

June 21, 2016

June 21st is National Aboriginal Day, a day recognizing and celebrating the cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada.

In celebrating these cultures that are at the core of Canada, it is important that this day not be seen as a day of celebration for Aboriginal People alone, but rather a day all of Canada celebrates. As a country we still have issues to overcome in the relationship with our Indigenous Peoples, but today we recognize the unique base upon which a new relationship arose and a nation was built. Make today's celebration a reason to think about the issues we face in the relationship of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Peoples and the responsibility we all have to solve the problems for the good of all Canadians.

I challenge everyone to help achieve the goals established by the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” . Making truth and reconciliation personal is important and requires your own personal call to action. Doing so can be intimidating for many people; what can one person do to help solve this problem? Individual action can be very effective, so I am going to challenge you to make your own personal call to action on this National Aboriginal Day. If you have already made your own personal “call to action”, I congratulate you. If you need some help deciding what one person can do, I recommend you consider these three simple things:

- 1) Let's start by helping to dispel the myth that Aboriginal People want to live with the social problems faced by many of their people. Life is complex. There are many reasons why people end up where they do, but a **desire** to be poor, hungry or unhealthy is not one of them. Next time you hear someone perpetuate this myth, challenge them on it, take a stand.
- 2) Next, help me dispel the myth that the “Aboriginal problem” is too big to solve and we can't get it done, so why try. There are many compelling examples that this is not the case. I, for example, am the first generation in my father's family that was not directly subject to the ravages of the residential schools. While residential schooling has caused some issues in my life, I am not a victim and I am not dependent on the Government for anything; in fact, the last time I checked my tax return, I see the Government as being fairly dependent on me. Positive change can happen and it can happen quickly when we fix issues related to health, education and opportunity. Learn about the solutions that work and do whatever you can to make more of them a reality.
- 3) Lastly I would challenge you to think about how you would want others to treat that Metis person living on the street if it was your Father, or how you would want that First Nations single mother living on a remote reserve in sub-standard housing treated if it was your Mother, or how you would want that teenage Inuit girl under the care of social services and living in a dangerous situation treated if she was your little Sister. When you personalize the faces of the “issues” we see in our society, it gets a lot easier to care about a solution.

I am very optimistic about the future of Aboriginal People and the benefit all Canadians will experience from a positive improvement in the relationship with the Peoples indigenous to this land.

To increase your awareness of this aspect of Canada's relationship with Aboriginal People, I recommend the following readings:

- **Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**– "Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts." -Justice Murray Sinclair.
<http://nctr.ca/reports.php> . For the first time, I am re-issuing a reading challenge. This report I recommended last year is so important to our moving forward as a country for both Indigenous Peoples and other Canadians that I really encourage everyone to read and re-read this report. We need to recognize the opportunity that BOTH truth and reconciliation offer us all and we need to make this a personal journey, not something left to others or governments to deal with.
- **The Orenda**; by Joseph Boyden - The Orenda is a historical novel that takes place in what was to become Canada in the early 17th century. While not everyone agrees on the perspectives taken in this book, remember it is fiction. It is a well written and highly engaging piece of historical fiction that I read in days, and as a busy person and self-proclaimed slow reader, that in itself is an indication of the talent of the author as a storyteller. While some have debated the historical accuracy or the perspectives taken in the book, I enjoyed it because it was an excellent portrayal of the clash of complex cultures that was at the core of Canada's creation and the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the constant stream of settlers and immigrants who make up our country. Like the fictional discoveries of the Starship Enterprise of the original Star Trek series, the newcomers' motto was probably "do no harm", but it seems only logical that when they brought new ideas, diseases, politics, values, technology and perspectives to an unsuspecting world, we see the origins of the harm that follows a crash of developed cultures in newly found interactions. This book made me think that some of the unintended harm still affects us today and until we face this reality and move on, we are all worse off.

All the best to you and your families on June 21st, National Aboriginal Day, an important day for all Canadians.

Keith