

PAUL MARTIN LAUNCHES NEW FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION PROGRAM IN FORT MCMURRAY

Mix 103.7 FM

Former Prime Minister Paul Martin is leading the launch of an Aboriginal entrepreneurship project in Fort McMurray.

Martin will be on hand as Father Patrick Mercredi High School announces a new partnership, and the launch of his Aboriginal Education Initiative tomorrow.

The program provides First Nations youth lessons in marketing, small business and workplace management.

Martin tells Mix News, its the perfect training ground for the next generation of leaders.

"Nobody says these students have to go on and stay in business, but I think we all know that understanding how the economy works is pretty important no matter what it is that you do," the former Prime Minister said. "So they're getting a general course in how to start a business, but also a general course in what the economy is all about."

Martin says affording Aboriginal youths the same opportunities as their classroom counterparts is both a moral and economic issue.

"They're entitled to the same quality of education as any other Canadian. To deny them that is simply nothing but overt discrimination; that's morally wrong, but it's also economically dumb," Martin said. "This is the fastest growing and youngest segment of our population, this is the workforce of tomorrow, and it's going to be a very important workforce in the area of Fort McMurray."

The former Prime Minister adds despite living in the wealthiest province in the country, First Nations youth in Alberta are still facing a disadvantage in the classroom.

"Of course there are other provinces hungover from residential schools, and other issues that we're all unfortunately, very much aware of. But also, there is a lack of presenting education in a way that fits in with Aboriginal traditions," Martin said. "That's one of the reasons our course and the work books that we've got -- these are the first indigenous work books ever produced by indigenous teachers."

The program will launch with roughly a dozen students this year, but Martin says the number is expected to multiply.