

Leaders call for implementation of TRC Calls to Action

By Sam Odrowski

Following the tragic discovery of a mass unmarked grave site containing the remains of 215 Indigenous children at a residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia, leaders and Indigenous rights advocates across the country have been calling on the federal government to properly respond.

Indigenous Watchdog, which tracks and reports on Canada's progress in the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on its website Indigenouwatchdog.org, is calling on the federal government to do what should have been done years ago ? honour the missing and undocumented Indigenous children and repatriate their remains for proper burial and remembrance.

Indigenous Watchdog's focus is squarely on implementing TRC Calls to Action 71 through 76, which directly relate to missing children and burial information. Three of the calls have not even been started by the federal government, six years after the TRC report's release.

Locally, Dufferin?Caledon MP Kyle Seebach says his party has put forward a list of meaningful actions to assist families in Indigenous communities at this time, with ?developing a comprehensive plan to implement TRC Calls to Action 71 through 76 by July 1, 2021? at the top of the list.

?The time for talk on reconciliation and the time to talk about the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is over ? it's time for action,? said Seebach.

?[Calls to Action] 71 to 76, they deal with finding grave sites, cataloguing, getting information from corners and historical records, to really try and make sure that this gets properly documented? so Indigenous families can get the information, the closure, and all of the things that they should have had.?

Other items on the list of meaningful actions to assist Indigenous families include funding investigations at all former residential schools in Canada where unmarked graves may exist, including the site where 215 children have already been discovered; and ensuring that proper resources are allocated for communities to reinter, commemorate, and honour any individuals discovered through the investigation, according to the wishes of their next of kin.

The last item on the list involves developing a detailed and thorough set of resources to educate Canadians of all ages on the tragic history of residential schools in Canada.

To date, 13 of the 94 Calls to Action from the TRC have been fully enacted and some steps have been taken on 60, while no real steps have been made on 21 of them.

Seebach says more needs to be done to have the Calls to Action implemented.

?No government's track record has been very good in with Indigenous peoples in this country, but in the last six years, there's been very little action on the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,? he said. ?I hope it's a wakeup call for the government, that they need to move faster.?

A non-binding NDP motion proposed on Opposition Day, calling on the federal government to stop taking Indigenous children and survivors of residential school to court passed 271-0 on Monday (June 7).

The federal government has also committed \$27 million to ?assist Indigenous communities in locating and memorializing children

who died at residential schools? out of a \$33 million budget. Prior to the discovery of the mass grave site on the traditional territory of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, only \$3 million of that budget was spent.

Going forward, Seebach told The Citizen he hopes the list of meaningful actions his party has brought forward will be adopted and that all Canadians take some time to honour and remember the indigenous children who never made it home.

?I just think that all Canadians should take a moment to think about the really dark stain on the soul of this country that residential schools are, and how we have to work very hard towards reconciliation,? he said.