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City of St. Albert took action on Red Dress Day

By Kinnukana, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

May 05 was *Red Dress Day* across Canada, a national day of remembrance and action that honours the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People (MMIWG2S+). The City of St. Albert (City) took action this year and expanded their displays across the City, providing compelling explanatory information to recognize Red Dress Day and build greater awareness.

The City had a display at the Healing Garden with information about those affected by MMIWG2S, that includes current statistics and contact information for individuals needing help. The Healing Garden is located along the Red Willow Trail on the Northside of the Sturgeon River, across from St. Albert Place. The City also extended their display to the lobby area of St. Albert Place, near the entrance to the rear plaza.

The displays were set up by the Kisakihikawin (You Are Loved) St. Albert Society, led by Amanda Patrick and Cheryl Stewart.

Mary-Ellen Green, Secretary to the Society, said that “it is an important display, especially at this location, to draw people in and learn about all of the women, girls and gender diverse people who have gone missing. Nobody really knows the number, it’s staggering how many people this affects and all their family and friends. The display was expanded to the lobby at St. Albert Place and the St. Albert Public Library, both downtown and at the Jensen Lakes location this year. It’s nice to see the displays growing and people coming to spend time and reflect in this place. We are fortunate to have a place like this in our community for awareness and healing.”

This day of remembrance originated from the REDress Project, an art installation by Metis artist Jaime Black, which features empty red dresses displayed in public spaces. The dresses represent the people who are missing or have been murdered. The dresses hanging in St. Albert and the many, many dresses hung across Canada are a visual reminder of the violence and the lives lost.

Did you know that Indigenous women and girls are twelve times more likely to be murdered or go missing than non-Indigenous women in Canada? In Alberta, Indigenous women make up over 50% of female homicide victims, despite comprising just 6% of the female population. Also, Indigenous men and boys are murdered at a higher rate than any other group of individuals in Canada, but there is little public concern surrounding this issue and men and boys are blamed for the violence they experience. Across the country, more than 4,000 cases of MMIWG2S have been documented

and many remain unsolved with families still searching for answers.

In 2019, there was a *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* that called this ongoing tragedy a genocide, rooted in colonization, racism, and systemic neglect. The Inquiry released a report called *Reclaiming Power and Place* with 231 Calls for Justice. The first call for justice is for government to develop and implement a fully funded, Indigenous-led National Action Plan that addresses violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, with clear timelines, accountability, and measurable outcomes. Other calls include things like ensuring safe and affordable housing, mandating that all police services receive culturally competent, trauma-informed, anti-racist training, Indigenous-led health and healing services, and accurate teachings about colonialism, residential schools, and the ongoing impacts on Indigenous communities. All of these Calls have not been implemented yet and failure to do so continues to lead to ongoing harm. Six years have passed and the number of cases keeps on growing.

Today, we continue to honour the red dresses and grieve loved ones, but action is required now by everyone to address these important calls to justice in order for healing and transformation to occur. *Red Dress Day* is more than a memorial—it reflects on the deep-rooted failures of colonial systems and the silence that surrounds this national tragedy. As everyone recognizes this day with red dresses, let us not just grieve but also stand up to government and those with influence to implement the 231 Calls for Justice in order to stop these heart-breaking losses and focus on healing and transformation in the future. There are many ways that you can be involved: educate yourself and others, advocate for change, provide community support, and push for government accountability. Let’s not just remember, let’s act now.

Need Help, Contact: MMIWG National 24/7 Crisis Line – 1-844-413-6649

For more information and to Act Now:
Read the *Reclaiming Power and Place* Report here: Final Report | MMIWG
Government of Canada Website: Women and Gender Equality Canada – Canada.ca
Email: FEGC.Info.WAGE@fegc-wage.gc.ca



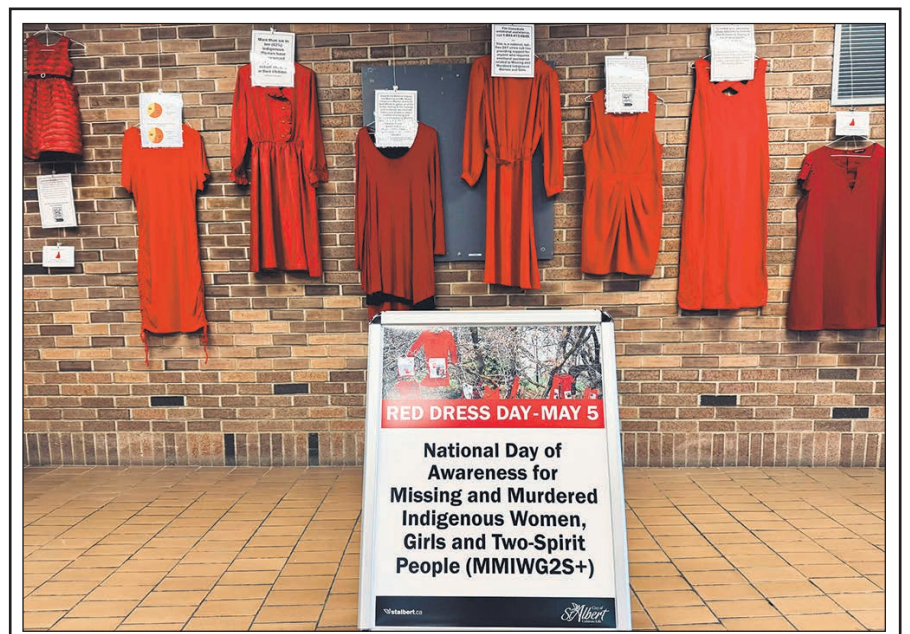
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Ben Calf Robe Society powwow celebrates culture and community

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

It was standing room only for a very busy 41st annual Ben Calf Robe Traditional Powwow. Only superseded by the Enoch First Nation powwow earlier this spring at River Cree Casino, this one was held on May 10, 2025, at Edmonton's Commonwealth Recreation Centre.

Due to field repairs outside, the powwow was forced to move to the Indoor Field House at the south side of the stadium. Space was rather tight for the hundreds that turned out to take in the popular event, but organizers managed to start pretty well on schedule with some 20 drum groups in addition to approximately 30 crafts and information booths, an Elders' tent, and stage ringing the perimeter inside. There was little space to spare as hundreds ranging in age from eight days to eight decades packed the facility till it was bursting at the seams!

Those familiar with seating shortages at previous events were smart enough to pack their own folding chairs so they could relax and enjoy the day in comfort. The highly anticipated festivity witnessed much in the way of smiles, laughter, renewal of friendships, photography and shopping around the crafts and garment booths And, oh, one vender was intelligent enough to sell bannock to the delight of many hungry customers wishing a tasty morsel. Overall, it was simply a down-right good time!

To their credit also, organizers, volunteers and staff effectively saw to it that the day's operation came off quite smoothly and on schedule. Much of that thanks to two veteran emcees – Hal Eagletail and Elmer Rattlesnake – in addition to the commandeering skills of co-arena directors Lloyd Cardinal and George Desjarlais.

The 1 p.m. Grand Entry started up smartly, guided by the beating drum and vocals of the host drum group, Mountain Kree. Meanwhile, as their drumsticks rose and fell, so too did the many feet of the Grand Entry dancers and princesses, the entourage of community and civic leaders, the Council of Elders, special dignitaries and others. Just a few of the dignitaries on hand were reps from the city police force, community leaders and education folks as well as MLAs Janice Irwin and Brooks Arcand-Paul.

Elder Fred Campiou offered the opening prayer while Phillip Campiou shared some of his kindness by setting up a few tipis outside near the

food booths and did a roaring business. Visitors and media types shuffled about constantly and excitedly to nail down that perfect angle from which to capture the best-possible photos from start to finish of that ever-popular Grand Entry. Not to be dismissed were the innumerable scores of individual selfies people shot of themselves, family members and friends with their phone cameras. For them it was the ultimate.

People were constantly mobile, welcoming the opportunity to log some history, culture and treasured moments that will likely be special keepsakes in the years and generations ahead. Indeed, the Ben Calf Robe Powwow always proves to be a time like none other!

Then too, there were the scores of people scurrying back and forth to the food and beverage wagons lining the west side of the rec centre. Indeed, it was like one humongous family picnic, where everyone was excited to visit and share stories.

Just one of those stories that was shared with this reporter was from veteran Grass and Chicken dancer, Kevin Buffalo, a Nehiyaw from Maskwacis. Kevin's "Indian name," translated to English, is 'Windychild.'

His style at the beginning was, for several years, as a Grass dancer, before taking up Chicken dancing. His first outfit/regalia, "came to me from Stan Isidore," he stated. As many on the powwow circuit know, Stan is well-known, serves as an emcee at many large powwows, including Kamloopa in B.C., one of Canada's



Maskwacis Councillor Kevin Buffalo

biggest and best that draws people from far and wide. "He did my 'End of the Trail' designed outfit," he said.

Over the years as a Grass, then Chicken dancer, Buffalo progressed and travelled widely. In one of his busiest years, he popped up at 29 powwows. Now, at age 50, "I'm down to 14 to 16," he expressed almost apologetically. And it's been quite a ride for the artist.

Of the many powwows he has travelled, two of his faves are Schemitzun in Hartford, Connecticut where he placed 2nd overall in Chicken, and Gathering of Nations at Albuquerque, New

Continued on page 4



Fancy Shawl Dancer at the Ben Calf Robe Powwow (Photos by Terry Lusty)



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Nicole Robertson’s journey into truth telling

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

When Nicole Robertson was an *iskweis*, a little girl, she knew what her calling was, “I always wanted to write,” she shared. “I knew at a very young age that writing was my path, my journey into truth telling, justice, and providing a platform all First Nations peoples to tell their stories—in our Indigenous ways and natural laws of knowing.” Robertson, founder of Muskwa Productions has been working in communications, creating space and platforms for Indigenous stories based on kinship values in everything she does, starting with her humility into understanding that, “[everyone’s] voice is just as important as my own.”

As Robertson reflects over a 24-year career, she notes that, “I am community made, not self-made” – because without the support, guidance, and the union of kinship from all her relations, Nicole would not be able to share stories about Indigenous peoples in a good way, specifically bringing justice to the forefront of everything she does.

The understanding of justice that Roberston came to know, was shared with her from an Elder that justice, “is not just us [Indigenous people]. it is all of us,” she said, “and that goes back to kinship values, our innate natural laws that are embedded into this land that we have had our ancestors live upon since time and memorial.” Those innate natural laws that Robertson speaks about are deeply tied to the natural elements, “there are elements that truly speak, the water, fire, air, land, and animals speak, and we are also

here to speak on behalf of them, that we have a platform and agency,” shared Nicole. Robertson ties this understanding of platform and agency directly to why First Nations women are so connected to the land – because they are life givers and Mother Earth teaches us about the longevity and continuation of life.

“Because we are originally from this land, we also have a responsibility for the next generations to ensure that they have water and food, at the bigger scheme of things, that is what it means to be an actual ancestor – looking at the next seven generations not just in words but in action.”

Through actions – words in motion, the heartbeat to the longevity of all our relations – when working in and for community, Robertson also makes sure to come from a place of understanding each community she works with. “If you are not the best person to tell that story, [make sure] that you are creating space for those that have that background, history or facts,” she said. “These communities should have the tools to tell their stories and also help their nations tell their stories – that is my focus, that I am helping to pass on the stories of our peoples and understanding, that it is coming from a place of humility, strength, courage, love, respect, and all the Seven Grandfather Teachings.”

Speaking to coming from a place embedded in the wisdom from the Seven Grandfather Teachings and bringing light to injustices so Indigenous lives too can be honoured as sacred, Robertson mentions that, “when I speak to stories



Nicole Robertson is founder of Muskwa Productions & Consulting.

being shared, most of Canadians just heard about Indian Residential Schools, there are still stories [coming to life] – the 60s scoop, 70s scoop, forced and coerced sterilization...up until 2023 Indigenous women were being forced to be sterilized, that is something that needs to be recognized but also new ways to implement justice in our communities.”

Sharing these stories tells the truth about cultural genocide and assimilation of the many distinct groups of peoples throughout the 634 plus First Nations across Canada, as well as the Metis, and Inuit. Hearing the stories helps all of Canada and people worldwide understand the injustices that still continue to affect the livelihoods and well-being of Indigenous peoples across the nations, and how we can come together in kinship and in good ways.

Ben Calf cont. from p 3

Mexico, where he placed last year. Both, of course, are the largest you’ll come across in all of North America. For sure the two are most memorable wins to him!

He additionally said that what he really loved about last year's placing in Albuquerque was, "I was competing with a bunch of younger dancers ranging from 18 to 49."

Today, Kevin is a whistle blower and a councillor who credits two particular Elders, "who've been influential in my life - my grampa Felix Buffalo and Percy Casper from the Kamloops, B.C. area."

Once the Grand Entry finished, the usual order of the day followed: Elder's prayer, then flags were brought forward, followed by a Victory Song, welcoming remarks, and introductions of Elders, chiefs, veterans, community leaders, princesses, and others.

A few rounds of Inter-tribal dancing followed the intros, which really helps dancers to limber up for what lies ahead – a rigorous, action-packed dance performance that takes a lot out of even the best conditioned dancers.

The evening portion incorporated a special tribute of "Honouring Our Mothers" that included gifting of flowers on Mothers’ Day and an Honour Song from Mountain Kree.


The earlier segment of the powwow featured

dance competitions by Tiny Tots, Juniors and Teens. The evening was dedicated to the Golden Age and Adult categories of 18 to 55, before the Giveaway which, of course, got all the youngsters in attendance squirming and squealing!


In wrapping up the day around 9 pm, the Eagle Staff and Flags were retired with a march-in and a few brief closing remarks were extended from Elder Betty Letendre. As well, a four-member group requested that people pray for victims of violence and especially our Missing and Murdered People and victims. Kevin Buffalo also requested prayers for a cancer victim who is in a bad way.

Hopefully next year's powwow will be outdoors. This one enjoyed fine temperatures outside of plus 20 with lots of sunshine.

Sponsors this year included: Ben Calf Robe Society, Edmonton Catholic Schools, City of Edmonton and the Council of Elders.




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Chicken Dancer at Ben Calf Robe Powwow (Photo by Terry Lusty)

Indigenous leaders urge HBC not to sell sacred artifacts

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Indigenous groups are cautioning against the Hudson’s Bay Company’s (HBC) intention to auction off its collection of thousands of pieces of art and artifacts, which could include items of cultural, historical and spiritual importance for First Nations in Canada.

“The HBC’s legacy is inseparable from the post-contact history of the original peoples on this land,” Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) Grand Chief Kyra Wilson wrote in an April 22 letter to HBC, which filed for bankruptcy in March.

“These artifacts are not simply ‘valuable assets’ or one-of-a-kind collectibles, but pieces of living history, some of which may be sacred, stolen from First Nations or properly First Nations-owned.”

As part of its efforts to pay back \$1 billion it owes creditors, HBC has closed down 96 stores across Canada, and plans on auctioning 1,700 pieces of art and 2,700 artifacts, as well as the 1670 Royal Charter King Charles II signed giving the HBC a monopoly on trade and commerce around the Hudson Bay watershed.

According to an April 29 report in the *Financial Post*, Toronto-based Urbana Corp., which owns \$500 million in assets, has expressed interest in purchasing the HBC brand and Royal Charter, promising to donate the charter to a museum.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO Memory of the World Advisory Committee has asked specifically that HBC not sell its Royal Charter.

“[The charter] is a clear example of a monarch, King Charles II, attempting to erase the political sovereignty of First Nations and Inuit and granting it instead to a private corporation,”

explained Western University historian Cody Groat, who chairs the Canadian Commission.

“Because of this, the ownership and stewardship of the Hudson’s Bay Company items is highly consequential.”

Grand Chief Wilson asked that HBC refrain from selling any items that could be connected to First Nations, make the full catalogue of items to be auctioned public, commit to a First Nations-led process to review the items, and cooperate with First Nations and other impacted groups “to identify pathways for repatriation, shared stewardship, and respectful preservation.”

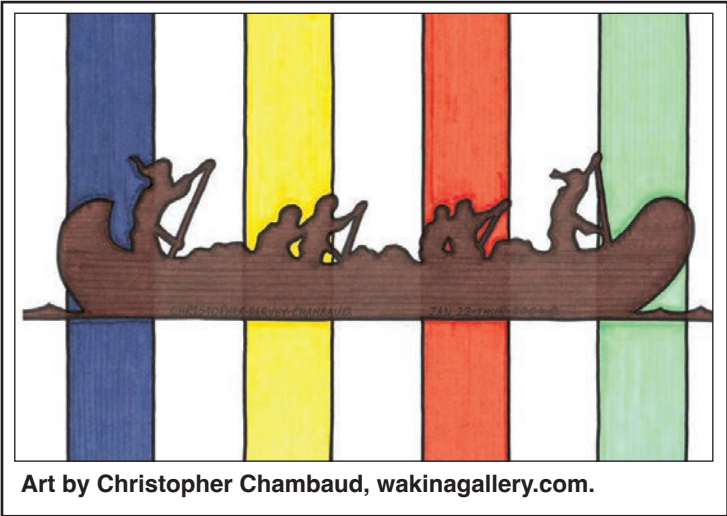
Lawyers for consultancy firm Alvarez & Marsal, which was court appointed to serve as the monitor for HBC paying back its creditors, have told the AMC that it will have a full catalogue of items HBC is selling, and that they are open to further discussions with AMC.

“Our Chiefs, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers have voiced concerns about the importance of reclaiming our cultural artifacts. We are optimistic that any items belonging to First Nations in Manitoba will be identified and returned to their rightful owners,” Wilson said in an April 24 news release.

She called on federal and provincial governments to co-develop legislation with First Nations that “creates a clear and enforceable process for the return of First Nations property.”

“Repatriating our cultural artifacts is about dignity, sovereignty and respect,” Wilson added.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which the



federal government adopted in 2021, calls on signatories to “provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action #92 calls on the corporate sector to adopt UNDRIP and “apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources.”

In an April 23 news release, the Indigenous Council of the Canadian Museums Association (IC-CMA) noted that “there are currently no UNDRIP-aligned mechanisms to ensure Indigenous communities have the first right to reclaim cultural belongings.”

In a letter to HBC, IC-CMA asked the company “to seize this moment not merely as a procedural step in asset management, but as a powerful act of relationship-building and reconciliation — a chance to move forward in a spirit of respect, accountability, and shared future-making.”

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First Nations criticism of Danielle Smith goes national

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The national advocacy organization for Treaty First Nations has joined the chorus of First Nations telling Alberta premier Danielle Smith that a referendum on Alberta independence would be illegitimate without consulting the land’s original inhabitants.

“Any proposed separation of Alberta from Canada would be fundamentally illegitimate and unconstitutional without the explicit, prior, informed and collective consent of the First Nations whose lands and rights predate the formation of the province and of Canada,” Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Woodhouse Nepinak said in a May 12 news release.

“The time has come for Alberta and Canada to move beyond colonial frameworks and honour the truth of their history by restoring justice and self-determination to First Nations.”

On May 5, Smith announced that she will chair a panel that will develop proposed policies to increase Alberta’s economic independence from Ottawa, which she promised will be put to a referendum next year.

She added that she has no intention of initiating an independence referendum, but that if a group of citizens get the required number of signatures, it will also be on the ballot in 2026.

A week earlier, Justice Minister Mickey Amery introduced legislation that will lower the number of signatures required for a citizen-initiated referendum, in addition to extending the amount of time organizers have to collect the signatures.

In response to these gestures, the AFN is asking the federal government to review the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (NRTA)—a

nearly century-old arrangement that transferred possession of Crown lands and natural resources to Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba without First Nations’ consent.

Woodhouse Nepinak emphasized that the NRTA violates the Treaties the federal government signed with First Nations in the three Prairie provinces, as well as sec. 35 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which upholds “existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada,” including First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples.

“The numbered Treaties, including 6, 7 and 8, did not surrender First Nations title to natural resources,” the national chief added.

“On the contrary, these agreements recognize the inherent rights of First Nations to manage and benefit from lands and waters within their territories. Unilateral imposition of the NRTA undermines the solemn promises of these treaties and stands in direct conflict with the Honour of the Crown.”

The chiefs of Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta left the AFN in 2022, opting to advocate for their Treaty rights directly with the federal government.

On April 30, Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation in Treaty 6 and Chief Billy-Joe Tuccaro of Mikisew Cree Nation in Treaty 8 co-wrote a cease-and-desist letter to Smith calling on her to stop making “separatist threats.”

“The province has no right to supersede or interfere with our Treaties, even indirectly by passing the buck to a ‘citizen’ referendum,” wrote

Continued on page 9

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New book offers an easy-to-read primer on Indigenous Rights

By Regan Treewater, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Book Review

“This book is not intended for lawyers,” begins author Bruce McIvor in his new book *Indigenous Rights in One Minute: What You Need to Know to Talk Reconciliation*. “It’s meant for non-lawyers interested in Canada’s commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and how to make it a reality” (10).

Dr. Bruce McIvor is uniquely equipped to help demystify the misconceptions or misunderstandings surrounding historical legal structures and policies after a distinguished career as an academic and jurist. He states in his biography posted on the First People’s Law website: “I was focused on working for social justice through an academic career in history until I began working in the law on what I expected to be a temporary basis. My work introduced me to a world of principled, high quality legal advocacy that led me back to university for a law degree and, eventually, to establish First Peoples Law.”

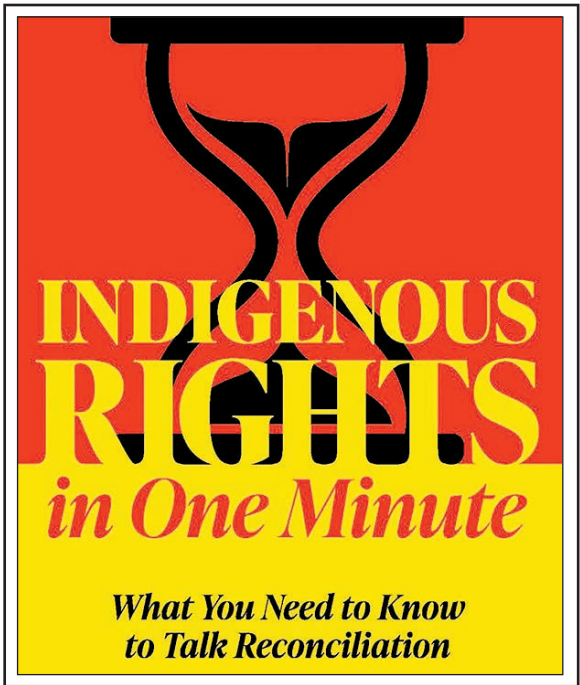
McIvor is a partner in their Vancouver office and continues to be a strong voice for informative bridgebuilding between communities. His bio elaborates: “First Peoples Law combines my passions for law, history and social justice. Most importantly, it allows me to work with other committed professionals in supporting Indigenous Peoples’ ongoing struggle for respect and justice.”

Sometimes it takes a lawyer to help demystify the intricacies of legal precedent, and that is what McIvor’s 2025 publication seeks to do. “Whether you’re completely new to Indigenous rights, have a basic understanding, want a refresher on key principles or are hoping to win an argument with a friend, family member or co-worker, I hope you find *Indigenous Rights in One Minute* useful and informative. Most of all, I hope you find it simple and easy to read” (11).

Indeed, universal accessibility informs the structure and organization of the book, and the same conversational tone carries throughout McIvor’s explanation of historical contexts and

sensitive discussions of colonial abuse and trauma. In fact, McIvor’s explanations are straightforward enough that extremely raw and painful topics seem intellectually manageable. When unpacking the significance of what ‘Land Back’ refers to, McIvor diplomatically, and concisely provides the core information that a reader would need to then begin further investigations on their own. “The Land Back movement requires Canadians to recognize the fundamental lie at the basis of the Canadian state – the lie that colonizers have simply claimed Indigenous land as their own and relegated Indigenous people to making a claim for their own land. Land Back is also about forging new relationships between Indigenous nations and the Crown that create space for Indigenous people to exercise their inherent rights and responsibilities to make decisions about their lands and benefit from them” (104).

McIvor’s structuring of the book is less of a page-turner, and more of an essential reference tool that every Canadian home should have. Instead of a traditional segmenting of topics into chapters, he has organized material by themes and provides brief explanations for key terms and legal structures using accessible language without embellishment. Literally, each of his entries can be read in close to a minute. “The brief summaries in this book no more than scratch the surface on complicated issues” (205) yet make it possible for readers to better navigate their basic understanding of important, and often intimidating material. This is an innovative strategy for engaging diverse audiences from a spectrum of the demographic pool. The straightforward and almost conversational tone means that newcomers to Canada working on acclimating themselves with the country, and who may be experiencing language obstacles, can access this vital information to gain a more



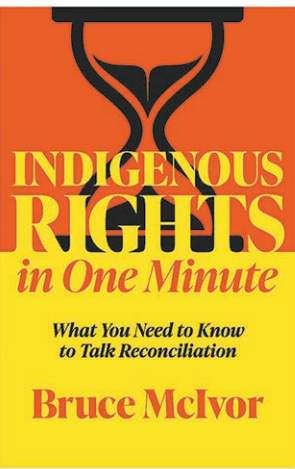
nuanced understanding of the new society they find themselves integrating into. In fact, this might be a great book to provide people before taking their citizenship tests.

Indigenous Rights in One Minute: What You Need to Know to Talk Reconciliation, is an excellent resource for the already socially conscious, and those who may previously have been a bit bashful about their lack of knowledge. It is the sort of essential resource book that will establish itself as a necessity in every Canadian home. Just as the *Elements of Style* can still be found on any writer’s bookshelf, this is a tool for engagement that should be made use of in daily life to make more informed comments and decisions and better navigate social interactions with sensitivity and compassion. Pick up a copy today, and the next time someone brings up something that is unfamiliar, let McIvor spell out the basics, in just around a minute.

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“If ever there was a book that needed to be in every school, library, and bookshop in Canada, it’s *Indigenous Rights in One Minute*. Bruce McIvor’s ability to make the information accessible to a broad, non-legal audience will help dispel myths, clarify misunderstandings, and give Canadians the tools they need to help advance reconciliation.”

—DR. PAMELA PALMATER, author of *Warrior Life: Indigenous Resistance and Resurgence*

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Coach Dakota Nepoose helps find balance in sport and life

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Dakota Nepoose grew up in the community of Maskwacis and has been part of it his whole life. Sport has always been important to him, and he continues to be involved in sport in his home community.

“Sport has always been a huge part of my life,” Nepoose shared. “I started when I was young, my mom was my coach for most of my life in basketball. That was my main sport and running. I like to think that she is the reason I went the path of Indigenous Youth Sport, because I saw her do it my whole life, and I saw the impact that sport in the community has.”

Nepoose grew up playing sport, then started coaching, which led him to become involved with the North American Indigenous Games since 2006, as well as playing, coaching and organizing the Alberta Indigenous Games since they started in 2011.

“All of those [opportunities] led me to Spirit North,” he added, “the perfect opportunity for me, because up until this point, all of my work in the community when it had to do with sport and physical activity was volunteer. It had to just be on my own time and whenever I had that free time.”

One thing Nepoose learned over the years, was to find balance in sport. He shares that lesson with youth today. “I use the Medicine Wheel in all aspects of coaching. I try to encourage all the youth that I come in contact with, to keep their life balanced and encourage them to incorporate all aspects of the Medicine Wheel. I always talk about how we are fulfilling the physical part whenever we [engage in sport], I like to encourage the emotional, spiritual, and mental—whether it’s smudging at the beginning of a

practice [or something else]. I talk about the importance of being in school ... I like to talk about having good relations emotionally when we are doing sport in our community.”

For almost 6 years now, Nepoose has been working with Spirit North, since almost the very beginning, and a majority of his time has been spent in his home community. “I have been able to be a part of the long-term growth of what a Spirit North program can look like in a community over time... I have enjoyed my role in community when it comes to just providing the physical aspect of balance.”

The balance that Nepoose speaks about, was brought on from his own awareness over time within his own holistic practice that sustains him on and off the court. At first a lot of his focus was solely on the physical aspect of sport. Gradually he came to know that he needed to engage with his emotional, mental, and spiritual health as well. Over the years as a coach, Dakota also noticed that a lot of the kids also lose touch with all other aspects of their health and well-being. He now teaches them to put just as much effort into all aspects of their life, not just the physical.

“I am just starting to see the long-term effects... it is very humbling,” he says. “Basketball has been my focus, you get a lot more time with the youth. I try and teach values that I grew up with. A lot of the youth that I worked with and coached with Spirit North are now adults. I play with some that I used to coach...its very humbling, it goes full circle. One individual I coached since he was little, ended up working with me in the community with Spirit North.”

When working with Spirit North in his home community, Dakota visits 12 schools within



Spirit North Coach Dakota Nepoose

Maskwacis, usually going to a school for a week at a time to run an outdoor program. The programs offered are either their land-based programs or through their gym program.

“When I first started, Spirit North was basically a travel program that would just bring cross country skiing to any community it could, but it was more targeted to isolated communities that wouldn’t get that experience. That was about 6 years ago. It has grown now; we are all over Canada now. We have built those relationships over 6 years, and we bring programming that the teachers might not be certified to do because a lot of it is outdoors, [with] different logistics involved – it’s like outdoor education...mountain biking, canoeing, kayaking, cross-country skiing, archery – basically a lot of land-based activities.”

Spirit North also has travel programs and is able to bring equipment into communities for Indigenous youth to engage in sport activities while building meaningful relationships with communities.

For more information visit www.spiritnorthxc.ca



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Action is needed for families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous people

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

It was a day when relatives as well as friends and acquaintances turned up by the hundreds, even thousands, all across Canada, many of them shouldering signs with pictures of their missing or murdered loved ones.

May 5 was Red Dress Day and in downtown Edmonton hundreds of people assembled at noon to execute a commemoration and awareness walk to Alberta's legislative grounds to extend their love for missing relatives and friends, and for victims of violence and murder.

Similar demonstrations occurred throughout the nation, stretching from Vancouver to Prince George, to Edmonton and Calgary, on to Regina and Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Kenora, as well as Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. It further extended across Canada's northern areas, from Whitehorse to Yellowknife, to Iqaluit and Goose Bay.

In every location people marched, many decked out in red apparel, ribbon shirts or skirts to demonstrate their love for missing and murdered individuals. Many of the participants still carry the resulting pain and sorrow. They carry the invisible but indelible scars of their lost and loved. They carry their hearts on their sleeves still grieving, still sensing that incredible loss of life, still angry and bitter toward the justice system in this country that they consider inadequate and uncaring about Native lives.

Dozens upon dozens seek justice and closure so they and others can heal. However, their journey seems so futile in the face of adversity. Many ask, "When will it stop, what will it take, what can we do?"

They're tormented by the thought that, somewhere out there the perpetrators of such

heinous crimes roam about freely, may re-offend, and have not paid for their crimes.

Friends and allies of families who have lost loved ones feel the love, the injustice, the hurts and are also impacted emotionally by the memory of those individuals. We too, have our moments of anguish, but also disgust and contempt for a society that does not seem to do enough for the Native community.

Fingers continue to point at police services and courts that find it difficult to arrest and convict such criminals, shell out inadequate sentences, wind up setting guilty parties free and grant early paroles to the criminals in question.

The cry of the Red Dress marchers rents the air each and every time these walks are held. The participants at the walks are generally focused and adamant for justice. The situation has gone on far too long, especially regarding the Indigenous victims who fail to get the attention they deserve which often smacks of inequality in this society.

The Edmonton walk took flight at noon on May 5, leaving from Jasper Avenue and 106 Street. It travelled one block west where the crowd held a large round dance amid gusts of red smoke symbolizing the red dresses and red lives. Ten minutes later, the group departed south, bound for the Alberta Legislature grounds to listen to brief speeches and stories, to honour the missing and murdered, demonstrating that they are not forgotten, and remain cherished and loved – forever.

In short, the walkers felt justified in their quest for justice, compassion and closure. They seek answers to ease their troubled hearts and minds, and that can lead to the healing process they so desperately need.

They walk to elevate awareness of the victims,



and to show how unbalanced our world really is, and just what the truths really are. In that respect it is similar to the lack of awareness and truths about all the atrocities of the residential school, foster homes, and hospitals that housed innumerable Indigenous patients.

As such, that quest will continue, relentlessly, fearlessly and lovingly because participants want and demand justice, equality and resolution in a world that is supposed to espouse justice, equality and liberty, yet fails exceedingly when it comes to Canada's Native people. Consequently, Canadian society needs to step up and be held accountable.

Indeed, this is what so many of those walking are protesting and giving voice to.

As the old adage goes, "Walk in their shoes." What if it was their own family members and loved ones subjected to violence, brutality, and murder? Might they be treated differently?

Where lies the respect, integrity and dignity towards Canada's First Nations, Metis and Inuit of our great country? Will there ever be a resolution?

Danielle Smith cont. from p 6

chiefs Sunshine and Tuccaro.

The chiefs wrote an additional letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney asking him to “get the province of Alberta in line.”

Chiefs from Treaty 6, 7 and 8 First Nations in Alberta held a joint May 6 emergency meeting in Edmonton to discuss a unified response to Smith stoking the fires of separatism.

At the meeting, Chief Ouray Crowfoot of Siksika First Nation in Treaty 7 said that the premier’s “rhetoric is not just an attack on First Nations, it is an attack on the people who call Alberta home.”



“You only have to look south of the border, at the chaos and uncertainty that is going on in the world. This time, more than any time, we should be bonding together and talking about how we are going to unite as a nation versus separation as a province,” said Chief Crowfoot.

Speaking at a May 1 meeting with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, AFN National Chief Woodhouse Nepinak noted that this isn’t the first time First Nations leaders have had to assert their rights in the face of separatist threats, referring to Quebec’s 1995 succession referendum, which narrowly failed.

“You can’t do it. All of Canada is Treaty territory,” she said. “First Nations were here first. We welcomed people to our shores. We welcomed people with open arms.”

“But at the same time, if people aren’t happy in this beautiful country that we’re building together, then you’re free to go and live wherever you want,” Woodhouse Nepinak added to applause from the Manitoba chiefs.


“You can take the dirt that maybe your ancestors brought with them when they came over here from other places. That’s the only piece of land that you’re going to take. You’re not going to take any Treaty land.”



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Leaders push for energy wealth and ownership

By Jeremy Appel, LJI Reporter

Less than a week before Billy Morin was elected as the Conservative MP for Edmonton Northwest in the Canadian federal election, the former elected chief of Enoch Cree Nation moderated a panel on Indigenous opportunities in hydrogen.

The Canadian Hydrogen Convention was held on April 23 and 24 at the Edmonton Convention Centre, with the second day including the panel, “Indigenous Partnerships for a Clean Energy Future.”

Grand Chief Greg Desjarlais of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Salish Elements chairman and co-founder Reuben George, and Xaxli’p (Fountain First Nation) executive director Andrew Mercer spoke on the Morin-moderated panel.

Salish Elements, an Indigenous-run company that produces green hydrogen—meaning hydrogen that is made with water, rather than natural gas—signed a May 2024 agreement to build a 25-megawatt hydrogen production facility on the Xaxli’p reserve in Lillooet, British Columbia.

“This is the first major business development that we’ll be doing on the traditional territory,” Mercer said, emphasizing that the project will be 51 per cent owned by Xaxli’p.

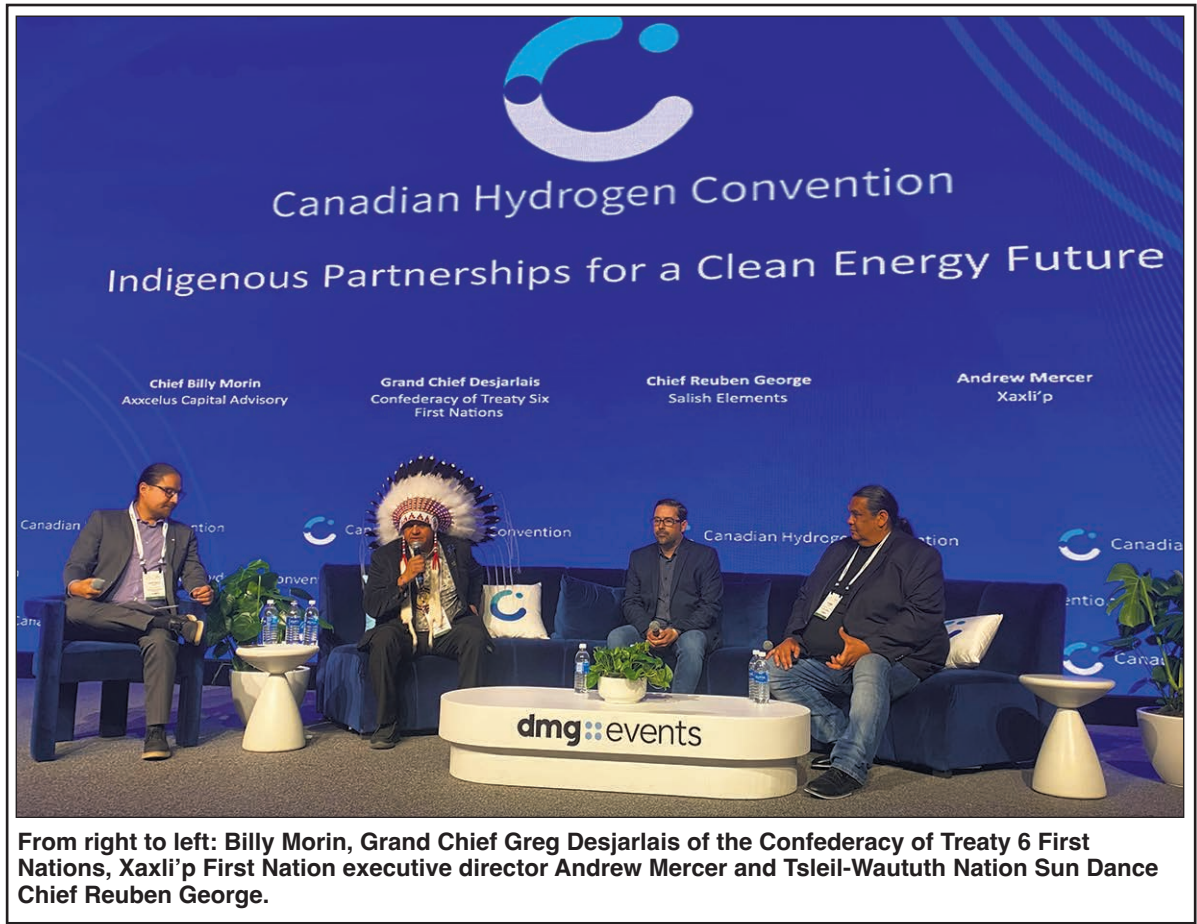
“It’s not that other companies haven’t come in before and tried to partner or to work with the community. However, none have done it in a way such that Salish is doing it.”

In addition to his role with Salish Resources, Reuben George is the Sun Dance chief of Tsleil-Waututh Nation, a Coastal Salish community based in North Vancouver.

George said his company is working to build hydrogen fuelling stations along the B.C. coast “from Vancouver to Prince Rupert,” and has been in talks with native tribes in the United States “to duplicate what we’re doing in British Columbia in Washington State.”

Mercer emphasized the collaborative approach George’s company took towards the project on the Xaxli’p reserve.

“Folks from Salish Elements come out to the community. They meet with the community, they talk to the community, they address the concerns



From right to left: Billy Morin, Grand Chief Greg Desjarlais of the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations, Xaxli’p First Nation executive director Andrew Mercer and Tsleil-Waututh Nation Sun Dance Chief Reuben George.

of the community. They change their model based on the feedback that the community gives, and that’s so important,” said Mercer.

Grand Chief Desjarlais, who’s also chief of Frog Lake First Nations, which is located about 250 km east of Edmonton, emphasized the importance of having Indigenous communities involved in energy projects at every step of the way.

“I always say it’s good to have the indigenous involvement at the beginning of the project, because you don’t want a cranky Indian at the back of the project, because the projects don’t go anywhere,” said Grand Chief Desjarlais.

“That’s the solution—invite the First Nations to the table and offer them some equity position, because there’s money available.”

Under former premier Jason Kenney, the Alberta government introduced the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, a Crown corporation that provides loan guarantees for First Nations and Métis communities to invest in equity for energy projects.

Morin, who served as the vice-chair of the Edmonton Region Hydrogen Hub, which aims to grow the local hydrogen industry, when it was established in 2021, said his consulting firm, Axxcelus Capital Advisory, is working with

Qalipu First Nation Band in Newfoundland to facilitate Indigenous investment in energy projects in Mi’kmaq territory.

“Indigenous Peoples are not homogenous, but we do cover, obviously, the whole territory of Turtle Island, which is Canada,” said Morin.

Desjarlais said that First Nations Peoples must be “open for business, and that’s how people have to view us.”


“We should be like our Saudi brothers,” said the grand chief. “We should be the richest people on this earth. And that’s what we’re trying to get to.”

He noted that he met with George for 10 minutes, and in that brief time “we already had made a trade between two men, two chiefs.”


Desjarlais is a director of the Western Indigenous Pipeline Group, which is working with Pembina Pipelines to secure an equity stake in the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion (TMX).

George, as a facilitator in renewable energy projects, noted that he’s on the opposite side of the pipeline debate as Desjarlais.

“But look what we did. We put aside our differences, and we’re going to trade some buffalo for some salmon, and that’s what we do as First Nation people,” said George.




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Looking for a binge-worthy show? Watch ‘North of North’

By Regan Treewater, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

If you’re looking for something binge-worthy to watch, *North of North*, created by Stacey Aglok MacDonald and Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, streaming now on Netflix, APTN and CBC Gem, is an uplifting and entertaining Canadian series that the whole family can enjoy. The comedy premiered its first season in 2025, and viewers are already chomping at the bit for more. Its title provides the perfect foreshadow to the show’s premise set in a fictional Nunavut town: aptly dubbed, Ice Cove. Starring Anna Lambe, an up-and-coming young talent born in Iqaluit, the show centers around an Inuk woman in her early twenties seeking independence and agency. This fresh take on a classic trope of breakaway empowerment manages to be light-hearted while also tackling some tough topics: colonialism, subjugation, and even the traumatic legacy of residential schools.

When Lambe’s character, Siaja, finds herself ready to branch out from being a stay-at-home-mom, she is met with ridicule and opposition from her husband Ting, played by Kelly William. She is confronted by secrets revealed and the realization that she would be happier as a single mom. She moves back in with her mother, who raised her alone, and who has celebrated several years of sobriety after long battling alcohol addiction.

Now, this set-up might sound familiar, and your question might be: how is this different from other similar shows? *North of North* is a remarkable step forward in Inuk portraiture and mainstream storytelling. It is a show that is marketed to diverse audiences, and as it is housed on Netflix, APTN, and CBC Gem, there is a larger viewership that is being introduced to *North of North*. Although the colonial system of oppression cannot be taken out of the equation, this is, at its core, a comedy, and one that manages to bring depth and texture to depicting Inuk communities.

Sometimes humour is the best way to approach difficult topics and encourage societal reflection. If so, then *North of North* can be regarded as a critical commentary on contemporary Canadian issues. In this fictional town that Siaja has been born and raised in, the local community centre director and programs organizer is a settler-Canadian named Helen, played by Mary Lynn Rajskub. The American-born actress may be familiar for her appearances in films such as

Dude Where’s My Car, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Sweet Home Alabama*, and *Punch-Drunk Love*. The relationship between Helen and Siaja is at first glance humorous, but speaks to a deeper social power disparity. After Helen begrudgingly hires Siaja as her assistant it becomes clear that the young Inuk woman is far more competent and well-equipped to perform the responsibilities of a community leader. Helen’s fumbling attempts to speak Inuk at a town celebration appear performative, despite the sincerity of her desire to belong and contribute to Ice Cove. It’s no ‘spoiler’ to characterize Siaja and Helen’s interactions as complex: the former is powerless despite literally inhabiting her home turf, while the latter is well-intentioned but misguided. The developing dynamic nudges the viewer to consider what results from a lack of autonomy in Indigenous communities.

The hyper-exoticization of Inuk culture by settlers is also explored through a disturbingly predatory lens at times. The show examines with a critical eye how Indigenous, in this case Inuk, women are objectified as mysterious: an intrigue to be conquered. The critical viewer may laugh along with the comical antics of such caricatures, but also see how this objectification is profoundly problematic as it promotes a lack of equity and respect. There’s no harm in appreciating the entertainment value of such exchanges, but this also speaks to the brilliance of *North of North*.

The show continuously makes light of the lack of resources the community endures: limited housing, a lack of employment, and scarcity of luxury goods. However, even as viewers are encouraged to laugh along as Helen goes to extreme efforts to have a case of Malbek flown in from Ottawa, it also becomes clear that the decadence of urban Canadian life that the majority of the country enjoys is a foreign concept to anyone who has never left a northern community. What is more, the dilapidated conditions of Ice Cove’s infrastructure would be troubling to most, but are regarded as a foregone



Screenshot from the Trailer of 'North of North'

conclusion by the show’s characters emphasizing the inequitable allocation of wealth within a broader Canadian context.

Perhaps most significant is how the show deals with the stereotyping of Indigenous peoples. Instead of ignoring the perpetuated prejudices that mainstream popular culture disseminates, *North of North* confronts these perceptions as ridiculous, thus dismantling their potency. Instead of not talking about substance abuse, generational trauma, colonial violence, and residential schools, the series manages to promote more nuanced understandings of the human faces attached to these struggles in an empathetic and relatable way.

North of North is soulful storytelling at its best, with loveable characters that audiences can really grow to care about. It is accessible not just to Canadian audiences, but should be appreciated as an artful exploration of complex human obstacles with honesty and depth. By bringing Inuk characters and stories to the mainstream, *North of North* is an innovation in broadening compassion and understanding while fully celebrating the traditions and beautiful diversity of Inuk culture. So, consider adding *North of North* to your ‘watch list’ and enjoy some trailblazing in Canadian television.

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Ben Calf Robe Powwow Photo Gallery by Terry Lusty



The 41st Ben Calf Robe Powwow was held on May 10 in Edmonton. It was a wonderful celebration of culture and community.

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