LA RONGE, Saskatchewan, March 14, 2003 -- Rick Laliberte, Member of Parliament for Churchill River, on behalf of Industry Minister Allan Rock, today announced an additional $6.4 million over the next year to continue providing First Nations schools with computers, Internet access, technical support and training through the First Nations SchoolNet Program.

"The First Nations SchoolNet Program is helping Aboriginal communities implement the advanced information technology infrastructure that will enable innovative new approaches for social and economic development," said Minister Rock. "Connection to the Internet and e-learning will allow First Nations students to pursue unprecedented new opportunities for learning and skills development within their own communities."

"Today's announcement demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that Aboriginal people and communities have opportunities to use information technology to improve their quality of life," said Mr. Laliberte. "By putting information and communication technologies into First Nations classrooms, we are giving Aboriginal students the opportunity to gain the skills they will need to participate in the growing knowledge-based economy."

First Nations SchoolNet has selected six non-profit Aboriginal organizations to manage and deliver the program across the country. Each Regional Management Organization participated in a rigorous selection process that demonstrated its knowledge and experience of First Nations connectivity issues, and ability to deliver the First Nations SchoolNet Program regionally. Selected organizations include the First Nations Education Steering Committee (British Columbia), Keewatin Career Development Corporation (Alberta/Saskatchewan), Keewatin Tribal Council (Manitoba), Keewaytinook Okimakanak (Ontario), Conseil en Éducation des Premières Nations (Quebec) and Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (Atlantic Canada).

The announcement was made at the Second Semi-annual First Nations SchoolNet Conference hosted by the Keewatin Career Development Corporation. The conference is being held in conjunction with the Pan-Canadian Northern Connectivity Conference, which focuses on northern connectivity with a particular emphasis on community access activities, challenges and issues.

Launched in 1996, the First Nations SchoolNet Program aims to connect all First Nations schools under federal jurisdiction to the Internet. Currently, First Nations SchoolNet has connected 80 percent of all First Nations schools across Canada to the Information Highway. Regional Management Organizations will continue to provide services to participating schools and will support schools that have yet to be connected. All First Nations schools under federal jurisdiction are eligible to participate in the program.
First Nations SchoolNet supports the Government of Canada's Innovation Strategy, which includes developing skills and knowledge for Canada’s Aboriginal youth living in rural and remote communities.

For more information, visit http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal or call 1 800 575-9200.

For more information, please contact:

Industry Canada
Media Relations
(613) 943-2502

Backgrounder

First Nations SchoolNet

Context
The First Nations SchoolNet Program (FNS), one of Industry Canada’s initiatives to connect schools to the Internet, has recently undergone a major restructuring. Until recently, the FNS National Office was dealing directly with the more than 600 on-reserve First Nations schools, helping to provide them with computers and other digital equipment, high-speed connectivity, technical support, and basic information and communications technologies training. As of December 1, 2002, six First Nations Regional Management Organizations (RMOs) have entered into agreements with Industry Canada to deliver the program to the schools in their region.

Regionalized Program Delivery
The RMOs provide a localized approach to assessing the needs of each Aboriginal school and community, and work with other federal, provincial, private sector and Aboriginal organizations to pool resources, reduce duplication, save costs and speed the delivery of all services. Each RMO has been paired with an Industry Canada Information Highway Applications Branch Regional Office, which will facilitate their work. To date, 479 First Nations schools have been connected and are being served by the RMO network.

Regional Management Organizations Selection Procedures
To select the RMOs, Industry Canada Regional Offices, Aboriginal Business Canada agencies and local experts in the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Economic Development Agency of Canada for Quebec Regions (CED), Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) and the Federal Economic Development
Initiative for Northern Ontario (FEDNOR) were asked to draw up a list of organizations that had the knowledge and experience of First Nations communities, as well as the connectivity that would make them thoroughly capable of delivering the FNS Program. Thirty organizations were recommended, of which 12 responded to a request to submit business proposals. Six organizations were chosen following a rigorous evaluation and due diligence process.

Benefits to First Nations Schools
Connection to the Internet and e-learning will allow First Nations students to obtain skills training and, in the future, to complete high school without ever leaving their respective communities. It will also permit communities to link to each other to share best practices for the preservation of their heritage and languages, and for their social and economic development.

Funding Details
FNS National Office has signed Contribution Agreements with the RMOs until March 2004. Please see detailed funding information below.

The RMOs for each region are:

British Columbia: First Nations Education Steering Committee - $1,449,500
Saskatchewan/Alberta: Keewatin Career Development Centre - $1,430,795
Manitoba: Keewatin Tribal Council - $905,125
Ontario: Keewaytinook Okimakanak, K-Net Services - $1,549,770
Quebec: Conseil en Éducation des Premières Nations - $582,310
Atlantic: Mi’Kmaw Kina’matnewey - $461,000

Conseil d’éducation des Première Nations
Quebec

Background
Conseil d’éducation des Première Nations (CEPN), launched in 1985, is a First Nations education organization representing 22 First Nations communities in the province of Quebec. Its mission is to represent the education interests of its members and to improve education services to First Nations students. CEPN interacts with the federal and provincial governments on education issues and responds to the requests and needs of its members. It provides services and research in cooperative education, special education, youth employment, Aboriginal languages, fetal alcohol syndrome, and science and technology.

Location
CEPN is located in Wendake, Quebec.

Connectivity Details
There are 48 First Nations schools in Quebec
40 schools are connected
78 percent of schools have a slow connection; 50 percent of schools are using DirecPC where bandwidth is shared nationally and the Internet connection is the equivalent of dial-up at peak periods
Average school population is 175 students

Contact
Lise Bastien
Project Leader
Conseil en Éducation des Premières Nations
240 Place Sondakwa
Wendake, Quebec
G0A 4V0
Tel.: (418) 842-7672
Fax: (418) 842-9988
E-mail: info@cepn-fnec.com
Web: http://www.cepn-fnec.com

First Nations Education Steering Committee
British Columbia

Background
The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), launched in 1992, is a charitable organization located in Vancouver, British Columbia, composed of 48 First Nations education representatives. Its mandate is to facilitate discussion about education matters affecting British Columbia’s First Nations by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations. It works as a collective organization to support First Nations schools and communities in providing education and to communicate with the federal and provincial governments to ensure that First Nations concerns are addressed. FNESC maintains several sub-committees in adult education, post-secondary education, Aboriginal languages and special needs.

Connectivity Details
There are 153 First Nations schools in British Columbia
108 schools are connected
83 percent of schools have a slow connection; 54 percent of schools are using
Keewatin Career Development Corporation
Alberta and Saskatchewan

Background
Keewatin Career Development Corporation (KCDC), launched in 1996, is a non-profit organization that represents First Nations, Métis and provincial organizations in northern Saskatchewan. Its goal is to promote the application of research, development, and information and communications technologies (ICT) for the benefit of rural Aboriginal communities. KCDC believes that Aboriginal communities can use ICT to compete with urban centres in terms of education and business opportunities, as well as services to community members. It works with First Nations, communities and organizations to implement projects that will bring the potential of ICT to rural and remote locations. KCDC is a Smart Community for Saskatchewan.

Location
KCDC is situated in La Ronge, Saskatchewan

Connectivity Details - Alberta
There are 82 First Nations schools in Alberta
61 schools are connected
87 percent of schools have a slow connection; 75 percent of schools are using DirecPC where bandwidth is shared nationally and the Internet connection is the equivalent of dial-up at peak periods
Province is providing Super Net connectivity to all schools by 2003
Average school population is 200 students

Connectivity Details - Saskatchewan
There are 89 First Nations schools in Saskatchewan
80 schools are connected
9 percent of schools have a slow connection; 9 percent of schools are using DirecPC where bandwidth is shared nationally and the Internet connection is the equivalent of dial-up at peak periods
Community Net is providing connectivity to 90 percent of schools
Average school population is 250 students

Contact
Randy Johns
General Manager
Keewatin Career Development Corporation
P. O. Box 489
La Ronge, Saskatchewan
S0J 3G0
Tel.: (306) 425-4778
Fax: (306) 425-4780
E-mail: randy.johns@kcdc.sk.ca
Web: http://www.kcdc.sk.ca

Keewatin Tribal Council
Manitoba

Background
Keewatin Tribal Council (KTC), launched in 1979, is a non-profit organization comprised of 11 member First Nations from northern Manitoba. It is the most northern Tribal Council in Manitoba and its members represent two distinct language groups: Cree and Dene. As a Tribal Council, the KTC provides project management services to its member First Nations in community services, education, health, housing and economic development. Through the 11 Tribal Council Chiefs, the KTC is accountable to approximately 10 000 reserve members from the 11 First Nations communities.

Location
KTC is situated in Thompson, Manitoba, and maintains a First Nations SchoolNet
Regional Management Office in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Connectivity Details
There are 65 First Nations schools in Manitoba
53 schools are connected
98 percent of schools have a slow connection; 88 percent of schools are using DirecPC where bandwidth is shared nationally and the Internet connection is the equivalent of dial-up at peak periods
Average school population is 200 students

Contact
Crystal Chercoe
Project Leader
Keewatin Tribal Council
102-83 Churchill Drive
Thompson, Manitoba
R3N 0L6
Tel.: (204) 284-9306
Fax: (204) 284-9306
E-mail: cchercoe@shaw.ca
Web: http://www.winnipeg.freenet.mb.ca/iphome/m/mfntc/ktc.html

-----------------------------

Keewaytinook Okimakanak

Ontario

Background
Keewaytinook Okimakanak (K-Net), launched in 1991, is the telecommunications arm of Keewaytinook Okimakanak, a Northern Chiefs Council. The organization represents six First Nations in northwestern Ontario, and is the clearing house for indigenous telecommunications issues, infrastructures, and information and communications technologies (ICT) applications in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). K-Net facilitates technical projects and the distribution of e-services, and develops new media content for its members and other First Nations in the NAN territory. It previously provided help desk services to 136 First Nations in Ontario. K-Net is a Smart Community.

Location
K-Net is located in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

Connectivity Details
There are 136 First Nations schools in Ontario
103 schools are connected
91 percent of schools have a slow connection;
79 percent of schools are using DirecPC where bandwidth is shared nationally and the
Internet connection is the equivalent of dial-up at peak periods
Average school population is 100 students

Contact
Brian Beaton
Project Leader
Keewaytinook Okimakanak
Box 1439, 115 King Street
Sioux Lookout, Ontario
P8T 1B9
Tel.: (807) 737-1135
Fax: (807) 737-1720
E-mail: brian.beaton@knet.ca
Web: http://www.knet.ca

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey

Atlantic Region

Background
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) began as the Mi'kmaq Education Authority in 1992. After
several years of negotiations between the Authority and the federal government, a
Mi'kmaq Education Act was passed in 1997, which led to the emergence of the Mi'kmaw
Kina'matnewey. It is a regional education body that represents nine of the 13 First
Nations in Nova Scotia. MK delivers a range of education services and serves as the
collective voice for the Mi'kmaw on education matters. Its mission is to facilitate the
development of innovative alternatives and to promote excellence in education among
its members.

Location
MK is situated on the Membertou First Nation in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Connectivity Details
There are 32 First Nations schools in the Atlantic region
30 schools are connected
93 percent of schools have a slow connection; 43 percent of schools are using
DirecPC where bandwidth is shared nationally and the Internet connection is the
equivalent of dial-up at peak periods
Average school population is 80 students

Contact
Kevin Burton
RMO Manager
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
47 Maillard Street
Sydney, Nova Scotia
B1S 2P5
Tel.: (902) 567-0842
Fax: (902) 567-0337
E-mail: admin@firstnationhelp.com
Web: http://www.firstnationhelp.com