

THE HONOURABLE LILLIAN EVA (QUAN) DYCK
SENATOR – SASKATCHEWAN



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SÉNATRICE – SASKATCHEWAN

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CANADA

March 26th, 2020

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

The Honourable Marc Miller, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Indigenous Services
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Ministers Bennett and Miller,

I write with concerns about First Nation band elections which are happening across the country. Many are rightly worried that holding an election during the COVID-19 pandemic endangers the health of First Nation communities. The voting process will put voters and electoral staff at risk.

According to CBC news, Yves Denoncourt, acting director of Indigenous Governance Operations Directorate, First Nations have the right to postpone their own elections but they aren't allowed to extend the terms of the current leaders. "At the end of the mandate, a First Nation will find itself dealing with a governance gap," Denoncourt wrote. Unfortunately, he made comments which were completely insensitive and patronizing by stating that officials should clean tables every 5-10 voters, should supply 50 pens and pencils (and clean them after each use) and should encourage voters to bring their own pens and pencils. We know that First Nation communities are at a much greater risk for community transmission of disease. He ought to apologize for minimizing the risk of COVID-19 in First Nation communities.

If a band decides to postpone their election, surely a policy can be put in place to allow the current chief and council to continue to be recognized by Ottawa and allow governance and administrative procedures such as funding via contribution agreements to continue to proceed for a period of time.

What will you do to help those First Nation bands who want to postpone their election to prevent the spread of the Corona virus in their communities?

Sincerely,

Senator Lillian E. Dyck
Saskatchewan