



## Former PM Chretien on Attawapiskat: 'People have to move sometimes'

National News | April 13, 2016 by [Jorge Barrera](#) | 21 Comments

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(Former  
prime  
minister

**Jorge Barrera**

**APTN National News**

Former Liberal prime minister Jean Chretien said “sometimes” First Nation communities need to be moved because “isolation” makes it difficult “to have economic activities in some of these areas.”

Chretien was in Ottawa Tuesday as a guest of Peter Harder—the point-man on the Trudeau Liberal government’s transition into power—who was officially sworn into the Senate, along with six other appointees, including Murray Sinclair, the former chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Chretien was the Indian Affairs minister under former prime minister Pierre Trudeau who introduced the 1969 White Paper which sought to wipe out the distinct legal status of “Indian” and absorb First Nation people into the rest of Canadian society.

The former prime minister was asked by reporters about what he would do with the Attawapiskat crisis.

The Cree community in Ontario’s James Bay region declared a state of emergency Saturday after recording 11 suicide attempts in a 24-hour time span. Attawapiskat sits about 90 kilometres from a De Beers diamond mine.

Chretien said sometimes communities aren’t viable.

“The problem is sometimes you cannot. You know, it’s—you know, people have to move sometimes,” Chretien told reporters on Parliament Hill. “It’s desirable to stay if they want to stay, but it’s not always possible. So you cannot have a statement that is generic. You know it’s extremely difficult. It’s one case at a time. Some, and you know, and it’s difficult culturally for them all the time.”

Chretien said he was the longest serving Indian Affairs minister in Canadian history, serving six years, two months, three days and “a few hours.”

He said the biggest problem facing communities like Attawapiskat was “isolation,” but First Nation people were “nostalgic” about the past.

“It’s difficult to have economic activities in some of these areas,” said Chretien. “When I quit politics in ’84, for a few years, I kept working with the Natives. I went to northern Manitoba, and you know, it’s extremely difficult to have a life there. But they traditional. They want to be close to the land. They are nostalgic about the past when they were going hunting and fishing and it takes time.”

Chretien said “time” is needed to let First Nation people catch up with modernity.

“You know, when I was minister, I think the first year there was about a dozen Indians who graduated from university. Now, it’s thousands and thousands,” said Chretien. “It takes time. I was in Old Crow one day. The first machine they ever seen was a helicopter; the same when they saw the man landing on the moon, about the same time.”

The Indian Affairs department is now called Indigenous Affairs. The name was changed by the Trudeau government from Aboriginal Affairs.

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