

A DAY TO LISTEN - BOB WATTS

Aanii. My name is Tall Pine. I'm from the Bear Clan. I'm Mohawk and Ojibway, and I'm a resident and member here at Six Nations of the Grand River near Brantford, Ontario. A number of years ago, a number of survivors of residential schools made legal claims against the governments of Canada and churches in Canada. And all this culminated in a massive class action settlement. That settlement included compensation for survivors. It included an independent adjudication secretariat, significantly, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a commemoration fund and a continued funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

After the settlement agreement, I was asked to take the lead in setting up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). You know, the TRC did amazing, amazing work, 94 Calls to Action. And it started off with really good support and there's still good support for reconciliation. But for some of the truths that the TRC found and heard from survivors, I don't think it really resonated with Canada and I don't think it has resonated until all these unmarked burials were found in Kamloops. The reality of residential schools has now struck home. And I talk to people and they say, "Oh, my goodness, if we'd have heard about this in any other country, that the bodies of 215 children were discovered at a former school, we would be as a country, we would be in shock." It's not the first and it's not the last either.

While we were setting up the TRC, a Member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, Gary Merasty, was asking questions in the House of Commons about unmarked burials and missing children, and we had heard about that when we went in and met with survivors. And some of those meetings were just like a sea of tears as people were disclosing, sometimes for the first time in their lives, sometimes they're in their eighties or the nineties, they never told their partner or their children. So we prepared a report on unmarked burials and missing children, and that became an important policy piece and a foundational piece for the work of the TRC. I think about this as an awakening for us as a country. I think about those children. I think about their spirits and the spirits of other children that never came home. So it's my belief, and I've heard this, too when I've talked to other people, both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, that these 215 children, they're spiritual leaders, they're spiritual warriors, and they're leading us and guiding us on a journey of discovery about ourselves as individuals, and about ourselves as a nation, to help us discover the truth, but also about the truth of reconciliation, the truth of nation-building, the truth of the promises that we've made to each other through treaty and the promises that we're making to our children, those coming faces about the kind of world that we're going to leave for them. This is what we're being guided to do.

I think these spirits are telling us that there's a spiritual side to reconciliation and to nation-building that we're missing. That's true for Indigenous contribution, but it's true for all of us. That's what the spirits of these children are telling us to do, is to do something, whether you call it reconciliation, whether you call it reconciliACTION, whether you consider it as nation-building, atonement, however you characterize it, there's a need for all of us to get past nice words and to manifest the outcomes that we're trying to achieve. Miigwetch. Thank you.