

A DAY TO LISTEN - TABITHA BULL

Aanii. Hello, I'm Tabitha Bull, President and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, and a proud member of Nipissing First Nation.

Indigenous people have been systemically and purposely kept out of the economy of Canada through the Indian Act. Many people don't know that from 1881 until 2014, the Indian Act actually contained a permit system to control First Nations' ability to sell products off of reserves and also Indigenous people, First Nation people were not considered Indians under the Indian Act if they obtained a secondary school degree until 1951. If you are a lawyer or an engineer or a doctor, that meant you are no longer considered an Indian under the Indian Act. And that's where we lost a lot of mentors and youth being able to look up to Indigenous people that had those degrees and were in those professions.

I think it speaks so much to the loss of intergenerational wealth. When we look at Indigenous people today and we look at Indigenous business owners, we've lost that intergenerational wealth of like you didn't have a home to pass on, but also if you didn't have a business, we see now young Indigenous people that are starting businesses and some of them are saying if it wasn't for their father or their mother that was able to start a business, they probably wouldn't have finished high school. They wouldn't definitely have started a business themselves. So we have a lot of years to catch up on and I think all of Canada needs to support Indigenous economy to ensure that we can close those gaps.

Despite that we were effectively excluded from the economy, Indigenous people have persisted. There are close to 60,000 Indigenous businesses across Canada, in every sector, in every size, and every province and territory. We see Indigenous businesses also within their business plan, at the root of their business plan, ensuring that there's an opportunity for them to give back to their community or to support Indigenous youth, to support Indigenous women and girls and education. The other thing I think that we're seeing that is such an important area of growth is that Indigenous people have always been sustainable, have always looked at the environment and protecting the environment and most businesses in the Indigenous community include that at the root of their business plan. So now when consumers are looking at wanting to buy products that are environmentally safe and that are sustainable, and now that everybody's looking at ESG, Indigenous businesses have been doing that since they started. And I think now the consumer is catching up to the importance of that work.

We talk often about reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). TRC #92 specifically speaks to corporate Canada and how corporate Canada support Indigenous people through reconciliation. And at CCAB, that's really the root of the work that we do. It's about bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses in ways that they can become equitable partners in looking how Indigenous businesses can get into the supply chain of corporate Canada. And we truly believe that procurement strategies to ensure that you're mandated and committing to buying from Indigenous business is one of the key areas of growth that's going to ensure that we can continue to grow the Indigenous economy.

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There's so much that anybody could do as a consumer. So as an individual, look at where you're spending your money and support Indigenous business, but also as an investor, look at the companies that you're investing in and pressure them to ensure that they have Indigenous inclusion strategies, that are working well with Indigenous people in Indigenous business. And the last thing I would say is within your organization, ask your organization what they're doing, what are they doing to support Indigenous business and Indigenous people and request that of them. Whether you're an Indigenous employee or not, there's so much that corporate Canada can do to move the needle. And it's not about spending more money, it's not about more tax dollars, it's just about looking at where you're spending your money and directing that in ways that are going to support the economy.