

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens Canada
Actualité**

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Table of Contents/ Table des matières

<u>Ottawa proposes hefty solution for abuse; Former students of native residential schools to get billions in compensation</u>	4
<u>Pre-election spending hits \$20B mark</u>	6
<u>Compensation for residential school students praised: Abuse victims, descendants eligible for federal package</u>	10
<u>A better life for Canada's natives: Throwing money won't solve the problems without a profound change in approach</u>	12
<u>Upcoming election can't undermine commitment to aboriginals, say officials</u>	14
<u>Compensation deal first step in closure</u>	16
<u>Residential school scars still raw</u>	18
<u>Abuse victims embrace payout</u>	20
<u>\$2b residential school deal a start, Knockwood says;</u>	22
<u>SCHOOL DEAL WORTH UP TO \$3 BILLION</u>	24
<u>STATEMENT FROM GRAND COUNCIL CHIEF JOHN BEAUCAGE</u>	27
<u>NATIVES LEERY OF COMPENSATION</u>	28
<u>Natives deserve a better future</u>	30
<u>Abuse victims to get \$2 billion; Deal for survivors of residential school program Historic milestone on path to healing, Fontaine says</u>	32

<u>The expensive politics of residential redress</u>	33
<u>HELPING CANADA'S NATIVES Ottawa to pay \$2-billion in residential schools deal</u>	34
<u>Residential school payout goes too far</u>	36
<u>Museum will tell dark story</u>	38
<u>Residential schools have been demonized</u>	40
<u>'Warm memories' bond nun, national chief</u>	42
<u>Money can't numb pain: Residential schools settlement met with scorn tempered by optimism</u>	44
<u>'An agreement for the ages'</u>	47

Source: Canadian Press (appeared in: The Telegram, The Record, Telegraph-Journal, The Guardian, London Free Press, Calgary Sun, Hamilton Spectator,

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Sue Bailey

Ottawa proposes hefty solution for abuse; Former students of native residential schools to get billions in compensation

The federal government has proposed more than \$2 billion in payments and healing programs to atone for decades of abuse in native residential schools.

If the deal is approved in court, survivors of rape, beatings and cultural isolation would likely be paid by the end of 2006. Their average age is 60 and many are sick or dying.

The announcement was among a flurry of costly promises made in the final days before an expected election call.

While most big-ticket items depend on the return of the Liberals, Conservatives have said they'd honour any court-approved residential school deal should they form the next government.

Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan was flanked by jubilant native leaders Wednesday as she announced the first sweeping plan of its kind.

The money is on top of more than \$4 billion to be promised to fight native poverty at a first ministers meeting starting today in Kelowna, B.C.

The deal includes \$125 million for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for programs to help survivors cope.

“It is an agreement for the ages,” said Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

He was one of the first to go public years ago with his own story of sexual and physical abuse at the Fort Alexander School in Manitoba. No amount of money will ever heal such scars, Fontaine said. And he'll pursue an official apology from Prime Minister Paul Martin – something that was not included in talks leading up to the deal.

Still, “we hope the settlement package will bring comfort and a sense of victory and vindication for the children and grandchildren of survivors as well,” Fontaine said.

“They, too, have suffered and witnessed the effects of the residential school legacy.”

That sad history has long been cited by aboriginal leaders struggling with epidemic rates of alcoholism, drug addiction and sexual abuse.

The agreement is open to more than 80,000 former students who can apply to receive \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the once-mandatory system meant to “Christianize” native kids.

Candidates over age 65 can apply for a fast-track advance payment of \$8,000.

Descendants of those who died after May 30, 2005 – when Ottawa appointed former Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci to help negotiate a settlement – can also apply, said lawyer Alan Farrer.

There will also be a truth and reconciliation forum to allow former students to share their stories.

Court approval of the settlement package could effectively derail more than 21 related class-action lawsuits.

It would also pay off dozens of lawyers who have worked for years on related files with little compensation.

One of the biggest cases involves Farrer’s firm, Toronto-based Thomson Rogers. It has led a massive class-action lawsuit being pressed by 20 firms across Canada.

If that process is nullified by the new settlement, Farrer says the consortium of lawyers would receive \$40 million.

“It represents work done over 10 years by probably hundreds of people.

“It seems like a lot of money. But during the same period of time the Department of Justice paid its lawyers to fight this litigation somewhere between \$80 million and \$100 million.”

Farrer estimates that the proposed deal could be approved and payments made to former students by the end of next year.

“If we can speed that up from the time we get into court this spring that would be great.”

Source: Canwest News Wire (appeared in: The Telegram, The Star-Phoenix, The Leader-Post, Times Colonist, Vancouver Sun, Calgary Herald, Montreal Gazette, Winnipeg Free Press, Edmonton Journal, Windsor Star, National Post)

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Anne Dawson

Pre-election spending hits \$20-billion mark

Prime Minister Paul Martin's frantic pre-election spending spree is expected to surpass \$20 billion before next week's anticipated campaign call and promises new programs the Liberals hope will shore up vulnerable ridings and return the party to majority rule.

In fact, Liberal spending announcements were pouring out so fast Wednesday, it was difficult to keep track of them all.

Despite the merit of some of the multibillion-dollar initiatives, such as \$2 billion in payments and healing programs to atone for years of abuse in native residential schools – a commitment that Conservatives said they would honour if they form the next government – opposition leaders weren't impressed.

“This is like somebody walking out of Canadian Tire with a canoe on their head without paying for it,” said deputy Conservative leader Peter MacKay. “Canadians see through it. They see it for what it is. They see it as a desperate Hail Mary pass from the prime minister and the Liberal party.”

There have been at least 40 announcements this week alone, □ommuniq billions for farmers, culture and arts communities, labour-market development initiatives, tsunami-damaged countries, the expansion of broadband Internet to remote communities, transit security measures, and help for East Coast fisheries.

More spending is on tap today including a billion-dollar announcement to help the beleaguered forest industry and money for a scientific study of mad cow disease.

Friday will bring another \$4-billion deal, hand delivered by the prime minister at the first ministers' meeting in Kelowna, B.C. to fight native poverty.

And on top of that, Finance Minister Ralph Goodale unexpectedly announced new guidelines for income trusts Wednesday, something he said only a few days ago would not be ready until January, and Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan announced she will take former Ontario premier Bob Rae's advice and call a limited inquiry into the 1985 Air India bombing.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has tallied the bill at about \$20 billion, and noted many of the announcements, especially regional initiatives under the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency umbrella, were made quietly without posting the usual notice on Canada News Wire to avoid detection by the national press gallery.

“These spending announcements are a sign of Liberal weakness, not strength. A government confident of its re-election would not be throwing everything, including the kitchen sink, at voters in order to save its political hide,” said John Williamson, federal director of the taxpayers federation. “Mr. Martin’s government is using tax money as the Liberal party’s own political slush fund.”

The last ditch attempt to woo voters comes just in time for Monday’s non-confidence vote in the House of Commons, a vote that will almost certainly topple the fragile Liberals and trigger an election in mid-January, risking the wrath of Canadians who overwhelmingly say they do not want a Christmas campaign.

The harshly worded Tory motion, which is backed by the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, was released Wednesday, and reveals the depth of animosity between the two sides.

“That the House condemns the government for its arrogance in refusing to compromise with the opposition parties over the timing of the next general election and for its ‘culture of entitlement,’ corruption, scandal, and gross abuse of public funds for political purposes and, consequently, the government no longer has the confidence of the House,” states the motion.

Alberta Premier Ralph Klein also weighed into the federal political fray Wednesday predicting Canadians will elect another Liberal minority government mostly because Conservative Leader Stephen Harper is seen as too right wing and he will not be able to convince Ontarians to vote for him.

“Unfortunately, if I were a betting man I would (bet on a minority Liberal government), but I wouldn’t want to see that outcome,” Klein told reporters in Halifax. “It’s a damn shame.”

His comments immediately drew the ire of his federal cousins.

MacKay slammed him and suggested “duct tape” might be the solution to keeping Klein quiet during elections.

Klein’s comments in the 2004 election about private health care badly damaged Harper, who was portrayed by the Liberals as having a hidden agenda to privatize the medicare system.

Harper, who announced Wednesday the recruitment of whistleblower Allan Cutler to run in Ottawa Centre, said his party is geared up and ready for a long-overdue election.

“I’m looking forward to it. I think Canadians have been expecting it for a while so I think now is a good time to get on with it,” he said.

Cutler helped blow open the door on the Liberal sponsorship scandal. NDP Leader Jack Layton said the Liberals have had 12 years to take action on issues addressed by the myriad of funding announcements, and have a long history of loosening the purse strings only at election time.

“I think Canadians have seen this so many times, they’ve become deeply skeptical,” he said. “I think they’ve become deeply skeptical of the Liberal party being mostly concerned about keeping itself and its friends in power ... and they are going to look at these announcements through that lens.”

CanWest News Service/with files from James Gordon and Carly Weeks (Ottawa Citizen)

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Last ditch attempt

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“Unfortunately, if I were a betting man I would (bet on a minority Liberal government), but I wouldn’t want to see that outcome,” Klein said.

Cash count

Announcements made Wednesday include:

\$2 billion in payments and healing programs to make up for years of abuse in native **residential schools** – the deal has to be approved in court. This money is on top of the \$4 billion to be promised to fight native poverty at the first ministers meeting this week in Kelowna, B.C.

\$755 million in emergency federal assistance for hard-pressed Canadian grains and oilseeds farmers and producers.

A \$1.3-billion initiative in new federal cash to provincial coffers over the next six years for retraining, helping get people off employment insurance, and language training for new immigrants.

\$350 million for a new investment in Canada's arts and culture.

\$33 million to rehabilitate and rebuild tsunami-affected countries. \$973,592 for expanding broadband Internet to rural and aboriginal communities.

\$110 million on improving transit security in the country's six largest cities.

Source: The Star Phoenix (also appeared in the Leader Post)

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Saskatchewan News Network

Compensation for residential school students praised: Abuse victims, descendants eligible for federal package

REGINA – The \$2-billion compensation package Ottawa promised former students of government-run Indian residential schools will not erase the painful memories of sexual and physical abuse, says a former student.

“Many of us have been scarred for life,” said Jerry Shepherd, who attended the Gordon’s Indian residential school in Punnichy and the All Saints residential school in Prince Albert during the late 1960s.

The redress is long overdue, Shepherd said, explaining many residential school survivors continue to struggle with the demons of their past as they try to find their identity and their spirituality.

“Justice has prevailed,” said Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations who attended a residential school in Fort Alexander, Man.

“This is the largest and most comprehensive settlement package in Canadian history,” said Fontaine, who has also been on a personal crusade for decades to get compensation for the victims.

“Today marks the first step towards closure on a terrible, tragic legacy for the thousands of First Nations individuals who suffered physical, sexual or psychological abuse,” he said.

The agreement, which must still be approved by the courts, covers some 80,000 people who can apply for \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year they spent in a residential school.

Candidates over 65 can apply for a fast-track payment of \$8,000. Descendants can also apply for compensation.

A truth and reconciliation commission will also be established.

In addition to the “common-experience” payment, which is expected to average about \$26,000, students who suffered physical or sexual abuse can seek additional compensation of as much as \$500,000 under an independent assessment process, said Regina lawyer Tony Merchant.

Merchant, whose firm has 8,200 client files on residential schools, said he is pleased with the government’s proposal.

“Many of you have heard me be extremely critical of the government of Canada because they seemed to have false start after false start,” said Merchant.

“This is not a false start. This is an historic and very appropriate and very generous end to litigation on behalf of residential school victims.

“It’s generous to residential school victims. It will allow the healing process to continue and it’s very much in the best interest of residential school victims and everyone within the First Nations community.”

Merchant said he will recommend to his clients that they take the proposed settlement, which would dramatically lower the number of cases being handled through litigation.

Payouts are expected to be completed by the end of 2006, but if five per cent of the claimants named in the seven class actions currently before the courts opt out of the settlement, it will scuttle the deal.

Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations vice-chief Morley Watson said the federation is grateful this issue is finally being addressed, something that is long overdue.

“Hopefully, the survivors themselves can take some good feelings that their issues are finally being dealt with,” Watson said, noting an estimated 19,000 former students still live in Saskatchewan.

Source: The Times Colonist

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Editorial

A better life for Canada's natives: Throwing money won't solve the problems without a profound change in approach

With \$2 billion, the federal government proposes to atone, on our behalf, for decades of abuse of native children in residential schools.

And when the money has been claimed by the 80,000 or so survivors of those dreadful institutions, and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has been set up to help them cope with their past, and \$40 million of it has been pocketed by lawyers who have been working on class action lawsuits, then what?

Well, Prime Minister Paul Martin is reportedly set to announce today that another \$4 billion will be made available – if the Liberals are re-elected, that is – to fight native poverty across the country. But \$4 billion, like the \$10 billion Canadian taxpayers provide each year for federal and provincial aboriginal programs, won't provide a better life for members of First Nations without a fundamental change in their economic prospects or in political accountability on reserves.

The residential schools – some of which pre-dated Confederation – were only one of the misguided steps authorities have taken to “improve” the lot of aboriginal people. Yanking young native kids from their villages and putting them in dreary educational factories was meant to “Christianize” them as much as educate them.

That was bad enough. What happened in so many places will always be a black mark in the history of this country.

Almost as misguided has been the assumption of successive governments that it's always in the best interests of natives to keep them on reserves.

Decrepit housing, unsafe drinking water, and appalling rates of gas-sniffing, alcoholism, chronic disease, abuse of women and children, and suicide have shown us the folly of this policy. But we continue not to see it, and assume that □ommuniqu more money into the reserves or moving communities that are no longer habitable to new locations, will solve everything.

They may not, as the relocation of the Labrador Innu community of Davis Inlet in 2002 showed. Members of the band council issued blank cheques and “loans” to one another and paid the travel expenses of people not connected to the band. Substance abuse remained rampant; there were still no jobs and the community began to decompose almost immediately.

Some reserves have flourished. The Osoyoos band in southern B.C. operates the fourth-largest winery in North America and a world-class golf course. But many are not in wine-growing country or are not tourist destinations, and the funding formula for bands can't make up for their disadvantages.

Many young natives have turned their backs, understandably, on reserves where they can have no future. Last year 46 per cent of registered Canadian Indians lived off reserve, compared with 29 per cent 20 years earlier. Yet there are some politicians and native leaders who say that encouraging natives to leave reserves is a form of cultural genocide.

The aboriginal summit between native and federal and provincial leaders that begins in Kelowna today would be a good time to start looking at the fundamental reasons for the continued problems that plague so many First Nations reserves. Premier Gordon Campbell deserves congratulations for trying a new approach: Asking aboriginal leaders to help shape policies that will break the mould.

In addition, there has to be accountability for the money taxpayers contribute to natives on reserves. The auditor general must be given the authority needed to track the funds. Pensions, welfare allowances and other government benefits go directly to citizens. Why couldn't the money now provided bands go directly to natives on reserves?

And, as governments tax back benefits to other citizens, native governments could do the same through income taxes, property taxes or other levies. That way, band members would have incentive to hold their leaders to account – to ensure, for example, that not only 10 per cent of those operating water treatment plants are trained, as reported by the auditor general.

In 2003, according to documents received by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation through Access to Information, Indian Affairs received nearly 300 allegations of corruption, nepotism or mismanagement by band ommuniqué across the country. These are the kinds of allegations that should be investigated by an independent authority, not the department that disperses the funds.

And the law that prevents those who live on reserves from owning their homes should be circumvented more than it is by Certificates of Possession, a sort of quasi-ownership that can be used for mortgages and provide incentive for property improvement.

But, as the Sherry Charlie case showed, there are problems in native communities that go beyond dilapidated houses and unsafe drinking water. Provincial authorities don't feel comfortable marching onto reserves whenever they want to check on the safety and well-being of women and children – yet women and children on reserves are the most disadvantaged of all citizens in our society.

The Kelowna summit should be used by provincial premiers like Gordon Campbell, who has shown a remarkable concern for “reconciliation,” to persuade the feds and native leaders that those who live on our reserves deserve as much protection as other citizens.

Source: Can West News Service (appeared in Vancouver Sun,

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Allan Woods

Upcoming election can't undermine commitment to aboriginals, say officials: Native leaders, Liberal party officials says any agreements will require immediate action

KELOWNA – Whichever party forms the next federal government will be under intense pressure to live up to the commitments announced at this week's first ministers meeting on aboriginal issues, politicians and aboriginal leaders said in advance of today's gathering here.

The push, particularly from worried natives, comes as the government prepares to put upwards of \$4 billion toward health, education, housing and economic development for natives living on and off reserves – money that dies once an election begins, as expected, next Monday.

Both the native leaders and Liberal ministers have warned the announcements and agreements between the federal government, provincial premiers and aboriginal groups require “immediate followup” in order to avoid seeing the work that has been done over the last two years scrapped, only to start all over again.

“My knowledge and understanding with the government is that no matter what gets announced here, if the government falls a few days later very little, if anything, is going to be delivered,” said chief Dwight Dorey, head of the Congress of Aboriginal People, which represents some 800,000 natives who do not live on reserves. “That's my concern and I think everybody has that concern.”

The call in favour of the status quo to protect the outcomes of the first ministers meeting has been decried as “terribly cynical” by the New Democratic Party, which suspects the Liberals are orchestrating the campaign for political gain.

“Certainly the Liberals are telling First Nations that if they're not re-elected this money is at risk,” said NDP MP Pat Martin. “That's exploiting desperate people.”

NDP Leader Jack Layton has been fielding telephone calls from native leaders urging him to back away from his threat to partner with the Conservatives and Bloc Quebecois to defeat the government in a confidence vote Monday.

“If you followed the logic being told to First Nations' leader, you would never have an election because it's too risky,” Martin said. “I think bringing in the premiers to this inoculates this from the impact of an election.”

The aboriginal summit in Kelowna comes one day after the Assembly of First Nations and the federal government announced a multibillion-dollar settlement with the almost 86,000 living aboriginal victims of government-run **residential schools**.

The settlement, which stamps out any pending legal claims, provides \$2 billion for lump-sum payments to abuse victims. Each former student will receive \$10,000 for the first year in attendance at the schools and an additional \$3,000 for any additional years. Aboriginals will also benefit from an enhanced compensation package for “serious” abuse survivors that will be boosted by \$800 million. Ottawa must also kick in \$125 million for the creation of an aboriginal healing foundation, \$60 million for a truth and reconciliation commission and \$20 million for commemoration projects.

The Assembly of First Nations estimates the settlement package will end up costing up to \$4 billion over its five-year lifespan.

Tory aboriginal affairs critic Jim Prentice said whichever party forms the next government must make alleviating native poverty a priority. But he would not endorse the 10-year plan that will be arrived at by the Liberals, provincial premiers and aboriginals.

“One thing I’m anxious about at this ... meeting is to see what ideas people are putting forward to change the way the system is working,” he said, adding that the “Liberal approach” is not working.

“I think people will find that what Conservatives are saying to make a lot of sense.”

Government officials and the five aboriginal groups participating in the two-day meeting have finalized “a very, very large amount” of what will be announced in Friday’s final communiqué.

It is expected to include an overall investment of \$4 billion to \$5 billion that will include a 10-year plan to improve aboriginal health; an aboriginal housing bureaucracy to encourage private home ownership and to manage social housing; improved access and delivery to public education as well as a proposal to ensure that more aboriginals have an opportunity to attend post-secondary education; stronger accountability requirements for First Nations groups so that on-reserve aboriginals receive the best possible leadership.

An important, but ill-defined, issue that will be discussed in Kelowna is how aboriginals can build and better exploit economic opportunities that may be available to them.

“Considering the number of participants and the number of issues, we have made huge, huge strides,” a senior government official, speaking on background, said in a briefing this week.

“My sense is that there are still a small number of issues that we weren’t able to crunch because they require political discussions.”

Source: Canwest News Service (Appeared in: Times Colonist, Montreal Gazette, Winnipeg Free Press, The Province, Windsor Star)

Date: 2005.11.24

Compensation deal first step in closure

Jubilation, vindication and a sense of relief greeted Ottawa's announcement Wednesday of a \$2-billion compensation deal in the residential schools file.

"Justice has prevailed," beamed Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations who attended a residential school himself in Fort Alexander, Man.

"This is the largest and most comprehensive settlement package in Canadian history," said Fontaine, who has also been on a personal crusade for decades to get compensation for the victims.

"Today marks the first step towards closure on a terrible, tragic legacy for the thousands of First Nations individuals who suffered physical, sexual, or psychological abuse."

Payout is expected to be completed by the end of 2006.

For decades, aboriginals have sought redress against the residential school system that was government policy through much of the 20th century. Under it, children from reserves were separated from their families and sent to distant boarding schools where they were stripped of their language and culture. As well, some said they were physically and sexually abused.

Native leaders have said the policy –done at the time in tandem with mainline churches to 'Christianize' native peoples –produced generations of people who were culturally and spiritually adrift, a policy which has fuelled many of the social problems that bedevil aboriginal communities today.

The agreement, which must still be approved by the courts, covers some 80,000 people who can apply for \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year they spent in a residential school. Candidates over 65 can apply for a fast-track payment of \$8,000. Descendants can also apply for compensation.

As well, a truth and reconciliation commission will be established.

The settlement comes on the eve of both a national federal election and a summit on native issues in Kelowna where billions more federal dollars are expected to be pledged to address native housing, education, medical and social issues.

"While no amount of money will ever heal the emotional scars, this settlement package will contribute to the journey on the path to healing – not only for all residential school survivors, but for their children and grandchildren. For they too, have suffered and witnessed the affects of this abuse," said Fontaine.

“It is an agreement for the ages.”

For Kenneth Potts, the agreement is exciting news and will offer a bit of security in his retirement.

“We live paycheque-to-paycheque,” Potts said in an interview from his Calgary home. “The money that I’m going to get will be put to good use paying down the mortgage.”

Now 69, Potts was sent to St. Cyprian’s residential school near Brocket, Alta., when he was seven, a day that is seared in his memory.

“My dad reluctantly took me to the school because they told him the law would come after him if he said no,” Potts said.

Source: Times Colonist

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Jack Knox

Residential school scars still raw: While abuse was rampant, not every teacher or lay brother was a predator, says a former student

Evelyn Voyageur was just eight years old, living up in Kingcome Inlet, when her parents came back from a meeting with the Indian agent.

“My mum was crying. She said ‘You have to go to school. If not, we’re going to jail or they’ll take you away forever.’”

The next day, the village children were piled into a speedboat and hauled across to the residential school at Alert Bay, where Evelyn would spend the next few years.

That was 1948. Evelyn wasn’t allowed to speak Kwak’wala, the only language she knew, at the school. Everything was grimly regimented, no questioning of authority permitted. She was forced to pray five or six times a day to a god who seemed flat-out mean. “We never heard of the words ‘hell’ or ‘devil’ until we went to school,” the Duncan woman said Wednesday.

Once, another student dared her to hug a supervisor, who just shoved Evelyn away.

“Why did you make me do that?” Evelyn asked her friend.

“Because I want a hug,” her friend replied, “and if she hugged you, then I would have gone and got one, too.”

Fat chance. “They never hugged us. They never praised us.”

Evelyn was not, as were many others, sexually or physically abused, but a lonely little girl cut off from her family, with no love around her. She bears other scars. “I was definitely emotionally and spiritually deprived,” she recalled from her home in Duncan.

The federal government announced details Wednesday of a \$2-billion compensation package for former students, more than 80,000 of whom may now apply to receive \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year they attended residential school. Claims of sexual assault or serious physical abuse will be dealt with elsewhere.

The offer will have many non-natives rolling their eyes and going ‘jeez, here goes Ottawa throwing another pile of cash at the Indians. Were the **residential schools** really that bad? Was everyone who worked in them a monster?’ To which the respective answers appear to be sometimes and of course not. Life isn’t that black-and-white.

Most of Canada’s 130 **residential schools**, largely operated through churches on behalf of the government, faded away 30-odd years ago. Included were the Anglican-run St. Michael’s at

Alert Bay, the United Church's school at Port Alberni and Roman Catholic institutions near Tofino and on Kuper Island.

Most non-aboriginals don't fathom the effect the schools had on many who attended them. As a teen in the Yukon, I knew guys who shuddered and flat-out refused to set foot in "the mission," even years after it was shut down. When their band got control of the building, first thing they did was bulldoze it.

Same thing happened on Kuper Island, where they actually threw the cornerstone of the old residential school into the ocean a few years ago, such was the depth of the residual rage.

Ten years ago, the TC ran a photo of a man holding a noose, a symbol of the suicides he tied to abuse at the old Christie school near Tofino. Oblate Brother Glen Doughty was convicted in 2002 of sex crimes at Kuper Island. Former dorm supervisor Arthur Henry Plint was jailed for sexual and physical abuse of boys at Port Alberni from 1948 to 1968. Another former Alberni employee, Donald Haddock, was jailed last year for sex crimes dating back to 1948.

But that doesn't mean everything that happened at the schools was bad, or that everyone employed by them was a predator. "Some were really nice," says Voyageur, "and some were there because they couldn't get a job anywhere else." She can name four abusers, but she also keeps in touch with a former St. Michael's teacher in Victoria who is loved and admired by all. "I think she was genuinely one of the good, good people."

The good people still get tarred with the same brush, though. To some, saying you used to work at a residential school is like admitting being a concentration camp guard. That's unfair, just as it's unfair to say the authorities were being malevolent in deciding forced assimilation into white society was the best thing for the Indians. People who thought themselves to be doing good works, who were unaware of the abuse going on under their noses, are now wounded when they hear their government, their churches, apologizing on their behalf.

Thirty, 40, 50, 60 years on, there are plenty of unhealed wounds to go around. Apologies and compensation packages can't change the past for those who lived through it. And those of us who weren't there can't pretend to know how it feels to live in that skin.

jknox@tc.canwest.com

Source: Calgary Herald

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Leanne Dohy

Abuse victims embrace payout

The federal government's compensation offer of more than \$2 billion in payments and programs comes as a comfort to abuse victims of Alberta residential schools.

For Kenneth Potts, the agreement announced Wednesday will offer a bit of security in his retirement.

"We live paycheque to paycheque," Potts, a Piikani native, said from his Calgary home. "The money that I'm going to get will be put to good use paying down the mortgage."

The deal, which must be approved in court, would likely be paid to the abuse victims by the end of 2006. It is open to the more than 80,000 former students of the schools – whose average age is 60 – and includes \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the system.

Those who suffered abuse will receive additional compensation that could range into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Now 69, Potts was seven years old when his parents were ordered to deliver him to St. Cyprian's school. That day is seared in his memory.

"My dad reluctantly took me to the school because they told him the law would come after him if he said no," Potts said. "When the parents left, they took me and bathed me in some kind of solution, then cut off all my hair, so I was bald."

Speaking Blackfoot was forbidden, and Potts said he was frequently beaten.

"We were abused all the time," Potts said. "When we were sitting in school, they would whack us over the head with these sticks, pointers that they used in reading."

When he was nine years old, Potts was shifted from full-day school to half days, working the afternoons on farms without pay. He left St. Cyprian's in 1952 after nine years of schooling.

"I had nothing to show for it."

He worked on area farms, and fell in to alcoholism. Thirty years ago, he swore off drinking and hasn't touched spirits since.

His two daughters are educated and grown, and a source of pride.

"They've done good," he said.

He's grateful for the work of his lawyers over the past decade. "They're not quitters, you know?" Potts said. "They kept at it, all this time."

Potts is one of 620 claimants represented by the Calgary firm of Ruston Marshall.

Partner Vaughn Marshall was elated by the announcement.

"I've always seen this case as one for the ages," Marshall said. "I'm hopeful that it will lead to a transformation in aboriginal relations."

"With the boarding schools," he said, "we're talking about something that was happening for over a century, enduring, unrelenting, affecting generation after generation."

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Source: The Chronicle Herald

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Jennifer Stewart

\$2b residential school deal a start, Knockwood says;

It is difficult to put a dollar amount on the abuse and cultural genocide thousands of native children suffered at residential schools across Canada, survivor Noel Knockwood said Wednesday in Dartmouth.

The 73-year-old is a former student at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia. He said the more than \$2 billion in payments and healing programs the federal government is proposing for survivors isn't enough, but it's a start.

"It's pretty difficult to measure a cultural loss and it is rather hard to put a dollar figure on any kind of an issue such as that," Mr. Knockwood said. "Regardless, it's a start and it might be the beginning of something a little bit better."

The settlement, announced in Ottawa on Wednesday, has yet to be approved in court, but if it is, the survivors of rapes, beatings and cultural isolation would likely be paid by the end of next year. Most survivors now average 60 years old and many are sick or dying. The agreement is open to more than 80,000 former students who can apply to receive \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the once-mandatory system meant to "Christianize" native kids.

Candidates over age 65 can apply for a fast-track advance payment of \$8,000.

Descendants of those who died after May 30 this year – when Ottawa appointed former Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci to help negotiate a settlement – can also apply.

Halifax lawyer John McKiggan, who represents about 900 survivors of the Shubenacadie school, said he is pleased with the deal.

"More than anything else, these lawsuits have been about recognizing the ongoing harm that was caused to native children by being taken from their families and assimilated into non-aboriginal society," Mr. McKiggan said.

More than 2,000 Mi'kmaq children from around Atlantic Canada went to the Shubenacadie school between 1930 and 1967, when it closed. The school was one of about 70 of its kind across the country.

It may take months for individual Supreme Courts to approve the settlement, but Mr. McKiggan said time "will ensure that the courts have an opportunity to examine the details . . . to make sure it is a fair and reasonable deal."

Mr. McKiggan said he spoke with Nora Bernard on Wednesday and the co-ordinator of the Association of Survivors of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School told him she, too, is happy with the settlement.

“They are pleased and relieved that the years of litigation are over so that their members will finally be able to achieve some recognition of the harm that was caused to them as children,” Mr. McKiggan said.

Besides the loss of language, culture and spirituality, Mr. Knockwood recalls awaiting punishment from the priests and nuns who taught them. He was seven when he was put in the school.

“If somebody did anything wrong, they would punish all of us,” said Mr. Knockwood, whose two sisters also attended Shubenacadie. “You’d have to line up to get a strapping.

“I recall that, because to stand in line waiting your turn to be beaten is not a very good experience.”

Wednesday’s announcement was among a flurry of costly federal government promises being made in the final days before an expected election call.

While most big-ticket items depend on the Liberals returning to power, Conservatives have said they’d honour any court-approved residential school deal should they form the next government.

The money is on top of more than \$4 billion to be promised to fight native poverty at a first ministers meeting starting today in Kelowna, B.C.

The residential school deal includes \$125 million for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for programs to help survivors.

“It is an agreement for the ages,” said Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

He was one of the first to go public years ago with his own story of sexual and physical abuse at the Fort Alexander School in Manitoba. No amount of money will ever heal such scars, Mr. Fontaine said. And he’ll pursue an official apology from Prime Minister Paul Martin.

Mr. Knockwood said an apology is “only words” and he wants to see something in writing that would stand the test of time.

“Something has to be documented historically to indicate the sorrow,” he said.

Source: Winnipeg Sun (also appeared in the Toronto Sun, Ottawa Sun, Edmonton Sun, Calgary Sun,

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Greg Weston

SCHOOL DEAL WORTH UP TO \$3 BILLION

For four days and nights, a small army of attorneys virtually barricaded themselves in the 27th-floor boardroom of a Toronto law firm, determined to negotiate an end to one of the most shameful chapters in Canada's history.

Finally, last Saturday afternoon, a deal was inked to provide up to \$3 billion in mainly federal compensation to the former students of Indian **residential schools**.

Among all of Canada's many misguided exercises in social engineering, probably none did so much harm to so many children as did the church-run hell-holes for native kids.

For almost a century, native children were taken from their villages with the blessing of the federal government, to be raised in church-run schools, far from home for years.

By the time the last of these wretched institutions was shut down in the early 1970s, their legacy of cultural annihilation, physical beatings and horrendous sexual abuse was etched in the ruined lives of generations of aboriginal people across the country.

Over the past decade, a wave of victim lawsuits began to swamp the federal government and the various churches involved in this sorry saga. In response, successive Liberal administrations have poured close to \$1 billion down the drain just in the past nine years, most of it on lawyers and bureaucracy, and relatively little on actual compensation.

Finally, a \$12-billion class-action lawsuit against the feds last year pushed all parties to the bargaining table, and ultimately to a deal.

It is pure coincidence, of course, that the agreement struck last weekend comes on the eve of both a federal election and today's aboriginal summit of first ministers in B.C.

The deal means Paul Martin will arrive at today's gathering in Kelowna to thundering approval from native leaders (even before he drops what is expected to be another \$4 billion in their laps for other aboriginal programs).

Under the agreement, the federal government will provide a total of about \$1.9 billion in compensation to the estimated 80,000 former residential school victims who are still alive.

This is not an issue of physical or sexual abuse -- everyone who attended a residential school will get a government cheque averaging \$24,000. No questions asked.

In addition, the deal allows those who do have claims of abuse to collect their \$24,000 and still go after the feds for additional compensation for their suffering at the hands of school pedophiles.

Government officials admit they have no idea how much all that could cost taxpayers, but one lawyer involved in the agreement estimates the additional tab could hit \$1 billion.

And what of the churches responsible for the offending pedophiles and other serial abusers?

One Supreme Court ruling established that the churches should bear about a quarter of the liability in residential school abuse cases -- a bill that could easily have topped \$500 million.

But under the deal struck over the weekend, the government is agreeing to protect the churches from all ongoing and future legal actions by abuse victims.

In return, government officials say the Anglican church has agreed to chip in about \$25 million, and the Presbyterians about \$3 million.

But it is the Catholic Church which got the heavenly part of this deal.

Having run almost 70% of the **residential schools** at issue, Catholic organizations could have been on the hook for at least \$350 million of the latest deal.

Instead, under the agreement, the church has to provide \$25 million of "in-kind" services for aboriginal healing, and has agreed to try to raise another \$25 million for "reconciliation" programs.

Finally, the 41 Catholic groups involved in the deal have also pledged \$29 million to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation "as it may be requested." The foundation is one of the dozen secretive money pits created by the Liberals beyond the prying eyes of access to information laws and even the auditor general.

Oh, I almost forgot the lawyers.

The government has agreed to pay the lawyers for the aboriginal school victims a cool \$80 million.

Greg Weston is the Sun's national political columnist. He runs Monday, Tuesday and Thursday

STATEMENT FROM GRAND COUNCIL CHIEF JOHN BEAUCAGE

Kelowna, British Columbia, Nov.23 /CCNMatthews/ - "We are very pleased with the announcement of a reconciliation and compensation agreement on **Residential Schools**. This is very long overdue, almost seven years after the 'Statement of Reconciliation', the government's official apology over the Residential School policy. Sadly, many of our elders have passed into the Spirit world during that time."

"The greatest value of this settlement, is it may bring peace and healing to generations of elders. I certainly feel the truth and reconciliation commission will be a positive step toward raising awareness, telling our Elder's stories, and brining First Nations and Canadians closer together."

"Hundreds of thousands of our children were forcibly removed from their communities, forbidden and punished for speaking their language. They were abused physically, emotionally and sexually. Sadly, very little is known about the Residential School tragedy within the broader Canadian society. Canadians must understand that this was a mandatory government assimilation policy which ultimately constitutes government-instituted abuse. Canadian children need to learn about this in school and all of us need to talk about this dark chapter in Canadian history. No longer should these events be swept under the rug, or whispered about in hushed tones."

Source: The Edmonton Sun

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Brookes Merritt

NATIVES LEERY OF COMPENSATION

Former students of notoriously abusive residential schools for aboriginal children are leery of Paul Martin's \$4-billion compensation promise, and wonder if it's just pre-election posturing.

And they worry the federal package might overshadow the other guilty parties in this whole ordeal - the churches who ran the schools.

The package is expected to provide any child who attended a residential school - whether or not they were the victim of sexual or physical abuse - with \$10,000 for their first year at the school, and \$3,000 for every year after that.

"No amount of money can bring back what was taken from us," said Mel Buffalo, head of the Indian Association of Alberta.

Buffalo attended a residential school in St. Albert for six years in the 1960s, where he said he was repeatedly beaten by other kids, and hit by teachers.

He wondered if the announcement wasn't Liberal grandstanding as they face a looming election.

"It's an acknowledgment of the nightmare we went through, but the aftermath has been devastating. Indians returned to communities and had to relearn their language and parenting skills, and had to heal from years of abuse."

Buffalo said that of the roughly 80,000 students across Canada claiming pain and suffering from attending residential schools, most are in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

"Everyone I know has a story about abuse in those schools," he said.

He hoped the churches will follow the government's example. Supreme Court rulings of residential school abuse cases have said the church involved should pay 25% of damages.

"It was members of the church who were doing the abusing, there has to be accountability there as well," Buffalo said.

A spokesman for Rev. John Clarke, the archbishop of the diocese of Athabasca, said compensation was long overdue, but made the excuse that the church should never have been handed over control of the schools in the first place.

But other students are demanding an apology from the church, in the form of further damages.

"This goes beyond government, the churches should be separately liable," said Leonard O'Kanee, who's now an addictions counsellor.

Okanee, 52, was sexually abused by other students twice between 1958 and 1963, when he attended a residential school at Onion Lake in Saskatchewan.

"I don't know if any compensation would ever be enough for what's happened to me. What I'm really looking for is an apology, someone from the church and the government saying 'yes, you were abused, and we're sorry.' But nobody wants to validate us."

Source: Toronto Star

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Editorial

Natives deserve a better future

For well over a century, many of Canada's native peoples have faced hard times. They have been warehoused, and often abused, in **residential schools** hundreds of kilometres from home. They have been treated in a paternalistic manner by the federal government, dismissed far too frequently as second-class citizens by the rest of the country, and neglected on rural reserves and in urban areas around the country.

Their scandalous plight has given Canada a well-deserved black eye at the United Nations and elsewhere in the world.

Finally, though, after decades of stalling and mismanagement, Ottawa is starting to address these wrongs and, if successful, could well give natives the resources and power to determine their own destiny and create a better future for themselves and future generations.

The first sign came yesterday when the federal government offered a \$2 billion compensation deal that is open to more than 80,000 former students at native **residential schools**. Under the deal, each survivor of abuse can apply for \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the schools.

And today, during a first ministers summit in Kelowna, B.C., Ottawa will offer natives a \$4 billion package to help fight poverty on reserves, including funds for training and to buy their own homes.

Native leaders are rightly pleased with the compensation package on **residential schools**, coming after years of lawsuits. Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine - himself a survivor of **residential schools** - calls the federal package "a deal for the ages."

As national chief, Fontaine is going to the summit with an ambitious plan that he hopes will finally break the cycle of poverty and desperation that plagues Canada's aboriginal peoples. He is proposing a 10-year plan that aims to eradicate poverty in the native community. More than 1 million natives live in Canada, from small reserves to large cities.

His prescription for healing a people that for generations has suffered high rates of unemployment, suicide, poverty and drug and alcohol addiction will not be cheap. The native leader is seeking a \$5 billion commitment over the next 10 years. That is in addition to the more than \$8 billion the federal government already spends annually.

"We're so desirous of change, real change. We want something better," Fontaine told the Star's editorial board earlier this week.

He wants First Nations members to take over native housing, which has a backlog of 80,000 units, along with education and health services. He proposes a First Nations auditor general to oversee spending and a First Nations ombudsman to deal with community complaints.

Many of his proposals may seem radical - and costly. But change is surely needed because the status quo is not working.

The plight of the Kashechewan Reserve in Northern Ontario, evacuated last month as a result of E. coli-contaminated water, reminded all of us how dire life on remote reserves can be. The incident may not be an anomaly. More than 50 native communities in this province are on boil-water orders to make water safe to drink.

Clearly, native leaders must assume some responsibility for the ramshackle conditions of many of their more remote communities. While federal neglect and inadequate funding are a major cause of many of the problems, they are not the sole reason. Canadians of goodwill are rightfully wary of pouring more good money after bad into a system that rarely seems to improve the living conditions on reserves or the plight of native communities. There is reason to proceed with caution.

Still, something must be done to empower aboriginal Canadians, to foster economic development opportunities and to inspire them to lead productive lives. Fontaine's vision of the future may not provide all the answers, but it is a sign of new thinking - and that is what is needed most.

Source: Toronto Star

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Sean Gordon

Abuse victims to get \$2 billion; Deal for survivors of residential school program Historic milestone on path to healing, Fontaine says

The federal government is offering \$2 billion in reparation payments to ease the plight of aboriginals who fell prey to rape, beatings and emotional abuse in church-run **residential schools** .

Though the agreement in principle must still be approved by the courts, native leaders and government officials said the compensation package will help mitigate what one called "the terrible and tragic legacy of our shared past."

"Today is an historic milestone on the path towards reconciliation and healing for the thousands of first nation individuals who have suffered and who continue to suffer from the effects of **residential schools** abuse," said Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

The agreement came on the eve of a two-day meeting that begins today when Prime Minister Paul Martin gathers with premiers, territorial leaders and aboriginal leaders in Kelowna, B.C.

The meeting is expected to produce upward of \$4 billion in new investments for improvements in areas like aboriginal education, housing, health care and economic opportunities.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said that any new federal funding for natives must come with strings attached to ensure it is not wasted, and warned Martin not to merely throw money at the problem.

"My major concern will be making sure that we have in place some follow-up and some objective measurement on an ongoing basis so that Canadians know that we are finally going to do justice when it comes to improving quality life for aboriginals," the premier said.

Under the compensation package announced yesterday, the roughly 80,000 survivors of the residential school program will each be eligible for a \$10,000 lump sum payment, in addition to \$3,000 for every year they spent in the institutions.

The government has also agreed to a \$125 million fund to pay for a healing program to help people cope with the consequences of their experience.

Those who are aged 65 and older - the average age of survivors is 60 - will be able to apply for an expedited \$8,000 payment.

It's expected that for the bulk of the survivors, the money will begin flowing by December of next year.

"While no amount of money will ever heal the scars, we hope the settlement package will bring comfort and a sense of victory and vindication for the children and grandchildren of survivors as well," said Fontaine, who was abused as a youth at the Fort Alexander School in Manitoba.

The residential school program existed in eight provinces for over a century - the last schools closed in the 1970s - and was primarily designed to culturally assimilate young aboriginal children.

More than 100,000 children passed through the schools and many suffered long-term psychological and physical consequences from the abuse they suffered, which native leaders blame for many cases of alcoholism, drug use and suicide.

Justice Minister Irwin Cotler said Fontaine's words "seared themselves on my own consciousness" when he referred to the program as "the most disgraceful, harmful and racist act in our history."

Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan, who oversees the resolution process, said "it is so symbolic that this week can deal with this important aspect of the past as so many have worked so hard in recent months to be ready to embrace the future."

The package may scuttle the court cases of about 15,000 former residential school students and their descendants who are presently involved in 21 class-action lawsuits against the government.

If that happens, the lawyers in those cases are expected to share about \$40 million in settlements.

Federal officials emphasized that people who don't think the settlement amounts are sufficient will have the opportunity to opt out of the program and seek redress through the courts.

While the agreement doesn't include a formal apology from the government, aboriginal groups vowed to continue pressing for one.

"I look forward to the apology by the Prime Minister eventually," said B.C. residential school survivor Charlene Belleau, who had worked with the Assembly of First Nations in its efforts to reach a settlement.

The schools were run by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and United churches. Officials said the contribution to the settlement package by the religious orders was about \$100 million in financial and "in kind" donations.

With files from Bruce Champion-Smith and Robert Benzie

Source: Globe and Mail

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Editorial

The expensive politics of residential redress

What price closure? To Prime Minister Paul Martin, the sky seems to be the limit. His government has concluded a \$3-billion-plus agreement to pay reparations to native peoples for the harms done by the residential-school system overseen by Ottawa for 100 years, until the 1970s. Even acknowledging that the schools are a blight on this country's history, that is a staggering sum to be borne by the current, blameless generation of taxpayers, who should be looking toward the future. Consider also that Ottawa has not even negotiated the question of whether to apologize for the **residential schools**. If sorry is so hard to say, why is \$3-billion so easy to pay? Hmmm, perhaps an election is coming. As Mr. Martin did when negotiating deals with Newfoundland and Labrador on equalization, with Ontario on immigration and other subsidies and with the premiers on health, the Prime Minister knows that the best way to silence loud voices of dismay is to give them everything they ask for. What he offers, no one can refuse.

Thus, Canada agreed to create a \$60-million truth and reconciliation commission. This type of commission, so valuable to South Africa as it came out of apartheid, probably works best if the history it seeks to expose has been hidden, or denied, or if the feelings on all sides are still raw; but the **residential schools** were probed in detail by a royal commission 10 years ago. The truth is known, and this new commission seems unlikely to reconcile anyone to anyone else.

Canada has also agreed to add a \$125-million endowment to the \$350-million Aboriginal Healing Foundation, created by Ottawa in 1998 at the same time that the government apologized for sexual and physical abuse that occurred at **residential schools**. But why, then, does Canada feel the need to pay \$1.9-billion to compensate all 80,000 former students of those schools for loss of language and culture and for the pain of being wrenched from their families? Each student receives \$10,000 for the first year and \$3,000 for subsequent years. (The average student spent an estimated five to seven years.) This is straight from the Assembly of First Nations' proposal. Ottawa had fought the notion of universal compensation for years, insisting (with some justification) that not all students at all **residential schools** suffered horribly.

Understand that this \$1.9-billion has nothing to do with abuse claims. Canada is creating a separate \$1.1-billion fund to settle those claims, a sensible and just alternative to endless court battles.

That does not include the lawyers' fees, which will top \$200-million.

Even those stagger-ing sums are not firm; they are based on rough estimates of anticipated claims, and the government has agreed to pay even more if necessary.

The **residential schools** deeply harmed native families and communities, and Canada should offer redress, in both symbolic and tangible forms.

But this agreement seems less about truth and reconciliation than about buying off an aggrieved community at election time.

Source: Globe and Mail

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline:

HELPING CANADA'S NATIVES Ottawa to pay \$2-billion in residential schools deal

MICHAEL VALPY, GLORIA GALLOWAY TORONTO, OTTAWA Ottawa's \$2-billion residential - schools agreement announced yesterday to bring closure to what has been called the most disgraceful racist act in national history took more than \$200-million in legal fees to achieve.

It left Canada's largest Protestant churches disgruntled by a perceived sweetheart deal on liability negotiated with the federal government by 41 Roman Catholic organizations that collectively ran most of the schools in which aboriginal children were forcibly confined through much of the last century.

And while the money offered was only about half the amount asked for by the Assembly of First Nations -- and came minus an apology for the sexual, physical and cultural abuse thousands of aboriginal children were subjected to -- the agreement was praised by AFN national chief Phil Fontaine.

"This is wonderful agreement," he said. "We were after a fair and just settlement package. This is certainly fair and just. We believe this will finally close the chapter on this tragic part of our history." With the announcement arriving as it did on the eve of the long-anticipated aboriginal summit in Kelowna, B.C. -- the success of which is far from certain -- it will help the Liberal government offset election-trail criticism that it has abandoned Canada's most vulnerable communities.

When asked why the native groups didn't pursue an apology as part of the settlement, Mr. Fontaine said he has not abandoned that quest.

"The apology from the government is something that is outside of this agreement and we will be sitting down with the Prime Minister to talk about the apology," he said during a news conference yesterday morning on Parliament Hill.

The proposal, subject to ratification by the courts, offers more than 80,000 former students -- whose average age is 60 -- \$10,000 each, plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the government-mandated, church-run schools established to assimilate native children into mainstream Canadian culture.

There will be an opportunity for individual abuse victims to opt out of the settlement, said Frank Iacobucci, the former Supreme Court justice who negotiated the settlement. But "we do sincerely hope that most survivors, and indeed as many as possible, will see this as a fair and reasonable approach." The settlement earmarks \$125-million for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to pay for programs to help survivors cope with the psychological trauma many of them suffered and

that aboriginal leaders have cited as a primary cause of epidemic rates of alcoholism, drug addiction and sexual abuse in native communities.

The federal government, which unwaveringly declared for a decade it would never offer former students a comprehensive settlement package, backed down in the face of pending huge class-action suits.

Toronto lawyer Craig Brown, a spokesman for the national consortium of legal counsel representing school survivors, said the government fought litigants "tooth and nail" for years oblivious to mounting legal fees.

The federal Justice Department, which had 109 lawyers assigned to the issue, has spent nearly \$90-million on litigation since 1999.

The agreement assigns \$40-million each, plus disbursement and GST costs, to the member law firms of the national consortium and the Alberta- and Saskatchewan-based Merchant Law Group. It also includes a payment formula -- estimated at \$20-million -- for work by lawyers outside the two groups.

In addition, the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United Church organizations that operated the schools under government contract have spent close to \$30-million on legal costs (as Ottawa was sued by school survivors, it turned around and sued the churches).

Source: Montreal Gazette

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Editorial

Residential school payout goes too far

It's tempting to simply heave a sigh of relief that the federal government and the Assembly of First Nations have finally agreed on a settlement that will bring an end to the long, agonizing drama over the mistreatment of aboriginal children in Canada's **residential schools**. In fact, at \$2.2 billion, the agreement seems almost a bargain if it can, indeed, bring this shabby chapter in our history to a close.

For the real victims - those who were sexually and physically abused - the agreement will bring some relief and compensation for their suffering. Not a lot, perhaps - \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the system - but something. And more has been set aside for victims of extreme abuse.

There are, however, elements of this deal that reek of expediency rather than justice. Compensating men and women who were raped and beaten as children is one thing; including loss of language or culture in the list of eligible grievances is going much too far.

It's true that many Canadians have come to regard **residential schools** with the kind of odium and disdain otherwise reserved for concentration camps. For those people - and they would include most of the aboriginal leadership - just to have been in one of these schools is qualification enough to line up for a government cheque.

But that's unfair, both to the smaller number of victims who bear physical and emotional scars unimaginable to most of us, and to the hundreds of well-meaning men and women who went north to work and teach in those schools, firmly convinced that they were acting in the best interests of the children involved. In fact, many graduates have positive memories of their experience in **residential schools**.

The motives of the people who built the schools and ran them were certainly coloured by the prejudices and preconceptions of their day, but their objective was to prepare aboriginal children for life in a modern society. Their methods were harsh and sometimes coercive, but at the time, assimilating children into white society was seen as a far better guarantee of success and happiness than leaving them to try their luck eking out a living in the wilderness.

We have become more sophisticated over time. Modern sociologists now tell us that the best place to help anyone is where they live (a concept, oddly enough, that the earliest Catholic missionaries also believed). But even that debate continues. The abuse and neglect that children suffer on many of Canada's more remote reserves - and the drug-and-booze-drenched hopelessness of their lives - doesn't seem much of an improvement on the **residential schools**. If anything, the lot of those children is sometimes worse; at least the schools made an effort to teach their wards a trade.

It's certainly sad that in that process, many of those children lost their language and their cultural identity, but the government and the religious groups who ran the schools acted in good faith and in accordance with the best understanding of the time in preparing their wards for the modern world. Just because something's lamentable doesn't make it actionable. Equating the loss of language with sexual and physical abuse is absurd.

Source: Winnipeg Free Press

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Dave Kuxhaus

Museum will tell dark story

David Kuxhaus A residential school museum scheduled to open on the Long Plain reserve near Portage la Prairie in 2008 has already received calls from as far away as Australia about a touring exhibit.

The museum, the first of its kind in the country, will shed light on a dark chapter of Canadian history -- the abuse and isolation suffered by many aboriginal children who were uprooted from their families in a failed attempt at assimilation.

It's a story that for many years people didn't want to hear or acknowledge, said the museum's project co-ordinator Shany Silinski.

"I think people are ready to hear this story more so now than they were in the past," Silinski said.

Yesterday, Ottawa offered \$2 billion to compensate former students of native **residential schools**.

Flora Merrick just celebrated her ninetieth birthday but can't forget the 10 years spent at a residential school near Portage la Prairie.

"I remember everything that happened," she said. "It never goes away." Merrick remembers getting strapped until her hands were blue with bruises, being forbidden to speak her native tongue, and being locked in dormitories at night.

But perhaps the most painful memory is the refusal of staff to let her go home to attend her mother's funeral.

"They left my dad and grandfather standing in the hallway," said Merrick.

Winnipeg lawyer Bill Percy, who represents about 500 clients who attended **residential schools**, said the compensation package isn't perfect but is a positive step forward.

Residential schools operated from the mid-19th century until 1980.

Many children were abused -- physically, sexually or emotionally -- and made to feel ashamed of their culture.

Silinski said they plan to tell the story of the schools using photographs and other documents such as correspondence between the churches and government, and letters from students. A touring exhibit is expected to be ready by the spring.

Aside from Australia, Silinski said groups from New Zealand and the U.S have inquired about visits.

The permanent home for the \$4.5 million museum will be the former Portage Indian School.

Source: Winnipeg Free Press

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Catherine Mitchell

Residential schools have been demonized

Prime Minister Paul Martin would like us to believe that the \$2 billion he is offering to "survivors" of Indian **residential schools** is a just resolution -- an agreement for the ages, national chief Phil Fontaine proclaimed.

There are legions of stories about children horribly, unforgivably abused sexually and physically at the schools. That is Canada's shame.

The stories have become legendary, supplanting the other truth: Many who attended the schools did not suffer.

But this 11th-hour "fair and lasting" fix, cooked up on the eve of an election, effectively indicts all who worked at any of 130 schools run by churches for the government, dating back before confederation.

It turns every student into a victim, including those who were better off for the experience. There's a separate fund for them too, because they are clearly suffering from repressed memory.

The truth about the legacy of **residential schools** is now an inconvenience, a pimple on the collective consciousness in the stampede to right the wrongs, including those not done.

Don't take my word.

Clarence Easter is a good friend, and chief of the Chemawawin Cree Nation, which sits on a rocky shore of Cedar Lake, a beautiful body of water that is now a gigantic holding pond for Manitoba Hydro's Grand Rapids dam. Easter's original home was an idyllic peninsula a bit farther west, where farming was fruitful and the fishing good.

In the 1960s, Hydro flooded the lake and Easter's community was relocated to its current home -- where farming was impossible, a promise of running water meant running for water, and the fishing eventually died off. In 1973, amid the social disintegration that followed on the reserve, Easter left for high school at Dauphin's McKay residential school.

Easter remembers being harshly treated: Getting painfully yanked out of bed; struck with a belt buckle; kicked; and forced to wash floors and stairs as punishment for misbehaviour. Residential school left its mark.

That mark has made him what he is today. He went to university, almost got a teaching degree, returned to Easterville, worked in education. He has been chief for more than a decade.

"I feel like I was physically abused but I got an education out of it. I learned a few things. I am the way I am today because of that. "It's a good thing. I like where I am today." He says he learned how to survive, to be independent, a feat not to be discounted given reserves' unemployment rates of 80 per cent and more.

Easter is eligible for \$19,000 from the plan cooked up by the Liberals, the Assembly of First Nations and the dozens of lawyers who had launched class-action suits on behalf of 80,000 status Indians -- whether they knew it or not.

Easter says he never filed a claim; he never thought of it, in fact. The government's records show almost 15,000 claims were filed for out-of-court settlement for abuse. Fewer than 3,000 have been settled, at a cost of \$110 million to date. The new agreement to compensate everyone for the "common experience" also promises to expedite the claims for grave physical and sexual abuses.

Residential schools were a government's attempt to educate and assimilate generations of small, vulnerable children. Some schools were rotten to the core. Some were good. Most, I suspect, fell somewhere in between, not unlike public schools today.

I can't imagine sending my kids off for eight months into a stranger's care. I sympathize with any parent who had to, to get their kid educated and more so for those who were scarred by the experience.

But I know that the government's plans to spend \$60 million on a "truth and reconciliation" process has already dispensed with the truth. Reconciliation will become historical revisionism, cementing a myth that all native families today suffer from the irrevocable harm of **residential schools**.

Don't take my word on this.

Today, Easterville teens are sent to high school in The Pas. They billet with local families, paid by the band. It's not good, Easter says. Kids go to families that are strangers. In **residential schools**, kids had each other.

The teenagers come home on weekends, get caught up in family stuff and sometimes don't go back on Mondays.

If he had a choice, he says, he'd send the kids to a residential school, where they'd get a better education.

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Source: Winnipeg Free Press

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Lindor Reynolds

'Warm memories' bond nun, national chief

Sister Ida Spence, a tiny 85-year-old nun with arthritic fingers gnarled into near-uselessness, wants to share her most important memories with a visitor.

She's almost blind now, this former residential school teacher, but she still uses her two photo albums as reminders of her long and full life. She has saved prayer cards, pictures of Pope John Paul and family snapshots. There are fading images of family, priests long dead and a variety of important religious services.

Sister Ida has also kept photos of one of her favourite students, once a little boy at Fort Alexander residential school and now a powerful First Nations leader.

In two pictures, an adult Phil Fontaine sits next to an aged Sister Ida and grins at the camera.

The man who helped design the federal government's \$2-billion compensation package for victims of **residential schools** still visits the Metis woman who was once his teacher at Fort Alexander.

There is grey in even the most seemingly black-and-white situations.

In the relationship between Fontaine, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and the elderly nun now living out her days on the infirmary ward of a church residence, there is a flurry of white, black and grey.

"Many of us have warm memories, of course," Fontaine said yesterday of the Oblate sisters, his former teachers. "I enjoy seeing them." Fontaine was speaking from the Calgary airport, fresh from the federal government's announcement of a compensation package that will see former students receive \$10,000 apiece, plus \$3,000 for each year spent in the school system.

He qualifies for that payment. Every former student, regardless of whether they suffered abuse, will receive compensation.

Fontaine paused as flight announcements rang out over the line.

"We should never, ever forget there were many, many good people there." But that has been forgotten. **Residential schools** have been measured in absolutes, hindsight rendering them all hell holes where children suffered unspeakable horrors. There has been no room for grey in the retelling of the stories of aboriginal children who were taught by nuns and priests.

Years ago, Fontaine disclosed he had been physically and sexually abused at the Fort Alexander school. He said yesterday that his fondness for some of his former teachers doesn't negate the mistreatment of many vulnerable students.

"Our warm memories don't erase what was done to children," he said.

The \$2-billion package, which still has to be approved by the courts, is a "fair and just package," Fontaine said.

"Our intention is to put an end to this story," he said. "We're very pleased with the agreement." The possibility exists that not every native student's experience at a residential school was entirely black. We've already assumed that every priest and nun involved in their education wasn't pure and white.

Could the truth, ultimately, be grey? Sister Ida, as she sat in her small room in the St. Boniface residence, said she is deeply hurt by all the stories of universal pain inflicted on her charges.

"I was in those places," she said, eyes shut against the light.

"I never saw that. Nobody acted that way with me there." She stops, tells a story about how a young native girl from Eddystone became a nun, and picks up the thread again.

"These were my children and they still are," she said. "I never had so much fun as I did with those children. For me, I loved them like they were my next of kin." The assumption of complicity in a crime against a generation of aboriginal youth has even reached the sanctity of the church residence she calls home.

"Some of the sisters, they say they know what happened there.

I say it is wrong to judge, to say it was like that everywhere, with everyone." The truth, in black and white, is that Phil Fontaine helped negotiate a \$2-billion settlement for every child who attended a residential school.

But the truth, as grey as it might be, is that the same man still visits the nun who educated him and who remembers him fondly today.

And that Sister Ida prays for him still.

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Source : Edmonton Journal

Date : 2005.11.24

Byline : Karen Kleiss

Money can't numb pain: Residential schools settlement met with scorn tempered by optimism

EDMONTON - George Brertton was five years old when his teacher smacked him so hard his head bounced off a concrete wall and started to bleed.

It was 1947 and he had just arrived at the Edmonton Indian Residential School.

He had asked the teacher: "What is this building?"

His mistake was asking his question in the only language he knew -- Cree.

In the 11 years he spent there, he ate porridge with mouse feces in it, and was once hit so hard he shook for two days.

At 12, he was forced to dig graves, which brought on terrifying nightmares of being buried alive. He started wetting the bed.

His teacher rubbed his nose into the urine-soaked mattress until it bled.

On Wednesday, 63-year-old Brertton learned the government that once instructed churches to "kill the Indian in the child" will likely compensate him with \$43,000 for his trauma.

But Brertton is indifferent to the windfall.

"It's not going to do me nothing -- you can never buy out that pain," he said Wednesday. "All the money in the world wouldn't be enough. I'll bring that pain to my grave."

He is happy, though, that the government is finally acknowledging the tragedy.

Aboriginal leaders were jubilant as Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan on Wednesday announced an agreement in principle, Canada's first sweeping plan to atone for decades of abuse at 130 residential schools across the country.

If approved by the courts, the agreement will make each of the estimated 80,000 residential school survivors eligible for \$10,000 in compensation, plus \$3,000 for each year of residency after the first. "This is the largest and most comprehensive settlement package in Canadian history," said Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

"Today marks the first step towards closure on a terrible, tragic legacy for the thousands of First Nations individuals who suffered physical, sexual or psychological abuses."

The new agreement provides for more than \$2 billion in payments and healing programs, and is also open to former students without Indian status, Inuit and Metis. Payments will likely be made by the end of 2006, and those over 65 years of age can apply for fast-track payments of \$8,000.

Former students who accept the deal agree to release the government and churches who ran the schools from further liability.

But Jon Faulds, an Edmonton lawyer who helped broker the deal, says the estimated 10,000 former students who can prove severe sexual or physical abuse can pursue further claims.

He says the deal allows up to 5,000 survivors to opt out before the government can be forced to renegotiate the deal, but he believes most survivors will see the benefits of the new agreement.

"It is easier, it is under court supervision and there are guidelines to make sure it deals with the caseload efficiently," Faulds said.

But Terry Lusty, president of the Residential School Survivors Society of Alberta, says his roughly 50 members believe the deal doesn't come close to compensating them for their trauma.

Most want to see compensation in the neighbourhood of \$30,000 to \$50,000.

"Many people are very frustrated, very upset and very angry about the offer that was put on the table," he said Wednesday. A survivor himself, he said the trauma is intergenerational and that families of survivors should also be compensated.

"Their immediate family should be eligible for the money they should have received," he said, referring to the fact that only the families of survivors who died after May 1 this year will be eligible to apply. Brereton hopes the settlement will help his grandchildren. "I want the kids to understand, to learn why things are the way they are. I want them to learn to forgive."

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A LOOK BACK

Hundreds of thousands of aboriginal children attended **residential schools**, which operated from the mid-1800s to the early 1970s. In Alberta, the first **residential schools** were opened in 1844 in Lac Ste. Anne and Morley. More than 20 **residential schools** were run in the province, including ones in Hobbema, Fort Chipewyan, Lac La Biche and St. Paul. Some important dates:

- 1919: Methodist Indian Residential School in Red Deer closes and is relocated to Edmonton.
- 1924: Edmonton Indian Residential School opens.

- 1961: Student riot at the school brings better food and treatment.
- 1968: School closes.
- 1974: Poundmaker's Lodge Treatment Centre is founded at the school site.
- 1984: New building is erected to house Poundmaker's Lodge Treatment Centre.
- 1996: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples highlights the tragic legacy of **residential schools**.
- 1998: Federal government issues a statement of reconciliation.
- 2000: (July) -- Edmonton Indian Residential School building is burned down by arsonist.
- 2000: (Sept.) -- First healing gathering held for former students at the site. Students share memories of having jobs burying dead aboriginal children and adults who had been patients at the Charles Camsell hospital and tuberculosis sanatorium. Others remember their younger siblings being hung up on walls with hooks to force older students to work.
- 2003: Government launches the National Resolution Framework to help resolve claims.
- 2005: (May) -- Government appoints Frank Iacobucci to broker a deal; in November, government announces agreement in principle.

BY THE NUMBERS

- \$1.9 billion set aside for the direct benefit of former Indian residential school students.
- \$60 million for the creation of a truth and reconciliation process designed to give former students and their families a chance to share their experiences and promote public awareness.
- \$10 million will be invested in a commemoration program.
- \$125 million will go to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, an endowment that will help fund programs to help survivors and their families heal.

Source: Edmonton Journal

Date: 2005.11.24

Byline: Editorial

'An agreement for the ages'

Canada has taken too long to recognize the grave injustice done to aboriginal people by forcing them as children into residential schools. But at last there is a breakthrough in resolving this shameful chapter in our history.

It's a profound truth that healing begins with the acknowledgement of harm done; that's the crucial step being taken in this move to compensate everyone sent to residential schools.

Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, calls this week's federal announcement "an agreement for the ages."

It will be exactly that if it gives aboriginal people a sense of vindication, a validation of their experience so long denied by the rest of society.

It's also true, as Fontaine says, that no amount of money will heal the scars of deprivation. Rather, this agreement seeks atonement for a well-intentioned but horribly misguided experiment in assimilation.

More than 80,000 aboriginals who attended residential school will be eligible for compensation, starting at \$10,000 for the first year and \$3,000 for each additional year. Cost to taxpayers will be \$1.9 billion. Cases of serious sexual abuse or physical assault will be eligible for further compensation.

The decision to issue a blanket payment to everyone who was sent away from home is a major departure from the previous federal position.

For years, Ottawa insisted that individuals prove the harm they suffered. But it has been evident for some time that this approach was not working. There were just too many claimants for the courts to handle.

Worse, after years of legal wrangling, it was still unclear how the courts would address the unprecedented harm of depriving children of their families, their language and culture, and sending them to live in institutions that were often substandard and subject to inadequate supervision.

Edmonton lawyer Jon Faulds, whose firm handled hundreds of cases, said over the years it became clear that just the experience of this deprivation needed to be addressed. Hence the push for a blanket settlement.

Former Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci was assigned the formidable task of bringing aboriginal groups, lawyers, churches and federal officials together to find another way. He deserves much credit for his work.

There are other important elements in the package: a truth and reconciliation forum to allow former students to share their stories, a \$125-million endowment for an Aboriginal Healing Foundation; and provision for commemoration activities.

Fontaine says he'll also seek an formal apology from the federal government, a step that is clearly an important part of righting this wrong.

It is also crucial that the four churches involved in running the residential school system are part of this agreement.

But Iacobucci managed to ensure that Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United churches that ran the schools will contribute "significantly" to the proposed settlement, and that's as it should be.

No doubt his negotiating hand was strengthened by the Supreme Court judgment last month upholding an earlier ruling which required the Catholic church to pay 25 per cent of damages.

There are still hurdles ahead. The chief justices of each province must approve the settlement, which will essentially overtake 21 class action suits across the country. Also, we haven't yet seen reaction from aboriginal communities, and without their support the settlement will stumble.

However well intentioned government and church officials may have been, **residential schools** had terrible consequences. About 100,000 children aged between four and 18, in every province but New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, were taken from their homes.

If this settlement works as intended, it should at last be possible to move on to focusing more energy and resources on building a better future with Canada's aboriginal communities.