populations is necessary if the federal government is to address the cities’ agenda seriously.

A serious obstacle to establishing programs under the UAS is the requirement of ‘matching efforts’ from other levels of government or service organizations. Whether matching efforts take the form of funding contributions or a commitment of human resources, they have a cost for those participating. Unfortunately, the provinces with the largest percentage of Aboriginal residents and urban Aboriginal populations, namely Saskatchewan and Manitoba, are among the least able to participate in matched funding programs (due to their weaker financial positions). The federal government moved towards matched funding initiatives in several program areas based upon the rationale that contributions from provinces and service organizations are indicative of spending

³⁴ Canada, Privy Council Office, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, “Government of Canada Invests \$25M in its Urban Aboriginal Strategy,” <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/interloc/>

³⁵ Canada, Privy Council Office, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians, “Backgrounder – Urban Aboriginal Strategy,” November 25, 2003.

³⁶ Canada, Office of the Prime Minister, *Address by the Prime Minister in Reply to the Speech from the Throne*, February 2, 2004, pp. 6-10.

³⁷ Canada, *Moving Forward on the Priorities of Canadians, The Budget Plan 2004*, pp. 161-175.

priorities. Provincial participation in new matched funding initiatives, however, may not be an accurate portrayal of provincial priorities. Cash-strapped provinces (or a province with volatile 'have' and 'have not' status such as Saskatchewan), the ones that would benefit most from injections of federal monies, are often the least able to participate or participate at the level of program need in matching funding agreements. Thus, matched funding programs often reaffirm the socio-economic position of provinces - and their citizens - within the federation.

Criticism has surfaced again in Ottawa over the federal government's handling of service provision for urban Aboriginal citizens. Two separate federal committees investigating policies for the Aboriginal population recommended that the federal government should take the lead in urban Aboriginal policy development and increase funding for initiatives. In June of 2003, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, investigating the needs of urban Aboriginal children, reported that almost 90 per cent of the nearly \$8 billion in Aboriginal-specific program funding goes to the on-reserve population, with only 10 per cent (approximately \$800 million) flowing to off-reserve programming.³⁸ The Committee's Final Report noted that 22 federal departments provide about 80 programs to Aboriginal peoples off-reserve "in a relatively uncoordinated fashion," such that the "jurisdictional web in which urban Aboriginal population policy-making takes place includes silos both within and between the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government."³⁹ The Committee also reported that governments are dealing with Aboriginal issues symptomatically rather than etiologically, and that this will lead to the same issues being at the forefront in thirty years.⁴⁰

This committee also recommended that the federal government build on the present *Urban Aboriginal Strategy*. It recommended that, with the participation of Aboriginal political and service organizations, the federal government "identify a department to take responsibility for providing policy and organizational coordination among all federal departments with programs for Aboriginal people (both on and off-reserve)" to better collaborate with other levels of government. The report also recommended the creation of a policy and program framework related to the development of Aboriginal children as a key output of the coordination initiative. While recognizing the value of enabling more integration and collaboration in the delivery of Aboriginal population services, the federal government's response was side-stepping and insubstantial, indicating that such an initiative

³⁸ Canada, Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, *Building A Brighter Future For Urban Aboriginal Children*, June 2003, p.6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-18.

“would require fundamental changes to the machinery of the Government of Canada,” but that the recommendation would be considered “when an appropriate time arises.”⁴¹

Reporting in October 2003, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples similarly condemned the federal government’s lack of program organization for the urban Aboriginal population. The Committee’s Final Report noted that, despite increased federal and provincial involvement in Aboriginal policy and program development, “efforts, however, are *ad hoc* and disjointed, with resources inefficiently used and programs duplicated...The result is an uncoordinated, labyrinthine programming landscape.”⁴² To escape what the Senate Committee viewed as the current “narrow policy thinking” of governments on urban Aboriginal issues, it recommended that the federal government take the lead in coordinating multilateral programming for the Aboriginal population. The federal government should develop, the Senate Committee recommended, through the UAS, “formal intergovernmental mechanisms to address the broad policy concerns of urban Aboriginal people in Canada and break down existing silos in program development and service delivery.”⁴³ The committee also recommended that the federal government look beyond the status criterion and increase programming for all off-reserve Aboriginal peoples, especially in the area of education, and that it look beyond jurisdiction and recognize the portability of status rights to off-reserve locations.⁴⁴

Conclusion – Finding a Way Forward

The alarming socio-economic indicators contained in Census data for Regina’s Aboriginal community demonstrate that past policies and programs for urban Aboriginal peoples have not met with real success. The last half-century has seen the urban Aboriginal population grow to 50 per cent. The federal government’s focus, however, in both spending and policy development has remained on the on-reserve population, even though the federal government’s inability to address poor housing, education and economic opportunities on reserves has been a cause of the urbanization trend.

The ability to be flexible and respond to changing circumstances in other policy fields in the federation is not present in the federal government’s treatment of the urban Aboriginal population’s issues. Despite internal criticism and repeated public commitments to address marginalization in

⁴¹ Canada, Privy Council Office, *Response of the Government of Canada to the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities*, November 6, 2003.

⁴² Canada, The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, Final Report, *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change*, October 2003, p. 28.

⁴³ Canada, The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, Final Report, *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change*, October 2003, pp. 7- 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-37.

urban Aboriginal communities, the federal government has not previously taken serious steps in this direction. The federal UAS may represent the first such serious steps but, to be successful, the federal government must pay careful attention to both how it plans and how much it spends in addressing the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples.

Planning well is the first challenge in making the UAS meaningful. As noted earlier, at least some provinces have already developed strategic plans to address the socio-economic disparity between off-reserve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Thus, a golden opportunity would seem to exist for the federal government to fulfil its commitment to get beyond jurisdictional wrangling with provinces by engaging them in a joint strategic planning exercise. Ensuring any strategic plan's relevance in the community it is meant to serve is also critical, as community-based agencies invariably become key delivery agents for government and the relevance of a plan to the community affects their willingness to become engaged in delivery. It is therefore essential that Aboriginal peoples themselves are made partners in the planning exercise. This sort of extended intergovernmental strategic planning is not without precedent, but to be effective it requires all parties to be genuinely committed to defining a set of shared objectives and a workplan that coordinates the activities of the various actors in achieving those objectives as efficiently as possible.

Developing a strategy such as the UAS also requires governments to coordinate their activities internally. This, of course, adds another level of complexity to strategic planning in a policy field with numerous actors. The complexity is necessary, though, as the risk that uncoordinated activities by different agencies within one government will make a multi-faceted strategy inefficient or, worse, ineffective, is as significant as the risk that attends intergovernmental conflict.

The second challenge in making the UAS effective will be in securing sufficient funding to make the shared objectives achievable. While no amount of money spent on ineffective interventions will make those interventions effective, it is equally true that good planning and program design cannot be effective if there is no money to support the program innovations that are part of the strategy. As yet, as noted above, the UAS is still too starved for funds to be able to be effective, even if it is brilliant in its design.

In the end, only time will tell whether the UAS represents the initiation of a new era in federal-provincial-Aboriginal cooperation that can effectively respond to the socio-economic disadvantages of Aboriginal peoples or whether it is the continuation of a tradition of unilateral federal half-measures. The very existence of the UAS is at least some sign of federal engagement. Let us hope that, through good planning and adequate financing, governments will realize its promise.

Appendix

Table 1: Youngest CMAs in Canada According to Percentage of Population in the 0-19 Age Group, 2001

CMA	Residents in the 0-19 Age Group (%)
Abbotsford	29.7
Oshawa	29.5
Saskatoon	28.3
Regina	27.7
Kitchener	27.5
Edmonton	27.2
Calgary	26.5

Source: Statistics Canada, "Age and Sex, Percentage Distribution for Both Sexes, for Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations – 100% Data," *2001 Census, Profile of the Canadian population by age and sex: Canada ages*.

Table 2: Youngest CMAs in Canada According to Median Age, 2001

CMA	Median Age (Years)
Saskatoon	34.4
Calgary	34.9
Kitchener	35.3
Edmonton	35.4
Abbotsford	35.4
Oshawa	35.8
Regina	35.9
Windsor	36.0
Toronto	36.2

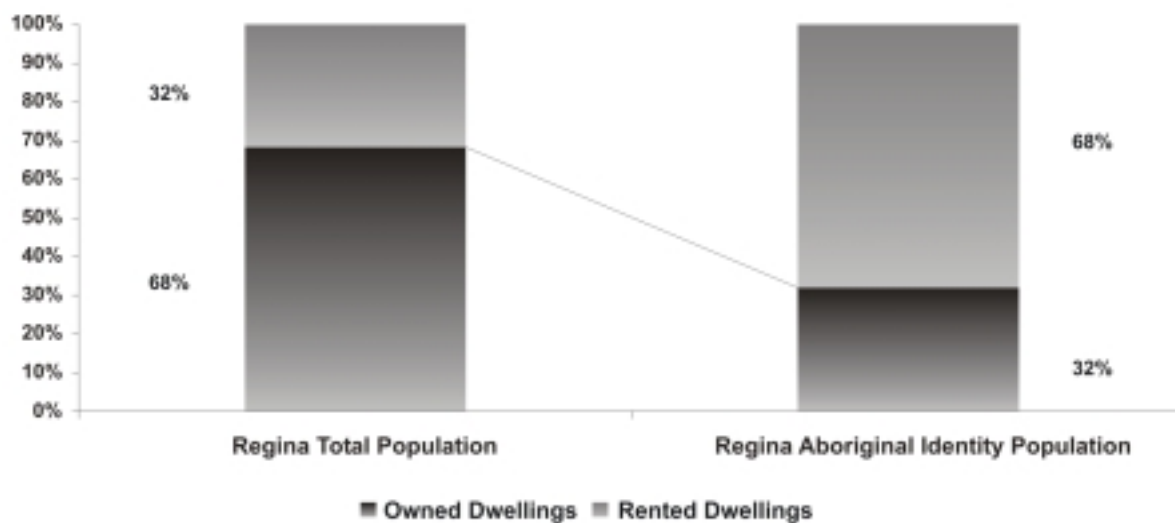
Source: Statistics Canada, "Age and Sex, Median Age for Both Sexes, for Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations – 100% Data," *2001 Census, Profile of the Canadian population by age and sex: Canada ages*.

Table 3: Percentage of Residents (Aged 25+) with Less Than High School Credentials, and Percentage with University Credentials, by Total and Aboriginal Populations (Regina CMA, Saskatchewan, and Canada), 2001

	Less Than High School Completion (%)	University Completion (%)
Regina CMA Average	27.2	17.9
SK Average	36.5	16.0
Canada Average	29.0	20.2
Regina CMA Aboriginal	35.1	9.0
SK Aboriginal	45.0	8.5
Canada Aboriginal	38.7	7.8

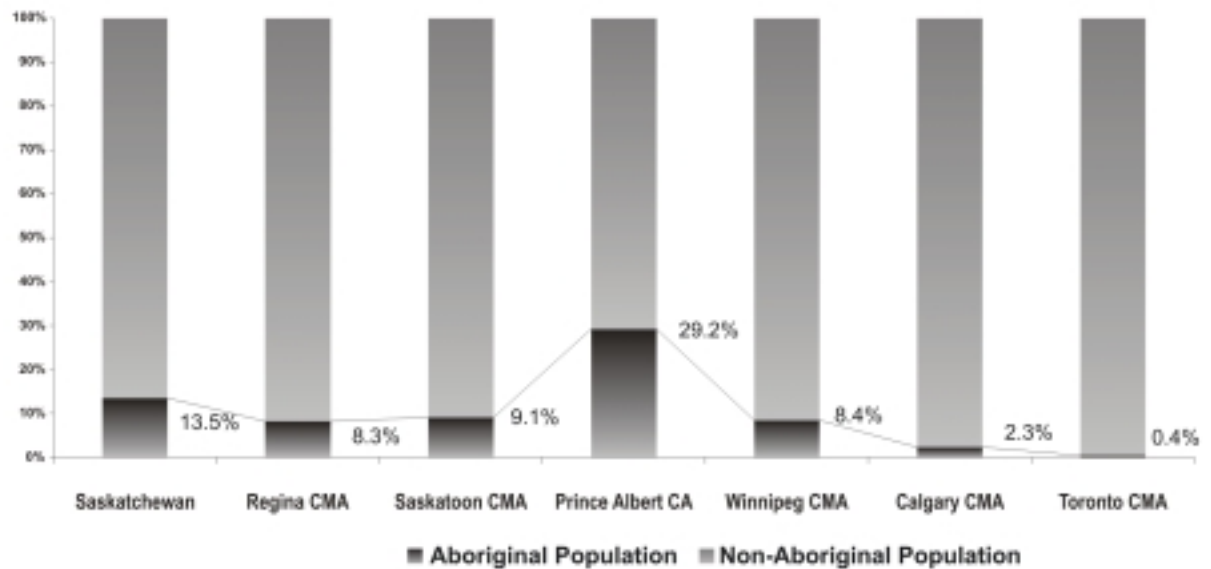
Source: Statistics Canada, "School Attendance (4), Highest Level of Schooling (12), Age Groups (13B) and Sex (3) for Population 15 Years and Over, for Census Metropolitan Areas, Tracted Census Agglomerations and Census Tracts," *2001 Census*, 95F0418XCB01002; Janice Stokes, "Demographic Trends and Socio-Economic Sustainability in Saskatchewan: Some Policy Considerations," Appendix 1, Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, *Public Policy Paper Series* (Public Policy Paper #19), October 2003; Statistics Canada, "Educational attainment in the population aged 25 and over, by age groups, Canada, 1991 and 2001," and "Population aged 25 to 64 reporting Aboriginal identity, by level of educational attainment and sex, Canada, 1996 and 2001, *2001 Census, Education in Canada: Raising the Standard*. The Canada Aboriginal percentages do not include residents over the age of 64.

Chart 1: Owned and Rented Dwellings as a Percentage of the Regina CMA Total Population and the Regina CMA Aboriginal Population, 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, "Families and Dwelling Statistics for: Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, Aboriginal Population Profile*, and Statistics Canada, "Families and Dwellings Statistics for: Regina (CMA), Saskatchewan," *2001 Census, 2001 Community Profiles*.

Chart 2: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Residents as a Percentage of the Population (Saskatchewan Average, Regina CMA, Saskatoon CMA, Prince Albert CA, Winnipeg CMA, and Toronto CMA)



Source: Statistics Canada, "Population reporting Aboriginal identity in selected census metropolitan areas (CMA) and census agglomerations (CA) with an Aboriginal population of 5000 or more, 1996 and 2001," *2001 Census, 2001 Aboriginal Population Profile*, and Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Identity Population, Percentage Distribution, for Canada, Provinces and Territories," *2001 Census, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile*.

About the Authors

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Ian Peach has been with the Government of Saskatchewan for nine years, and has been Director of Constitutional Relations in the Department of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs and, for the five and one-half years before coming to SIPP, a Senior Policy Advisor in the Cabinet Planning Unit of Executive Council. In his fifteen years of government service, Mr. Peach has been involved in numerous intergovernmental negotiations, including the Charlottetown Accord, the Social Union Framework Agreement, First Nation self-government agreements, and the Canada-Saskatchewan Northern Development Accord. He has also been involved in developing Saskatchewan's policies on a broad range of issues, including Saskatchewan's argument before the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec Secession Reference and key cross-government strategies to address the socio-economic disparity of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan and northern economic development. As of January 1, 2005, Mr. Peach will hold the position of Director of the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy.

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