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Friday, April 13, 2018

Open Letter to All City of Calgary Council
and
His Worship Mayor Naheed Nenshi

Dear His Worship:

RE: BID FOR THE 2026 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES



Please allow us to introduce ourselves. We are two representatives and leaders of Indigenous people of Canada who have been closely following the potential for Calgary to bid for the 2026 Winter Olympic Games. I, Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild, a Cree from the Treaty 6 Confederacy and recently was appointed Ambassador to the Winter Olympics by the Assembly of First Nations. And I, Bill Erasmus the Dene National Chief, was asked to accompany Chief Littlechild to PyeongChang, Korea for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

During these trips we were welcomed by the Calgary 2026 project team and incorporated into all activities. We had the great pleasure of meeting both International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach and International Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons on our trips and took the time to sit with them and explain the relevance and importance of Indigenous people in Canada at this time. We took these opportunities to outline the difficult history Indigenous people have experienced in Canada, and how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and resulting Calls to Actions have given Indigenous leaders hope for the future of our people. We specifically drew their attention to the TRC Calls to Action relating specifically to the Olympic Games, recognition of Indigenous World Games and Indigenous participation in sport more generally. As a survivor of 14 years of residential school abuses, I, Chief Littlechild can speak directly to the power of sport to inspire, persevere and provide meaning in an otherwise difficult daily existence.

We are writing to you today to express our gravest concerns that you may vote to end your Olympic exploration before you have sufficient facts before you to make this important decision. We would like to highlight a few key points for your consideration prior to the reasoned decision you will make this coming week.

- We believe there is a tremendous opportunity in bidding and hosting the 2026 Winter Olympic Games for Calgary to demonstrate its newfound commitment to inclusion and diversity. Indigenous representatives have never been invited into an Olympic bidding process as early nor as fully as we have been, and particularly speaking for myself, Chief Littlechild, who was a member of the CBEC

"Upholding and Protecting the Rights and Interests of the Dene Nation"

Board. The invitation to be included, the desire to listen to our perspectives and the effort to ensure we are engaged should be applauded. This commitment to diversity and inclusion could surely be a core part of Calgary's vision for hosting the Games in 2026 and would appeal to a very broad global audience.

- We believe there is a tremendous economic opportunity in bidding and hosting the 2026 Winter Olympic Games, and it is our understanding that negotiations with other levels of government are in the early stages. Negotiation takes time, but we are confident that the Federal and Provincial government will also see the opportunity that exists in the 2026 Games over time as they become educated about the project.
- We believe that Calgarians and all impacted surrounding regions, which include many Indigenous communities, should be given a chance to understand the Olympic bid project and then to speak their opinions regarding whether they want to bid and host the 2026 Winter Olympic Games. If you end the project this week you will silence these voices without ever having given us a chance to speak.

Your Worships – if you vote No this week to the continued exploration of the Olympic Bid, you will potentially be denying the City of a vast economic opportunity at a time when the City desperately needs it. You will be denying the City a chance to get its swagger back through promoting itself to the world – a unifying rally cry to bring the people together. And we believe that you will be denying Indigenous people a chance to participate in and be inspired by the great connector that is the Olympic Games.

Please consider our message and make the decision to support this project, now equally supported by the Federal and Provincial governments. When we all have the financial answers we are looking for, and we understand the outcome of the negotiations with the governments, then and only then will you have the full information you need to make a rational judgment regarding this project.

Sincerely,



Bill Erasmus
Dene National Chief
AFN Regional Chief, NWT



Wilton Littlechild
Grand Chief Treaty 6 Confederacy

cc. Premier Notley
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau