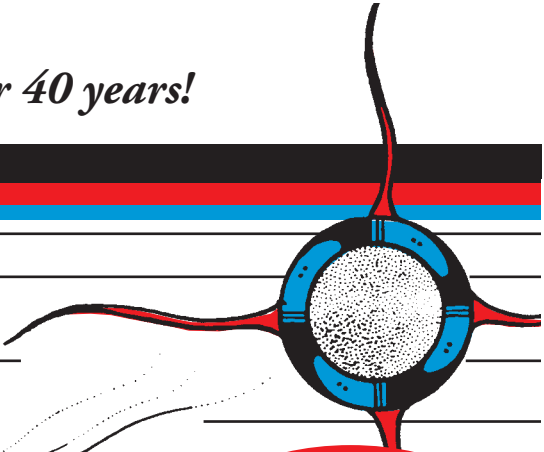


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Alt-pop artist blends music with identity and storytelling

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Métis alt-pop artist Robin Cisek is moving through a busy summer season, with appearances across Alberta that include Métis Music Fest at Métis Crossing, Alberta Métis Fest, K-Days in Edmonton, and her upcoming show “Métis Music and Drag”. Through each stage, she continues to build a career rooted in storytelling, emotional expression, and independent artistic vision.

Cisek recently performed at Métis Music Fest at Métis Crossing on June 12, an experience she says reflects the importance of community connection and cultural celebration. “As a Métis artist, having the support of my community is incredibly meaningful. I am very proud of my Métis heritage.”

Cisek identifies as a Métis alt-pop artist with roots in the Red River Settlement in Manitoba and is a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta. She says her upbringing in community continues to shape not only her identity, but also the emotional foundation of her music. “I’ve been raised in a community that values art and connection, and that’s had a huge impact on my career and the music I create,” she said.

While her sound is not traditional Métis music, Cisek emphasizes that her artistry is still deeply informed by the values she grew up with. “I’m influenced by connection, hope, and resilience,” she said. “I try to write from the heart and create music that makes people feel seen and heard.”

Her work focuses on emotional honesty and storytelling, with the goal of creating music that resonates personally with listeners while reflecting her lived experience as an Indigenous artist navigating both identity and industry.

Cisek’s journey into music was shaped in part by a significant health challenge. A former athlete, she was diagnosed with thoracic outlet

syndrome, a condition that required major surgery and forced her to step away from sports. She continues to experience chronic pain at times. “I was really into sports and considered myself a bit of an athlete,” she said. “I had to go through major surgery, and I still deal with chronic pain here and there. Eventually I had to quit sports because it became a liability.”

That difficult transition ultimately became a turning point in her creative life. What began as a loss in one area opened the door to another form of expression. “That experience pushed me toward music and the visual arts,” she said. “It came out of necessity, but it became a really meaningful way for me to reflect on what I was going through.”

During that time, songwriting became both a coping mechanism and a creative outlet, allowing her to process her experiences while developing her voice as an artist.

Today, Cisek works as an independent musician, something she says is central to how she approaches her career. “Being an independent artist has allowed me to share my music, visuals, and project vision authentically, without too much outside influence,” she said. “I would love to see more Indigenous artists have that opportunity.”

She adds that maintaining creative control allows her to shape not only her sound, but also the visual and conceptual direction of her work. For Cisek, independence is closely tied to authenticity and artistic freedom.

Her work has gained recognition on multiple levels. She is a two-time Top 100 finalist in CBC Music’s Searchlight competition, has charted on U.S. Mediabase and the Indigenous Music Countdown, and received the 2022 Indigenous



Superstar Music Award for Best Emerging Artist.

Cisek says these milestones have helped expand her audience while reinforcing her commitment to her craft. “It’s opened the door to a much wider audience,” she said. “It’s allowed me to keep growing and set higher goals.”

Despite the growing recognition, she says her focus remains grounded in connection—both with listeners and with the community.

Looking ahead, Cisek is preparing for her show “Métis Music and Drag” and will also perform at K-Days in Edmonton, where she will open for Aysanabe on the CKUA stage on July 22.

She describes her live performances as immersive experiences that blend vocals, storytelling, and live production techniques. As a vocalist, songwriter, and producer, she often incorporates live effects and mixing into her sets. “I love telling stories through my music,” she said. “My goal is to take people on a journey.”

For Cisek, that journey is not only musical, but emotional—inviting audiences into a space of reflection, connection, and shared experience. Above all, she says her goal is simple: to make people feel understood through her work.

“I just want people to feel seen, heard, and uplifted through the music,” she said.



**Otipemisiwak
Métis Government**

NOTICE TO CITIZENS

Notice of Meeting

Otipemisiwak Métis Government Annual Citizens’ Gathering

August 21 & 22, 2026

Slave Lake, Alberta

In accordance with the Constitution and Laws of the Otipemisiwak Metis Government,
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Métis Nation within Alberta will gather for the 98th time
at the annual Citizens’ Gathering of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government to be held
on August 21 & 22, 2026 at Slave Lake, Alberta.

In accordance with the Constitution and Self-Government Act, Citizens of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government
who attend the Citizens’ Gathering shall have the opportunity to present and vote on Citizens’ Proposals.

In accordance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and the Citizens’ Gathering Rules of Procedure
all copies of proposed Special Resolutions must be provided by email to the Chair of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government
via Chair@metis.org no later than 3:00 PM on July 24, 2026.

Learn more about the Citizens’ Proposal & Special Resolution processes here:

AlbertaMetis.com/Citizens-Gathering-2026

Dated this 8th day of July, 2026 at Edmonton, Alberta.

Garrett Tomlinson, Chair, Otipemisiwak Métis Government

How an entrepreneur turned family stories into a publishing movement

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For the founder of Eaglespeaker Publishing, Jason Eaglespeaker, storytelling was never simply about books. It was about survival, healing, and ensuring future generations inherit the truth from the people who lived it.

“I’m not a publisher who became Indigenous,” he says. “I’m an Indigenous person who became a publisher.”

Rooted in both his Blackfoot and Coast Salish heritage, Jason is Kainai on his mother’s side through Linda Eaglespeaker and Duwamish on his father’s side through Jeffrey Thomas of Muckleshoot. Raised by his late grandparents, Glenn and Leona Eaglespeaker, on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta, he grew up surrounded by knowledge keepers whose stories rarely appeared in textbooks.

“There were no jobs on my rez,” he recalls. “But as a youngster I was shown that it’s not about how many resources you have, it’s how resourceful you are.”

That lesson sparked an entrepreneurial spirit at an early age. As a child, he sold frybread kits at powwows, picked and sold Saskatoon berries, traded American snacks, cut Christmas trees, recycled cans and bottles, and made crafts for the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Gift Shop.

“I was that kid who always had twenty dollars in my pocket while everyone I knew was five bucks short,” he laughs.

His path into publishing was anything but conventional. A self-described high school dropout with “zero colonial degrees, diplomas, or certificates,” Jason spent years working with Indigenous organizations, youth, Elders, artists, and educators. Along the way, he noticed an ongoing problem: many Indigenous stories were never being told.

That realization came into sharp focus while working for the Calgary Board of Education in 2008. At the time, he found few educational resources that fully captured the realities of residential schools.

So he created one himself.

Using a coil notebook, he assembled a scrapbook documenting the experiences of his mother and her eight siblings at St. Paul’s Residential School near Cardston, Alberta. The project, titled *UNeducation: A Residential School Graphic Novel*, combined hand-drawn illustrations, survivor interviews, historical newspaper clippings, and community testimony. When he shared the single copy with educators, the response was

immediate. “They wanted to buy ten.”

He dismantled his original copy and painstakingly recreated ten by hand. Soon there was demand for 100 more, and eventually the Alberta government requested 1,500 copies. His family formed an assembly line to keep up with orders, but outsourcing the project to a commercial copy centre proved costly. “It ended up costing me more than I was paid.”

Then came a request from the federal government for 5,000 copies. Instead of walking away, Jason searched online for how to produce a library-quality publication. Two days of research later, he had taught himself the publishing business. The experience changed his life.

Eventually, he realized that waiting for mainstream publishers to create space for Indigenous voices was not enough. “If the door wasn’t opening, we needed to build our own.”

That vision became Eaglespeaker Publishing, a company dedicated to helping Indigenous people tell their own stories, in their own voices, and on their own terms.

He believes mainstream publishing often favours stories that fit familiar narratives of trauma and history. While those stories are important, he says they do not represent the full spectrum of Indigenous life.

“Where are the stories about everyday Indigenous families? Indigenous humour? Youth voices? Community projects? The stories that exist around kitchen tables every day?”

He argues that reconciliation cannot simply be performative. Institutions must move beyond symbolic gestures and invest in Indigenous-led businesses, educators, and decision-makers.

Publishers and media organizations, he says,



Jason Eaglespeaker

also carry a responsibility when covering residential schools. “Residential schools are not simply a historical topic. Their impacts continue today through family separation, language loss, intergenerational trauma, and systemic inequities.”

At the same time, Indigenous people cannot be defined solely by those experiences. “Public understanding must include both the harms of the past and the strength, creativity, and success that exist in Indigenous communities today.”

His commitment to future generations also drives his work. Through his Student Voices program, he travels to schools across North America, helping students transform their stories, poetry, reflections, and artwork into professionally published books. “When students hold a published book containing their own words, something changes,” he says. “They begin to understand that their voice matters.”

Ultimately, he says his work is not only for today’s readers but for descendants he will never meet. “My true audience is my descendants,” he reflects. “Just as I look to my ancestors for guidance, my descendants will look to me. If I don’t share my story in my own words, someone else will—and I guarantee they’ll get it wrong.”

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BRANDED CONTENT

FortisAlberta expands its wildfire prevention efforts with new public safety measures

Extreme wildfire conditions are becoming more common across Alberta, with recent years seeing an increase in both the frequency and scale of wildfire activity. While the risks are a growing concern, there is positive work underway to help reduce the risk.

FortisAlberta takes a proactive approach to wildfire safety

FortisAlberta’s wildfire preparedness efforts combine advanced technology, real-time awareness of local conditions and coordination with local authorities. This approach supports year-round wildfire mitigation measures, including regular inspections, vegetation management around power lines, early-warning technology to detect issues and infrastructure upgrades to improve resilience in wildfire-prone areas.

In rare cases, if conditions such as strong winds, low humidity and dry vegetation create extreme wildfire risk, FortisAlberta may implement a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) as a last resort safety measure. A PSPS involves temporarily turning off electricity in targeted areas where operating power lines could increase the risk of wildfire during these extreme conditions.



Although a PSPS event would be a rare occurrence, it’s important that individuals and businesses are aware and prepared.

If conditions warrant, we will notify customers and coordinate with municipalities and emergency partners. We would also leverage social media to help warn residents and businesses that we will be shutting off power.

Denis Andre, Manager, Land Environment & Sustainability at FortisAlberta



This advanced notice helps residents and businesses prepare, particularly customers who rely on medical devices that require electricity. To stay informed, update your contact information with the retailer that issues your utility bill.

A community approach to wildfire mitigation

“Preparing for wildfire risk is a shared responsibility,” says Lorena Charest, Crisis and Wildfire Communications Strategist. “Staying ready helps everyone. Steps such as keeping devices charged, assembling an emergency kit and staying informed about wildfire conditions and potential power outages can make a meaningful difference.”

Alberta’s provincial government advises individuals to take proactive steps to build wildfire resilience for their properties and be prepared.



Clear dead wood, pine needles, debris and firewood within 1.5 metres of your home to reduce wildfire risk.



Stay informed about local conditions and update your contact information with the retailer that issues your utility bill.



Build an emergency kit with water, non-perishable food, a flashlight, radio, medications and important documents.



Have an evacuation plan for your household, including pets and livestock.

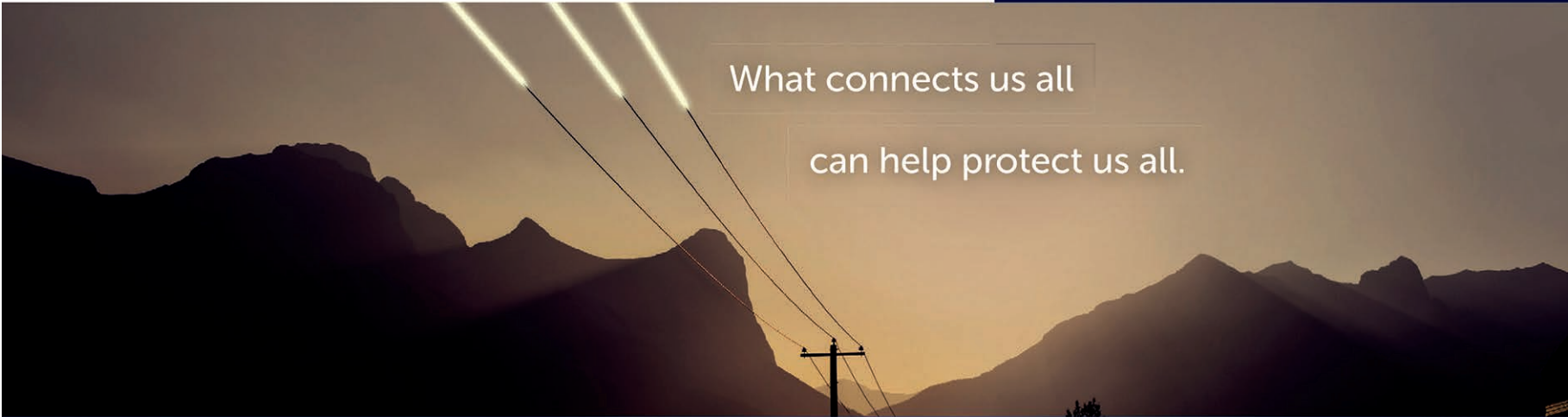


Keep devices and medical equipment charged and check on neighbours who may need help.



Follow Alberta Wildfire fire bans and restrictions. When permitted, fully extinguish firepits and burn barrels.

Visit alberta.ca/wildfire-preparedness for more.
This is intended for general information only.



What connects us all
can help protect us all.

For more information on PSPS and how to stay safe this season, visit fortisalberta.com/psps

These images are for illustrative purpose only. Remember to keep a safe distance away from power lines. For more information visit fortisalberta.com/safety



The line that connects us all

National Indigenous Peoples Day celebrated at the Legislature

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Indigenous culture, music and community were celebrated on the Alberta Legislature Grounds during a National Indigenous Peoples Day event held Friday, June 19.

The event brought together performers, Elders, community members and government representatives to recognize the histories, cultures and contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across Alberta and Canada.

Entertainment throughout the day featured performances by the Prince Charles Youth Fiddlers, Chubby Cree, Jenna Broomfield and Brittney Porter, and Bobbi-Jo Starr. Attendees also had the opportunity to gather with respected community members, including Elder Margaret Cardinal, MJ Belcourt Moses and Teague Cardinal.

National Indigenous Peoples Day is observed annually across Canada as a time to celebrate Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions and achievements.

Performer Bobbi-Jo Starr said reconciliation is about restoring relationships while also reconnecting Indigenous peoples to their identities and responsibilities to the land and water.

“Reconciliation for me, is about restoring a relationship that has been broken or forgotten between government, institutions and Indigenous people. But it also means remembering who we

are as Indigenous people, and our relationship to the Land and Water,” Starr said.

She added that performing at the Alberta government’s Indigenous Peoples Day celebration provided an opportunity to share an important message through music.

“Performing at Alberta’s Government Indigenous Day celebrations became a great opportunity to share my music about protecting water and encourage all my relations to speak up. We need your voices,” she said.

In a statement provided to *Alberta Native News*, Minister of Indigenous Relations Rajan Sawhney said the day serves as an opportunity to recognize the lasting impact Indigenous Peoples continue to have on Alberta.

“National Indigenous Peoples Day is an opportunity to celebrate the cultures, histories and leadership of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and to recognize their enduring contributions that continue to shape Alberta’s communities, economy and future,” Sawhney said.

The minister also highlighted Alberta’s ongoing reconciliation efforts, noting progress on many of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action that fall under provincial responsibility.

“Reconciliation is built through relationships, learning and sustained action. Alberta has made



Bobbi-Jo Starr at the NIPD event.

progress on 24 of the 29 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action that relate to the province, including work across education, justice, child welfare and health, while continuing to identify opportunities for further progress through deeper engagement and listening,” she said.

Sawhney also shared a message directed to Indigenous youth.

“To Indigenous youth, your cultures, knowledge and leadership are essential to Alberta’s future, and there are growing opportunities ahead where your voices will continue to shape strong and inclusive communities.”

The event was one of many held across Alberta to mark National Indigenous Peoples Day and celebrate the resilience, strength and contributions of Indigenous Peoples.

New funding for MMIWG programs projected to be cut in half

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Canadian government is backsliding on its funding commitments for achieving the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ (MMIWG) Calls for Justice, according to a new report.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) tracked federal spending on programs related to the 231 Calls for Justice from the inquiry into MMIWG’s 2019 final report, *Reclaiming Power and Place*.

The CCPA identified \$146.3 billion in spending commitments related to the calls from 2019/2020 to 2030/31 across 94 federal programs and initiatives. That figure includes \$24.7 billion, or 17 per cent, for new programs, including child welfare, housing and infrastructure, health and wellness, culture, and safety.

“These investments reflect a recognition that the violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people is systemic, and that ending it requires sustained coordinated action,” reads the June 2026 CCPA report.

“However, the findings of this report make clear that this progress is fragile. Nearly half

of all federal programs linked to the calls have ended or are at risk of being sunsetted in the coming years.”

According to the CCPA analysis, annual spending on new programs is projected to be cut in half from a height of \$3.7 billion in 2024/25 to about \$1.8 billion in 2028/29 and afterwards, potentially “erasing recently developed social infrastructure and reversing progress.”

Niall Harney, a Winnipeg-based senior researcher for the CCPA who co-authored the report, told *Alberta Native News* that the bulk of cumulative funding from 2019 to 2031 “comes from longstanding programs that the federal government has a constitutional obligation to deliver on.”

These include education on reserve, income assistance, and child and family services.

The reason that new annual spending is projected to be reduced so sharply over the next few years is that many of these programs are “short-term in nature,” Harney explained. But some weren’t funded as advertised.

The Indigenous Shelter and Transitional

Housing Initiative, launched in 2021, was supposed to provide \$720 million to build homes for Indigenous people facing gender-based violence, yet only \$260 million was actually funded before the program ended in 2025, the report notes.

Another area of backsliding is mental health support. The feds have provided \$2.1 billion for its Mental Wellness Program, which will end in 2028.

In March 2026, the government announced \$630 million in funding for Indigenous mental health for two years as part of a broader \$2-billion commitment for essential Indigenous programming.

“A lot of these programs ... require communities to apply to the programs, and then as these programs change names or change structure, communities have to find a whole new kind of pathway to apply for funding,” said Harney.

“This lack of long-term stable funding really slows down progress on addressing the calls.”

The former chair of the MMIWG inquiry, Marion Buller has criticized the “glacial pace” of action, “if any,” on the Calls for Justice, a concern echoed by Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak, as well as the Native Women’s Association of Canada and the

Continued on page 11



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Deaf, Two-Spirit artist grows through culture, and creative vision

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The spectacular image on the cover of the July edition of *Alberta Native News* is a collaboration by contemporary artist Torrie Ironstar and LEGO brick master Sam Malmberg. The huge LEGO mosaic was exhibited at the Saskatchewan AI Expo in April 2026. It was created based on two pieces of Ironstar’s art (468 sections), reconfigured by Sam Malmberg and assembled by expo attendees to create the final masterpiece.

For Ironstar, a Deaf, Two-Spirit Indigenous artist from Regina and a member of Carry the Kettle Nakoda Nation, the past year has been marked by growth, opportunity, and an expanding artistic vision that continues to connect audiences with stories of identity, culture, and lived experience.

Since our last conversation, Ironstar has participated in two major group exhibitions, one in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and another in Saskatoon. He is also currently serving as an artist-in-residence with the City of Regina, a

milestone that reflects the increasing recognition of his work across the Prairies.

“My art is becoming more detailed and larger in scale,” said Ironstar. “Being part of these exhibitions has given me more knowledge and confidence to share my personal stories and experiences.”

Among his recent works, Ironstar said a painting exploring the strength and power of matriarchy is particularly meaningful. The piece reflects both personal experience and cultural teachings while demonstrating a growing willingness to share deeper aspects of his story through art.

As a Deaf, Two-Spirit, and Indigenous artist, Ironstar’s unique perspective shapes every aspect of his creative process. Rather than relying on words, his work communicates through colour, shape, and symbolism.

“My Deaf eyes allow me to tell stories without language,” he said. “The colours, shapes, and connections create stories that people can relate to through their own experiences.”

His connection to Carry the Kettle Nakoda Nation remains a powerful influence. Stories shared by family members continue to inspire him as he learns more about Nakoda history and culture and incorporates those teachings into his artwork.

“I think of my paintings as a form of oral history,” he said. “They help audiences see and learn about Nakoda culture while I continue learning myself.”



Torrie Ironstar and Brick Master Sam Malmberg with their LEGO Collaboration.

Looking ahead, Ironstar is preparing for an upcoming exhibition at Saokitapi Gallery in Lethbridge, Alta., titled *Listening Through Light*. He is also exploring additional artist residency opportunities in Saskatoon and Edmonton while continuing his current residency in Regina.

Reflecting on his recent success, Ironstar says the greatest lesson has been learning to appreciate every opportunity, regardless of its size.

“Always be grateful for what you have,” he said. “Accept opportunities when they come, even if they seem small. Those opportunities can take you further than you expect.”

As his artistic journey continues, Ironstar remains committed to creating work that elevates Indigenous identity, Deaf visibility, and Two-Spirit representation while sharing stories that resonate across communities.



Northern Lights © by Torrie Ironstar



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HIV Edmonton: U=U and reducing stigma. Prevention is the cure.

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For more than four decades, HIV Edmonton has been at the forefront of HIV prevention, education, and support services in Alberta. Founded in 1984 during the earliest days of the AIDS crisis, the organization continues to evolve its approach to reflect modern medical breakthroughs while addressing ongoing stigma, inequities, and gaps in access to care.

Executive Director Catherine Broomfield says the organization was born out of community care and urgency.

“HIV Edmonton has been in existence for 42 years,” she said. “We were started in 1984 by a group of friends who were supporting the first Edmontonian who had an AIDS diagnosis.”

Today, HIV Edmonton provides outreach, education, testing, peer support, and wraparound services, while maintaining a strong focus on equity for people impacted by HIV and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs).

“At the heart of our work is making sure stigma, bias, and stereotypes don’t prevent people from accessing care,” Broomfield said.

Breaking Stigma Through Education

One of the most persistent challenges the organization continues to see is misinformation about HIV transmission.

Katherine Ciampa, Indigenous Capacity Building Educator, HIV Edmonton, says education remains one of the most powerful tools in prevention. “A lot of people in the community still believe that HIV can be spread through saliva, sweat, hugging, or sharing dishes,” she said. “So it’s really important to reduce that stigma that people living with HIV face every day.”

Ciampa works directly with Indigenous

communities, providing culturally grounded education on HIV and STBBIs. She also highlights the importance of biomedical prevention tools such as PrEP and PEP.

“PrEP is a medication taken by HIV-negative people to prevent HIV infection before exposure,” she said. “PEP must be started within 72 hours after a possible exposure to HIV.”

U=U: A Scientific Breakthrough Changing Lives

One of the most significant advances in HIV science is U=U (Undetectable=Untransmittable).

U=U means that when a person living with HIV takes antiretroviral treatment consistently and maintains an undetectable viral load, the virus cannot be transmitted sexually.

Ciampa says the message is essential for reducing stigma. “It reduces stigma and helps people better understand HIV and how it is transmitted,” she said.

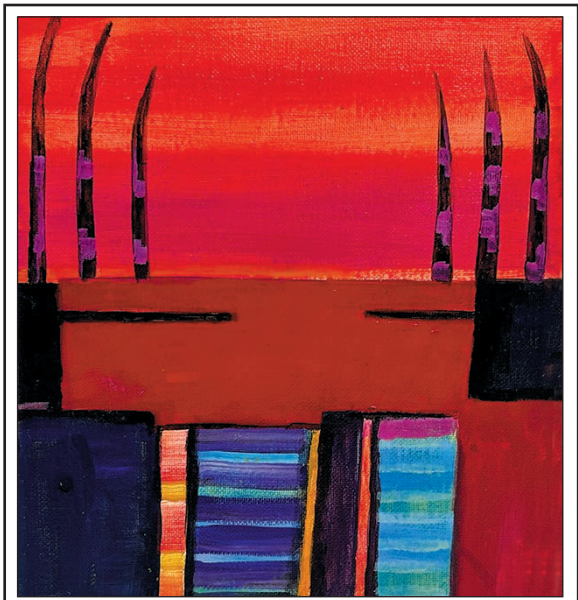
When asked about transmission risk, Ciampa was direct: “Someone living with HIV, taking their medication and has an undetectable viral load, has a 0% chance of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners.”

Treatment, Prevention, and a Changing Future

Ciampa explained how people achieve an undetectable viral load through consistent treatment. “They are taking antiretroviral treatment. It usually takes about four to six weeks to start reducing that viral load,” she said.

Treatment is typically taken as a daily pill, though long-acting injectable options are becoming available.

“There is also an injection every two months,



Deer Clan © by Linus Woods. Available for purchase at wakinagallery.com.

and a longer-acting shot has been approved more recently, though it is not yet widely available in Alberta,” Ciampa added.

Funding, Equity, and Indigenous Support

From an organizational perspective, Broomfield says funding remains a constant need for nonprofits working in public health.

HIV Edmonton is also looking to strengthen Indigenous-specific supports.

While the organization currently has an Indigenous Educator and Capacity Building role held by Ciampa, Broomfield says there is still a need for more direct support roles.

“We would like to expand supports for Indigenous communities. While we have an Indigenous Educator and Capacity Builder, we do not currently have a dedicated Indigenous Support Worker,” she said.

“This would help us provide direct support and care through Indigenous ways of knowing, and build stronger, culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous people living with HIV.”

LEGAL NOTICE

Are you an Indigenous person who attended a First Nation Managed School for elementary or secondary education, while ordinarily resident on reserve, between April 17, 1985 and October 18, 2021?

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The Federal Court of Canada has certified a class action regarding individuals who attended First Nation Managed Schools. You are affected by this class action if you fit all the criteria to be a Class Member. You are a Class Member if:

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There are no age restrictions. The Class includes children and adults.

First Nation Managed Schools are schools managed or operated by First Nation organizations with funding provided from the Federal Government. A list of the First Nation Managed Schools for the purpose of this class action is available at FirstNationSchoolClassAction.ca. Please check this list to confirm whether the school you attended is on the list. More schools may be added to the list of First Nation Managed Schools. If you believe a school should be added to the list of First Nation Managed Schools, please contact Class Counsel at 1385 West 8th Avenue, Suite 400, Vancouver, BC, V6H 3V9.

If you meet this definition, you can choose whether to stay in the class action:

- To stay in the class action, you don’t need to do anything. If money or benefits are obtained, you’ll be notified about how to make a claim. You’ll be bound by any orders or judgments, and you won’t be able to sue Canada separately for the same legal claims.
- If you do not want to be part of the class action, you must submit an opt-out form by no later than September 17, 2026. You can contact the Notice Administrator to request the form.

If you opt out, you will not get money or benefits from this lawsuit, if any are awarded.

The Court has appointed Klein Lawyers LLP as Class Counsel to represent the Class. You don’t have to pay Class Counsel to participate. If money or benefits for the Class are obtained through the class action, Class Counsel may ask for lawyers’ fees and costs, which would be deducted from any money received or could be paid separately by Canada.

For more information about your rights:

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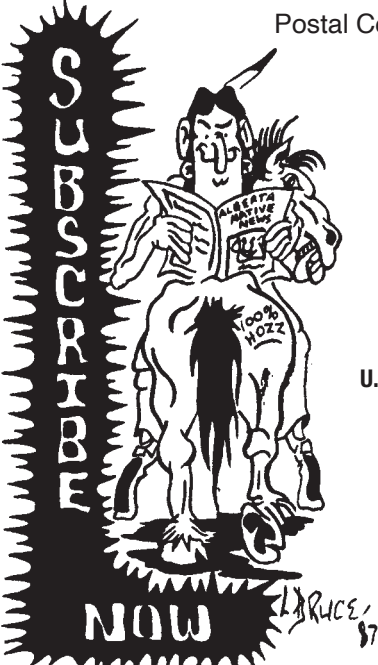
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First Nation leaders warn against Alberta separatist referendum

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

First Nations leaders are calling on Premier Danielle Smith to apologize and fire her office’s executive director after he made online remarks blaming chiefs for their people’s suffering.

Bruce McAllister, a former MLA and TV broadcaster, was responding to the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs (AOTC) unanimously passing a resolution on June 16 asking the RCMP and auditor general to investigate the premier for treason.

“We call for this investigation on the basis of the intentional violation of the Treaties; of calling a referendum in the face of severe risks to Canada’s sovereignty and the Treaty Relationship, and of failing to take action on the violation of privacy rights of millions of people,” reads an AOTC statement.

Criminal Code section 46(2) defines treason as using “force or violence for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Canada or a province,” or providing military or scientific information to another state that “may be used by that state for a purpose prejudicial to the safety or defence of Canada.”

On X, formerly known as Twitter, McAllister called the AOTC motion “childish nonsense.”

“People are sick and tired of hearing unrealistic demands from them,” he added. “It might be tolerable if their communities were beacons of prosperity, safety, strong families and real accountability, but sadly, they’re anything but.”

After listing social issues that disproportionately plague First Nations communities, including drug abuse, domestic violence, poverty and children being removed from their families, McAllister questioned whom the AOTC, which represents chiefs from Treaties 6, 7 and 8, “are taking their orders from.”

“It surely isn’t their own people,” he said. Chief Rupert Meneen of Tallcree First Nation in Treaty 8 told *Alberta Native News* that McAllister’s comments remind him of racist remarks that are common from anonymous social media accounts.

Meneen said there appears to be a pattern of these attitudes within Smith’s “inner circle.”

“These people have been empowered by her with what she’s doing,” he said. “The racists are just out there front and centre right now.”

Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, also in Treaty 8, said in a June 19 statement that if McAllister’s comments “were made by a senior staffer in a Premier’s office in any other province they would be fired.”

Meneen told this newspaper that he can’t see First Nations “even looking at partnering with

this government” unless “there’s apologies, for one thing, and she has to fire these people, but I doubt that she’ll ever do anything about it.”

“It’s got to start from the top,” he added. “She’s got to be able to lead with her apologies, she’s got to be the one doing it, and she’s got to be sincere about it.”

But the Premier’s Office is standing behind its executive director.

“Accusing elected officials of treason is dangerous and unacceptable rhetoric that only fuels division. It must be rejected entirely,” Premier Smith’s spokesperson Sam Blackett said in a statement.

“We want to work collaboratively on a government-to-government basis to make our communities stronger. When the Treaty Chiefs are ready to do that, we’ll look forward to it.”

Matt Wildcat, a professor in Native Studies at the University of Alberta, told *Alberta Native News* that he shares the chiefs’ offence at McAllister’s comments.

“It’s really unfair to tell First Nations to do better when they are required to do more with less resources than any other government in Canada,” said Wildcat.

He added that it’s unclear to him whether the AOTC’s treason motion was “trying to make a political statement or trying to have a tangible outcome.”

“From a strategic standpoint, if the goal was to rankle the premier, then they succeeded,” said Wildcat, “but ... the AOTC call probably was stretching itself a little thin in terms of thinking an RCMP investigation is going to go anywhere.”

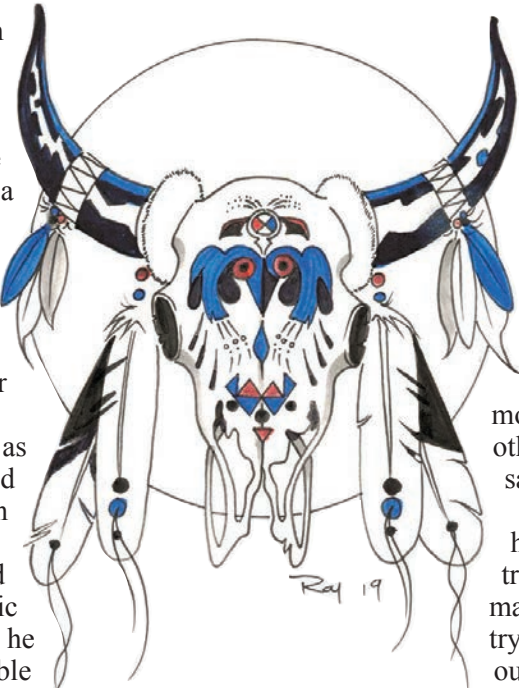
He added that there’s a “long-running debate in Indigenous governance” about the utility of turning to colonial institutions, such as the RCMP, to “advance Indigenous claims,” rather than building independent “sources of strength, where you can press your claims through actions like civil disobedience and cultural regeneration.”

“The RCMP is an institution, which has very often not been a source of justice for Indigenous Peoples,” Wildcat said, “and so is there a danger in placing our faith in legitimizing and upholding the RCMP as an arbiter of justice in this moment?”

Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi has warned that the government proceeding with an Oct. 19 referendum on whether to pursue a vote on independence could result in civil disobedience.

The Mounties didn’t respond to a request for comment by deadline.

Earlier this year, the AOTC passed a motion declaring non-confidence in the premier’s UCP government.



Edmonton Park gains a 14-foot “Misi-mîkisak” beaded landmark

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

William Hawrelak Park in Edmonton now holds a striking new Indigenous public art landmark, as Cheyenne Rain LaGrande’s 14-foot installation *Misi-mîkisak* transforms one of the city’s most iconic river valley landscapes into a space of beadwork, language, and Indigenous visibility.

The monumental sculpture reimagines a beaded earring at an expanded scale – turning a familiar, intimate piece of Indigenous fashion into a large public artwork visible across the park’s lake and pathways.

For LaGrande, who is from the Big Stone Cree Nation and uses she/they pronouns, the installation marks a significant milestone as her first major public art commission.

“I am an artist from Big Stone Cree Nation, and my pronouns are she, they.”

She describes her practice as interdisciplinary, moving fluidly between performance, wearable sculpture, photography, video, installation, sound, fashion, and now large-scale public art.

“Yeah, I’m a visual artist. I work very interdisciplinary through a variety of mediums. My main practice is performance art... and I’m also more recently working in public art.”

At the centre of *Misi-mîkisak* is the idea of scale – taking something small, precise, and deeply personal, and enlarging it into a monumental form that interacts with land and sky.

LaGrande says the concept began with a simple but powerful visual idea.

“What inspired that was kind of wanting to reimagine our beautiful, delicate beadwork. It was a simple idea of wanting to see a seed bead enlarged... and trying to reimagine our traditional beadwork in a more futuristic context.”

The result is a 14-foot sculptural beaded earring that sits in dialogue with its surroundings, including the park’s lake, tree line, and sunset sky.

The title of the work holds linguistic and cultural meaning. In Cree, *Misi-mîkisak* translates to “large bead.” For LaGrande, naming the work in her language was both an artistic and personal decision.

“To title my work in my language is a way for me to learn it and have access to it. And I think it also encourages the public to get to know some Cree words.”

“So it was really important for me to name the piece in my language.”

While rooted in beadwork traditions such as floral designs on hides, LaGrande says she was intentional about choosing a form that reflects contemporary Indigenous life. “For me, I wanted to choose a type of beadwork that felt more

contemporary... beaded fringe earrings feel like something Indigenous people wear in their fashions today.”

By elevating this everyday expression into a large-scale monument, the work bridges historical beadwork practices with present-day Indigenous identity and fashion.

A key part of the installation is its celebration of Indigiqueer and Two-Spirit identity, which LaGrande intentionally weaves into the colour palette and emotional tone of the piece. “It was very important for me to include pride, and I included rainbow and pastel colours.”

She said pastel tones are deeply tied to both her artistic language and personal memory. “Pastel colours are a motif that runs through my practice... they bring me back to my home and auntie’s houses where everything was painted in those soft colours.”

LaGrande emphasized that visibility and affirmation were central goals. “But with everything going on, I really wanted us to be visible. I wanted us to feel strong together... I hope they feel Indigenous love, Indigenous resilience, and Indigenous joy.”

“I want them to feel proud of who they are and not be ashamed... I want them to know they’re loved.”

The location of the work in Hawrelak Park’s river valley landscape also shaped its design, particularly its relationship to light and colour. “The sunset section at the top of the piece is in pastel-like orange, pink, and yellow.”

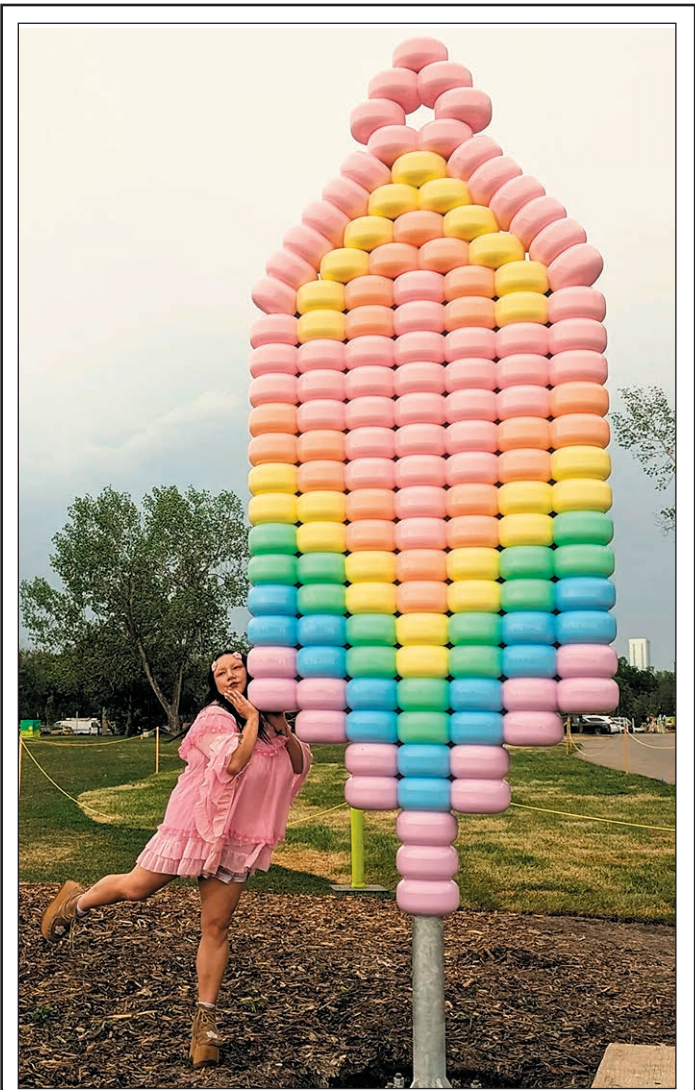
LaGrande explained that she intentionally designed the sculpture to interact with the environment. “I was really thinking about how the piece could blend into the sky and then blend into the land.”

“The baby blue on the piece is also very close to the colour of the sky... I really wanted it to be part of that reflection of land and sky.”

Beyond visual impact, LaGrande situates *Misi-mîkisak* within a broader sense of responsibility to land, ancestors, and community. “It makes me think a lot about our bodies in relation to the land and how we’ve been here forever.”

She said she felt gratitude that an Indigenous artist was chosen for the commission, seeing the work as part of ongoing recognition and presence.

“I was really thankful that they chose an Indigenous artist to do this piece because it’s a



Artist Cheyenne Rain LaGrande's 14-foot "Misi-mîkisak" installation at Hawrelak Park in Edmonton depicts an iconic beaded earring.

way of honouring us and honouring our ancestors... everything my ancestors have been through to bring me to this point.”

“This piece is a way to thank all my ancestors and everyone who has brought me to this point, and also a way to thank the land.”

At its core, LaGrande hopes the installation offers something emotional and lasting for viewers moving through the park. “I really want people to feel joy and love, and to reflect on the land and the Indigenous folks who have existed here forever.”

“I want them to feel Indigenous love, Indigenous resilience, and Indigenous joy.”

For her, the message is also personal and communal. “I want them to feel love from the community... and know that it is okay to be Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit, and that that is such a special thing.”

In transforming a bead into a 14-foot monument, *Misi-mîkisak* reshapes not only the physical landscape of Hawrelak Park, but also how Indigenous presence is seen, felt, and celebrated within it.

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Samson Cree Nation celebrates Pride through culture, kinship and inclusion

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Samson Cree Nation Chief Izaiah Swampy-Omeasoo joined community members on June 13 for the annual Pride crosswalk painting, reaffirming the Nation's commitment to supporting Two-Spirit and LGBTQ2S+ community members through Cree teachings of respect, kinship, and inclusion.

The crosswalk painting followed a Pride gathering held on June 10 and marked the eighth year of the initiative, which leaders say is rooted in the Cree principle of Wahkohtowin – the interconnected relationship between people, community, land, and spirit.

For Swampy-Omeasoo, attending the crosswalk painting was an opportunity to visibly demonstrate the Nation's support for all community members. "I think the first thing is it goes back to honouring our cultural values that we've always held as Cree people, is respect and Wahkohtowin," he said. "So, for us as a nation to be able to support our LGBTQ+ community and our relations in that community, shows support on a physical aspect and on an image aspect."

Swampy-Omeasoo said visible symbols of inclusion matter because they influence how people feel about themselves and their community. "When you look around and you see communities that have garbage or that have drugs or fighting going on outside daily, people pick up on that," he said. "It takes the spirit."

"So for us to be able to paint the crosswalk and for us to be able to show support and show that image, that takes the spirit in our community that we love and we respect and that we honour and uphold our relations in that community."

The chief noted that the Pride crosswalk has become an important tradition within Samson Cree Nation. "This is beautiful," he said. "I'm happy that we're doing this again. This is the eighth year, and it shows that commitment that we have."

Swampy-Omeasoo said Samson Cree Nation was the first First Nation in Alberta to establish a Pride crosswalk. He said the milestone reflects the Nation's history of leadership and its commitment to showing love, compassion, and respect for all relations.

He said that commitment will continue under his leadership. "I'm very grateful and happy that

this can continue and it will continue under my tenure as chief," he said. "We will continue to show support to our community."

The Pride gathering on June 10 featured keynote speakers Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack, Associate Professor at the University of Alberta, and Jack Saddleback, a public speaker and equity champion, who spoke about Indigenous teachings, gender diversity, and the importance of supporting Two-Spirit and LGBTQ2S+ community members.

Whiskeyjack said gatherings like Samson Cree Nation's Pride celebration are important reminders that gender diversity has always existed within Indigenous communities.

Whiskeyjack grounded her remarks in the Cree concept of Wahkohtowin, describing it as a system of kinship and relational responsibility that connects people to family, community, land, and the cosmos. "When we are talking about Wahkohtowin, you're talking about the way you are connected, your kinship connection to your community, to the land, to the cosmos," she said.

She said Cree teachings traditionally focused on spirit rather than physical characteristics. "We are such spirit-centered people," she said. "Why does it depend on how I express my body and how you're going to treat me instead of looking at spirit first?"

Whiskeyjack challenged the colonial attitudes that have shaped modern understandings of gender. "So, when did we turn into being very physical-centered people?" she asked. "When did it become so foundational to judge someone based on what is between their legs?"

"When did we become so colonized?" she continued. "We can connect that to Indian residential school, Catholicism, colonialism, the binaries."

She explained that European institutions imposed rigid systems of gender that differed from Indigenous worldviews. "A lot of the nurses and nuns in residential school were Francophone," she said. "They come from a very binary worldview, that there's either or, and one is higher than the other."

Whiskeyjack said Cree language itself contains teachings about inclusion and belonging. "The more we wake up our language, the more we ask these questions about what gender diversity is from our worldview, the more we get to see how inclusive our language actually is," she said.

She also expressed concern about the impact of anti-trans rhetoric and legislation on Indigenous youth. "We're in this day and age where we're not even acknowledging a good percentage of our gender-diverse and sexually-diverse kids," she said. "So we're missing out on medicine we need during this great change happening now."

Whiskeyjack said Indigenous teachings recognized that every child enters the world with a unique purpose and gifts that benefit the community. "Our great grandparents had this heightened intelligence that they could determine a child before they were born," she said.

"They knew the gifts that every child brought into community, and every child contributed to the health and wellness of community."



Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack at the Samson Cree Pride gathering.

"That's what Wahkohtowin is."

Whiskeyjack also spoke about ceremony and Indigenous medicines as teachings of reciprocity and balance. "All these medicines in our ceremony, tobacco, sage, sweetgrass, we have all of those medicines and all of those medicines are all intersex beings," she said.

"A lot of people don't even realize, if you're going to be homophobic, transphobic in these ceremonies, then why are you using intersex medicines, that are here to help us?"

"There's that reciprocity of being a good, kind relative that our medicines, our teachings, are not even practicing it in our own communities."

Saddleback said Indigenous-led Pride events help restore traditional understandings of gender and sexual diversity. "We are able to revitalize our historical acceptance of gender and sexual diversity within Indigenous nations from an Indigenous nations' perspective," he said. "Having it by community, for community, is just a pretty jazzy thing."

Saddleback said Two-Spirit and LGBTQ2S+ people continue to face growing challenges both in Alberta and beyond. "There are a number of barriers that are happening for the community," he said. "We're seeing rise in transphobic sentiments, not only here within Alberta, but also in the United States, the UK and other spaces around the world."

"It seems to be that number one, public perceptions are starting to change and increase violence against gender and sexual diverse community members," he added.

He said Indigenous nations have a responsibility to publicly support gender-diverse community members and defend their place within their nations. "As Indigenous nations, I think it's important that we are very vocal, very public about our acceptance of gender and sexual diversity and our historical roles and community members that are gender and sexual diverse," he said.

"Being able to also stand up in regards to our sovereignty around our nation's members, the acceptance of our nation members, and ensure that no other outside governments can try and legislate the erasure of our Two-Spirit or gender and sexual diverse community members."

Together, the Pride gathering and crosswalk painting highlighted a shared message of inclusion rooted in Cree teachings. Through Wahkohtowin, speakers emphasized that every person has a place within the community and that honouring gender diversity is not a new concept, but a continuation of Indigenous values that have existed for generations.



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Reconciliation, rising hate, and the future of Alberta

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This past National Indigenous Peoples Day, Alberta MLA Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse reflected on the importance of celebrating Indigenous identity while also speaking candidly about the challenges Indigenous peoples continue to face in Alberta and across Canada.

For Calahoo Stonehouse, the day represents both pride and visibility.

“It’s a beautiful moment where we get to celebrate who we are – our culture, our language, our lands, our identity,” she said. “It’s also an invitation for the rest of the world to see us.”

She emphasized that National Indigenous Peoples Day is not only about recognition, but also about building stronger relationships grounded in respect, understanding, and truth.

Reconciliation and Its Growing Tensions

When asked about reconciliation, Calahoo Stonehouse offered a critical reflection on where Canada currently stands, particularly in relation to treaty rights and ongoing political debates.

She described reconciliation as increasingly complicated, especially when legal rulings and Indigenous rights are not fully respected or implemented.

“We’ve seen court rulings that affirm First Nations rights, including free, prior and informed consent, and Section 35 protections,” she said. “And yet we still see decisions moving forward that contradict those rulings.”

Calahoo Stonehouse said this creates tension between governments and Indigenous communities and risks weakening the progress that has been made since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. “It really puts reconciliation in jeopardy,” she said. “It dismantles a lot of the work that has been done over the past decade.”

Despite this, she stressed that reconciliation remains possible if it is grounded in meaningful

action and genuine partnership. “I love when reconciliation is happening,” she said. “When we’re working in partnership, when we’re working toward a better Alberta for every citizen.”

Rising Hate and Personal Impact

Calahoo Stonehouse also spoke about what she described as a significant rise in online hate and harassment targeting Indigenous leaders and communities. “It’s really awful, and people are afraid,” she said. “We’re seeing levels of hate on social media like we’ve never seen before – violence, name-calling, things we haven’t seen since the 1970s.”

She shared that she has personally experienced repeated harassment online. “I am called a squaw on a daily basis,” she said. “On a regular basis on my social media, I’m targeted, I’m threatened, and I’m subjected to constant harassment.”

Calahoo Stonehouse said the normalization of this kind of abuse is deeply concerning and reflects a broader issue of racism that Indigenous people continue to face in public life and digital spaces.

She added that many Indigenous leaders are now forced to consider safety planning simply to go about daily activities, including traveling to nearby communities for basic needs. “We’ve had communities develop safety plans just so people can go to the grocery store or bank,” she said. “That level of fear is not normal.”

Treaty Responsibility and Shared Future

Calahoo Stonehouse connected these issues back to the spirit of treaty relationships, emphasizing that treaties were intended to create peace, friendship, and shared responsibility. “When we think about treaty, it is a peace and friendship treaty,” she said. “We agreed to share the land and live in peace.”

She warned that rising hostility and disrespect



Alberta MLA Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse.

undermine those original intentions and strain relationships between communities that are meant to coexist.

A Message for Youth

Despite the challenges she outlined, Calahoo Stonehouse ended with a message of hope directed toward young people, whom she sees as essential to shaping the future. “Our young people are the hope for the future,” she said. “We really need to mobilize the coexistence of peace and friendship and the work of reconciliation.”

She encouraged youth to engage in civic life and recognize the importance of their voices in shaping political and social change. “Our young people have an opportunity to stand up and vote,” she said. “They have an opportunity to change this province so it becomes part of the Canada we all want.”

For Calahoo Stonehouse, that vision of Canada is rooted in equality, dignity, and opportunity for all people. “A Canada that believes everyone has a right to exist,” she said, “and a right to pursue their dreams, their happiness, and their careers.”

New funding cont. from p 5

National Family and Survivors Circle.

The CCPA report concludes with 10 recommendations to ensure the feds meet their constitutional obligations towards Indigenous Peoples while getting itself on track to fulfill the Calls for Justice.

These include adopting a “permanent ... funding framework” for MMIWG, prioritizing Indigenous-led community partners, addressing

the “severe funding gaps” that exist for urban Indigenous populations, and boosting “investments in Indigenous housing, shelters, and safe infrastructure.”

The federal government committed in 2021 to addressing the National Inquiry into MMIWG’s Calls for Justice, and “they need to be held to that commitment,” said Harney.

“We need to keep pushing forward and making sure that as governments change and as priorities change at the federal level, that [the issue of] missing and murdered indigenous women and girls doesn’t get lost in that shuffle,” he said.

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