

Premier Gordon Campbell
Lheidli T'enneh First Nation Agreement-In-Principle (AIP)
July 26, 2003

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Thank you all for coming and joining with us today. It is very important that we recognize the work that's been done by the Lheidli T'enneh and I want to take a moment to highlight the incredible leadership that we have seen from Chief Barry Seymour.

The Lheidli T'enneh Chief has been there leading the entire way through this long process. Thank you, Barry, for the leadership you've shown for all of us.

We're very fortunate today because we are joined by people that have had a vision of British Columbia that brings people together and shares opportunity amongst all British Columbians.

I want to pay special recognition to the elders here today for their patience, directness, leadership, wisdom and guidance throughout this process.

I'm very pleased that Miles Richardson, the Chief Commissioner for the BC Treaty Commission is with us today because Miles has also tried to ensure that we are moving together and learning from one another.

It's great also to have Grand Chief Ed John of the First Nations Summit and National Chief Phil Fontaine with us because it is important for us to recognize that there is an immeasurable amount for us still to do.

By working together constructively and positively, it is possible for us to create the future that we want for our children and for the generations to come. I also want to recognize the contribution that Minister Nault has made as the Federal Minister responsible, and my colleague Geoff Plant, the Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations.

It's also critical for people in this part of the province to know that both Minister Shirley Bond and MLA Pat Bell have been constantly interested in trying to build on the spirit of recognition and reconciliation that is so critical for our province's future and especially for the future of northern B.C.

This is the second AIP in eleven years in the BC treaty process. It's been a long slow process for many British Columbians – First Nations and non-First Nations alike. But the achievement that we are recognizing today reflects the leadership that we have seen from the Lheidli T'enneh in working to find solutions so we can move forward together.

It offers all of us the opportunity for renewal, reconciliation, and a shared commitment to each and every British Columbian and the generations that follow us.

We're at step four in the six-step process. Everyone here knows there is plenty of work to do, but we are all eager to move forward.

The Agreement-In-Principle that we are signing today defines the rights and the obligations of the Lheidli T'enneh, and defines an agreement on self-government that will bring us together. It increases the Lheidli T'enneh's economic participation while providing new and increased certainty on our land base.

We should recognize in signing this Agreement-In-Principle today the true leadership that has been shown by the Lheidli T'enneh. They've been leaders in working with the local community and with business partners. And they've been leaders in creating new opportunities that benefit their people and all of us.

Chief Barry Seymour has led that commitment. As President of the Aboriginal Business Development Centre in Prince George, Chief Seymour won the National Business Community Economic Developer of the Year Award last year.

In 1995 he established the Lheidli T'enneh Business Development Corporation, an umbrella organization for all Lheidli T'enneh enterprises. That initiative has already resulted in the creation of a new logging company and a shingle mill. Providing new jobs for the people of the Lheidli T'enneh.

Chief Seymour your Nation has also been instrumental in working with us to provide new revenue sharing arrangements in forestry. In March, the Lheidli T'enneh were invited to apply for a forest license for a 150,000 cubic metres of timber under an interim measures agreement. With this Agreement-In-Principle, the Lheidli T'enneh are also now eligible to apply for a community forest pilot agreement.

Each step that we take is an important step towards a future in which we share mutual respect, economic opportunities and social strength. But it is also important to recognize today that this is the work of people that came before. It is the work of our elders, our councillors and people who were willing to build a future that is better for the Lheidli T'enneh, the province of British Columbia and Canada.

We can all share in this achievement. It is one step to a better and brighter future for all of us, and I am proud today to be here with all of you.

I say again thank you to Chief Seymour, thank you to the Elders of the Lheidli T'enneh, thank you to the people of the Lheidli T'enneh for taking on the mantle of leadership. And thank you to the Federal Government and Minister Nault for joining us in this important endeavour.