INQUIRY RESPECTING THE TREATMENT, EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF INNU IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

English Transcript | Volume 24

Commissioners: Retired Judge James Igloliorte, Dr. Mike Devine and Anastasia Qupee

Sheshatshiu

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[redacted]

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you.

We're moving right on now to our next presenter, and that will be Paul?

P. RALPH: Paul, yeah.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mr. Rich.

Thank you.

Come on up, Michel.

You got more work – sorry, okay.

P. RALPH: Commissioners, if I could just say one word.

So we invited leaders, former leaders and Elders to come here today because we wanted to discuss with you what we've been doing with the Inquiry, what we intend to do. And we wanted to hear your thoughts about whether we're on the right path and what things we – other things we should be doing, or things perhaps we're doing, that we shouldn't be doing.

So we wanted to share this – thought it was a good time in the Inquiry, good point that we invited you all here.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Peter.

The three Commissioners sat down at the very early days and we hired a couple of lawyers that we thought would understand the nature of the job we were expected to do and understood government policies, but also understood the communities. And we're very grateful to Peter and to Caitlin and Lynn Moore, who's not here, that they've done a really good job of setting all of this up. We're grateful for that.

[redacted]us [redacted]eryone who speaks to just speak their mind about what they [redacted]uch [redacted]ut [redacted]

[redacted] I had an email from Anastasia there last [redacted]the [redacted]

[redacted]cles, [redacted] of course, which is always – always has been an issue because under [redacted]slation, federal law and all this stuff, but – I wanna get to that, but I wanted [redacted] as Paul [redacted] community.

[redacted]when [redacted]o say, because I have a lot to say. A lot in terms of [redacted]no I [redacted]ed with, [redacted]st. So [redacted], to be here 'cause listening to my mother-in-law, Tshaukuesh Elizabeth [redacted]hen I was about probably two or three, four years old. So I [redacted]ne, [redacted]em.

[redacted]ot [redacted] not Steven, but it's Max, Gabriel and my brother Joseph just back in [redacted]nd I have a brother named Michel Rich, and Steven is in [redacted]as married and got siblings of his own and grandchildren of his own; he's doing well.

Myself, I got three girls and one boy, all grown up and they're doing very well. They got their own positions, doing their own things in careers and having a good future. I have three grandchildren – three granddaughters and two grandsons. All are doing very well, very happy and me, as a grandparent, very happy that they're succeeding and I do get involved in their – as a grandparent, get involved in a lot of their, not day-to-day stuff but in their – they do call me on FaceTime and all this stuff, the new technology that's kicking in, and they're getting involved in all that.

But I want to say that my parents were taken – we were taken from our parents when we were two or three years old, put into a North West River dormitory, which was, you know – which is considered today as a residential school. And I'm one of those residential school survivor from the system, that itself, was against the Innu from the start

The social work system itself – Department of Social Services back then, which is now the social – under provincial legislation, of course, and the religion back then, they kind of worked against the Innu and they were not open to Innu and their interpretation of Innu culture, Innu language being taught in those schools, which is now a different story.

But I do see that the system itself killed my parents because, my father, Joseph Rich, who was from Davis Inlet, he was a nomadic hunter, and my mother who was also from this community. Before she got married, her name was Mary Pasteen – Theresa Mary Pasteen, right. But they were all – they lived off the wilderness, all the wild foods; lived in the wild and they call it the

[redacted]ve call [redacted]

[redacted]e, they [redacted] to [redacted]t, the [redacted]f they didn't go to school, Social Services would take them. [redacted]

[redacted]l [redacted]ame [redacted]n [redacted]vent through in order to be with a family, not your [redacted] [redacted]ame it on that system, because my parents, when they were [redacted]his community, they had nothing – no training, nothing. You can't go hunting, [redacted]we're going [redacted]

[redacted]n [redacted]ey died from alcohol and tragic events. Who in the [redacted]ning [redacted]e all that, [redacted]ng at [redacted] they [redacted]l [redacted]ure that was way inferior because you couldn't talk the language. [redacted]should change and they have to change. You know, for my [redacted]o [redacted] services by our own people, our language that we're losing

[redacted]ve [redacted] [redacted]our land rights and our – all our self-agreements, so that we could [redacted]here to promote and to really push our rights and [redacted]s for this nation.

We are strong and we know what we have to do. But this community – and communities sometimes don't see the big picture, and we need to push and promote that. There's not too many of us that have all the knowledge and all the experience and the information, but together I know we can make it happen.

Language, culture, education, run our own services, be our own social workers, our own teachers; really, really show why we've negotiated and fought for our rights for these past 50 years 'cause I know the province has really done a piss-poor job of running our operations, under the current legislation.

And now the feds will have to do the same thing. They have a big responsibility because they've neglected the Innu for the past 50 years, ever since Canada and Newfoundland signed Confederation back in '49. Innu were not involved in the any of these discussions on the future of our people. And that's why the direction sometime, with the provincial legislation and the federal legislation, seem to be colliding, and it's mixing up our direction and our rights, and that's not gonna happen.

We should be changing – we should be in full control of all these – of our programs and our services, because these issues that we're bringing forward should all be dealt with. And never again should we be losing our people because of inferior – all other cultures, other than our own people, our own nation, telling us what to do.

We lost too many people. We put down our community too much, our members too much. We destroyed the – we tried to destroy the whole culture of our language, of our nation. I know we – we're headed into the – into a big change and I can't wait to

[redacted]ecide [redacted]and how we're gonna do it, how we're gonna run it, who's gonna run [redacted]e – [redacted]nd [redacted] I [redacted]

[redacted]very strong. We have a strong voice. What we [redacted]e [redacted]g that [redacted] And all the past leadership that has come [redacted]n [redacted]u [redacted] big legacy that we're about to create. To run our own affairs, be in control, [redacted]wn people running those operations, lead those operations. [redacted]aul Rich, I'm from this community. I don't plan to go [redacted]ights that seems like there's still some issues [redacted]SD [redacted]king them [redacted]work [redacted]we do it right, by communicating and not taking kids from the hospital at early [redacted]nd that's back in our own communities: healthy communities, [redacted]ave [redacted]e [redacted]e you're setting up your own tent.

[redacted]nportant that was. It was done by two workers from – Gail Baikie and [redacted]as Leslie, but those two individuals did good work on [redacted]e Band Council at the time. And that report was 20 years ago, 2003, and still, today, there's big issues.

So time is not something that we like putting towards if it's not going to be developed. You can develop all kinds of proposals, develop all kinds of – put all kinds of consultants, advisers, into every potential program, but at the end of it, nothing happens, then the community is back to where it started.

So it's got to be in the same momentum, it's got to be the same idea of why we're all here: to help our community. Not because we want to do a good story, but that story is to be done – coming from the community so that community could take that next step. So that we don't – we avoid these obstacles, we avoid these hurdles, so they're not repeated and we don't lose any more children.

And the children that's walking around today, we know we have a lot of work to do in terms of finding proper training, proper schooling, so that they could have a future. And those are the kind of things I want to hear future programmers, such as yourselves, and others, to come up with that. How do we do it? Not when, or 20 years down the road, 'cause most of us is not going to be here. But we need to make things happen now.

That's why the – there was a court case that was just announced just two days ago, I think it was yesterday, a big child welfare case that was just announced. It was a $22-billion case that was in favour of First Nations because of the welfare and how it treated First Nations in the country. Seventeen to 20 years for that. It's just like that proposal that we submitted back in 2003 to get social workers, to develop our own people. And how do we develop that? How do we do that? And there was a couple

[redacted]on't [redacted]emented or not. It doesn't sound like.

[redacted]nd a [redacted]me [redacted]d [redacted]o be [redacted]ut. Not just for the community to do reports after reports after [redacted]e feds and the governments – provincial [redacted]doing [redacted]

[redacted]at [redacted]he wilderness, in Nutshimit, we call it. Those are very important for us, [redacted]that and develop the Nutshimit way of life is very important, so we don't [redacted]t ourselves [redacted]red that we do have a culture and we do live off the land [redacted]kills [redacted]to do a lot of what we lost.

[redacted]eak on [redacted]e [redacted] tent together. We are very good at setting up our tent, but into the [redacted]y [redacted]uff [redacted]elling the parents that they have to go out – their kids have to [redacted]ou [redacted]know, what kind of life was that? Then all you gotta do is – [redacted]k, [redacted] go out.

[redacted]y and I'm glad I'm able to speak and I – you know, I'm one [redacted]rvivors from the North West River residential school. And I know today, and I see it today, that there has to be a big change – big change – and it's gotta happen because everybody got to see that change, that's work with the Innu, not somebody that's working against the Innu and working on behalf of the Innu. It's gotta – they gotta see that, at the end of it, you're working for the Innu and the goals of the Innu, and that's the main reason why I wanted to speak.

We didn't fight so that we could end up losing at the end. We fought because we wanted something at the end. And that end is our future, our nation, our people, our direction; our own people run their own services. Control – if we make a mistake, we're gonna fix it. Outside people make a mistake, they expect us to make a – fix it for their mistakes, but we're not in control.

We control it; we run it. We make a mistake; we fix it. That's the way it should be and that's the way it's gonna be. It's time to – like they say in the real world, I think, the light at the end of the tunnel. Well, that light is right there and we're about to move in that direction, as the Innu and the nation.

That's where I come from, and I'm happy to be here today to explain that and to talk about my personal life and what I see in the future that is critical for our nation to really move forward, and our children, of course, our children.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Thank you, Paul.

Do you want to sum up, as well, in Innu-aimun what you've said?

P. RICH: Yeah, I think so.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: It's so wonderful and remarkable to hear all of you who speak two languages, and we're really grateful that you can do that. It's something for us to witness and see.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: Tshenashkumitin.

[Sheshatshiu-aimun spoken.]

Thank you.

P. RICH: Tshenashkumitin.

COMMISSIONER QUPEE: I just said to Paul, thank you for coming and sharing his story and I hope that in the coming months, I guess, that he'll come back and speak again.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Mike.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: Yes, thank you very much for coming today and it was really interesting to hear what you had to say.

I think in terms of the child welfare system and the change is I think that's the Inquiry, sort of, sees that as being the way to go, is that their own child welfare system. So I don't think – that's no secret in terms of – and I think the Innu Nation also is on that.

So we'll take your words and certainly look forward to what you talk about, as an Innu-led –

P. RICH: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DEVINE: – programs and services.

Thank you.

P. RICH: Yeah. Thank you very much.

I wanted to say, too, that the – you know the – like I said, we're not going anywhere, we're gonna be here and we wanna see the changes, which are reflective of what everybody is saying here in our community, and that's total control of the – and if we make mistakes, we're going to fix them, as a nation, as a people, but that's where it all starts, you know, about make a big change.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: So it's lunchtime and we're really sorry if there were people who were ready to speak and wanted to speak. How many people have we missed? Do you know, Paula?

CLERK: We had five on the list speaking today.

COMMISSIONER IGLOLIORTE: Okay, are we continuing at 1:30?

Recess

