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‘Stark contrast’ between Carney and Trudeau’s approach to Indigenous relations, says ITK president Obed

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Natan Obed says it’s been ‘challenging’ navigating the ‘new lens’ of Mark Carney’s leadership, with the national body having to pitch investments to the feds in ‘almost like a Dragon’s Den approach.’

BY ELEANOR WAND

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Natan Obed says it has been “challenging” navigating new relationships with the Carney government after 10 years of relationship building under the Trudeau-era Liberals, with his organization now deploying an almost “*Dragon’s Den* approach” of pitching investments to get heard.

“We spent some time in the beginning of this Carney government trying to find a way to reorient those who are in the key positions of power about the work that we have been doing together and the need for continuation,” said Obed, who’s led the ITK since 2015.

He pointed to a “stark contrast” between former prime minister Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government and that of Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.).

“The biggest challenge has been to keep the institutions that we’ve worked 10 years to create functioning,” he said.

Obed noted that, for Trudeau, reconciliation was a “key plank” of his platform.

The former prime minister launched the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ran on implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action in 2015, and enshrined the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into federal law.

Obed said that Carney, by contrast, has spoken about “reconciliation generally as a theme,” and as a “contributing consideration”

for the feds’ work, but it’s not his first priority.

“I’m not casting aspersions on that,” he said. “The focus on the ‘One Canadian Economy,’ on housing and building housing and reducing the dependence on the U.S. ... Those are, rightly, his focal areas.”

But Obed said the result is there’s “almost like a *Dragon’s Den* approach,” with ITK having to pitch investments.

ITK was “left in the dark” about the future of some pledges made under Trudeau, including Ottawa’s 2018 commitment to eliminate tuberculosis across Inuit Nunangat by 2030, Obed said, and the Inuit Child First Initiative, which provides access to government-funded products and services for Inuit children.

“We spent the better part of a year trying to figure out how to navigate through the new lens of a new leader and those who he has chosen to represent the interests of the government at [Privy Council Office] and [Prime Minister’s Office],” he said.

“So, it’s been challenging.”

‘Canada has a lot of work to do to earn back the trust,’ says AFN national chief

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak said “Canada has a lot of work to do to earn back the trust after Bill C-5 and a bad budget.”

The prime minister’s first federal budget, released in November 2025, did not contain an Indigenous-specific chapter, unlike previous budgets under Trudeau. The AFN criticized the budget for falling short on health, training, language, and truth and reconciliation.

Carney’s Bill C-5, the controversial legislation attached to the Major Projects Office (MPO)—passed into law as the Building Canada Act—has been criticized for giving Parliament the authority to fast-track projects with national-interest status, which could see treaty rights overridden.

Most recently, the government’s energy deal with Alberta, which outlines a pathway to an oil pipeline running from Alberta’s oil sands to the British Columbia’s coast, was denounced by Coastal First Nations in B.C.,

who say they don’t want the project built. The AFN adopted a resolution back in December urging Canada to withdraw from the deal.

On Jan. 13, Carney met with some coastal nations to discuss “how we build and how we build together,” he said.

But Woodhouse Nepinak said First Nations’ rights are “under threat in new ways.”

“We have fought in Parliament, and continue to do so,” said Woodhouse Nepinak, who was elected to the role in December 2023. “Unfortunately, we keep fighting in courts, and we keep winning, and we will keep winning in courts. But the relationship between this country has to change.”

“Why do we always have to fight through the courts when we should be around the table making decisions together?”

‘Tension is palpable’ over Carney’s development plans, says Métis National Council

The Métis National Council has been “pretty encouraged” by Carney’s willingness to engage on major projects, said its president, Victoria Pruden.

The prime minister held a Métis Major Projects Summit in August where he told Métis representatives that their rights will be respected as projects fast-tracked under the MPO are developed.

Pruden called the summit “incredibly productive,” saying she sees “a lot of potential” for future meetings, with cabinet ministers taking a “relationship-building” approach.

Still, Pruden pointed to tension stemming from Carney’s rapid development ambitions.

“What we’re seeing is that tension where we have an extremely powerful prime minister with such that perspective of ‘let’s get things done, let’s move forward quickly,’” she said.

“Holding that balance of meaningful engagement with Indigenous partners, including Sec. 35 rights-holding Métis governments and organizations with land claims and who are in treaty negotiations—that tension is palpable.”

Pruden pointed to an occasion where the council was notified of consultation on a Friday for a meeting the next week.



Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Natan Obed, pictured, said his organization has been ‘left in the dark’ about the status of pledges made under former prime minister Justin Trudeau. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

“We can work quickly, but let’s be real. We need the opportunity to be able to meaningfully engage people,” she said, highlighting that in Alberta, there are about 78,000 Métis members.

Energy Minister Tim Hodgson (Markham—Thornhill, Ont.) previously brushed off concerns about short-notice for a meeting with coastal B.C. First Nations last November, saying “it’s called Zoom” in response to a question about the concerns on the CBC’s *Power & Politics*. The minister has since apologized for his comments.

Trump’s threats to Greenland have ‘pretty big ramifications’ for Inuit, says Obed

Obed said the MPO offers “new opportunities.” He pointed to the feds’ commitments to defence, sovereignty, and militarization of the Arctic, saying ITK has been seeking infrastructure development, including air strip upgrades and health-care facilities, across Inuit Nunangat “for decades.”

Carney’s first budget included the Arctic Infrastructure Fund, aimed at developing infrastructure in the North. The fund pledges \$1-billion over four years for “major transportation projects,” including airports, seaports, all-season roads, and highways. The budget says the government “recognizes that Inuit, First Nations, and other communities are best placed to identify community needs.”

“Even though the Arctic is mentioned quite a bit, it ... doesn’t quite understand fully the self-determination aspects of Inuit Nunangat and the partner relationship that has to be forged on the work in our region,” Obed said.

The budget came as tensions in the Arctic were sparking. Now, with United States President Donald Trump’s repeated threats to control Greenland—a predominantly Inuit nation—those tensions are flaring. As of this week, a number of NATO member

countries have sent troops to the autonomous Danish territory.

Obed said the threat will have “pretty big ramifications” for Inuit, calling the situation “scary.”

“We are caught in the middle of, again, geopolitical dynamics that are not of our making,” he said.

“We ... want Canada to work with us on any threats that we may see to our homeland and to our way of life.”

Time to ‘close the loop’ 10 years after Daniels decision: Pruden

A “top priority” for the AFN is getting clean-water legislation for First Nations tabled after a previous bill died on the Order Paper in the last Parliament. Woodhouse Nepinak said she’s hoping new legislation doesn’t differ from the original bill.

She also said she was “really glad” that Carney agreed to a long-requested joint federal-provincial-territorial-First Ministers Meeting with First Nations, giving them a “full seat at the table.”

Carney announced the meeting at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly back in December, telling chiefs they would “set the agenda.”

For Pruden, the priority for the year ahead is to “close the loop” on self-government agreements, treaties, and land claim agreements, 10 years after the Daniels v. Canada decision.

That Supreme Court ruling said the federal government is legally responsible for legislating issues affecting Métis and non-Status Indians, with both being considered Indians under Sec. 91(24) of the Constitution, though not under the Indian Act.

“My dad is 85 years old. I never thought that at this age, I would see my dad still not having access, as a vulnerable senior, to more supports around health care, around housing,” Pruden said.

“Canada needs to come to the table and settle some of these matters.”

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