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The Honourable Carolyn Bennett  
Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
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House of Commons  
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March 16, 2016

**Re: Boil Water Advisories**

Minister Bennett,

The recent news confirming that your government's First Nations education commitment is over 1.5 billion dollars in the hole is deeply troubling. I am even more concerned that this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to costing issues regarding your government's promises to Indigenous peoples. Your party's failure to properly cost its promises must not be placed on the backs of Indigenous peoples – that is the oldest story of Confederation. This brings me to the information your government recently released on safe drinking water on reserves.

During the election, the Prime Minister threw out a commitment to end all Boil Water Advisories on reserve within five years despite there being no commitment or costing in your platform:

*“Chief Isadore Day has called for within five years there should be zero, and I've told the Chief and I've told First Nations many times, we agree with that, and a Canadian government led by me will address this as a top priority because it's not right in a country like Canada that this has gone on for far too long...”*

Recent statistics provided to my office show what these advisories really look like. As of November 30, 2015, there were 136 drinking water advisories in 92 First Nations communities, excluding British Columbia and the Territories. One of these dates back to 1995. What does this mean? The total number of days First Nations communities have been on these advisories is 327,256 and every day we wait adds another 136 days. Ontario alone makes up 238,911 of those days.

Drinking water advisories are responsive measures put in place to indicate unsafe drinking water. Advisories may not be community-wide and one community may have more than one advisory. This is why we need to focus on safe drinking water and why the numbers are all the more concerning. Out of

699 water systems, 43.5% had a high or medium risk rating and out of 446 wastewater systems, 52% had a high or medium risk rating.

Furthermore, many communities don't even have water or wastewater systems to be contaminated. Yet the government is unable to confirm how many housing units have no water or wastewater service.

So, how will this government fulfill the Prime Minister's promise, which appears to not have been costed or included in your government's platform, focuses on boil water advisories instead of safe drinking water, and appears to exclude entire regions of the country?

The Department's response to my office states:

*"The third party National Assessment of Water and Wastewater Systems, completed in 2011, identified the cost of upgrading existing systems to standard at 1.2 billion as part of overall recommended investments over a period of 10 years of 4.7B in First Nations water and wastewater systems."*

The referenced 2011 report states:

*"Nationally, based on the 10 year projected populations, the combined water and wastewater servicing needs are estimated to be \$4.7 billion plus a projected operating and maintenance budget of \$419 million per year."*

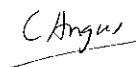
These numbers are five years old. At the very minimum, they must be updated to account for inflation. Your government's commitment is to crunch these numbers over five years instead of ten. If we take the 4.9 billion dollar needs based calculation that would be 940 million dollars per year, plus the 419 million per year for operating and maintenance expenses.

Yet the department has only spent an average of 300 million dollars over the past three years and is projected to spend an average of 239 million over the next three years. These numbers don't even hit the projected operating and maintenance dollar requirements. I remind you again, that your platform contained zero reference or costing for this promise. *So, if we are to use the department's most up to date numbers released to my office as a crude minimum measurement, there is a massive hole in the Prime Minister's promise.*

Every Canadian has a right to a consistent source of safe and clean drinking water. To achieve this, we must look at what didn't work and what is working. We must learn from water treatment plants that have failed on reserves. Ultimately, there must be funding and a plan. I am concerned that your government will not be able to deliver on its promises for both of these.

Indigenous peoples have been met with empty promises since before Confederation and it's time for that to end. What steps will you take to ensure that Indigenous peoples are provided with the basic water safety infrastructure that other Canadians take for granted?

Sincerely,



Charlie Angus  
MP Timmins-James Bay