

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens Canada
Manchettes**

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November 23, 2006

Elders Hope to Revitalize Aboriginal Languages

The StarPhoenix

By : Pam Cradock

Sheila McKay is one of the few people on her reserve who speaks Dakota fluently.

McKay, from the Sioux Valley Dakota First Nation in southern Manitoba, is worried. Culture and language are intrinsically linked, she said, and if one dies out, the other will, too.

She has reason to be nervous. The youngest fluent speaker of the language on her First Nation is 35 years old, and if children don't become fluent, the Dakota language will become extinct.

McKay is from one particular First Nation and one language group, but the stories are the same throughout the country. Due to the lingering effects of residential schools and the oppression of First Nations people, it's believed at least three aboriginal languages will die out in less than a generation from now.

Children and young adults aren't learning the languages because they aren't spoken regularly by their parents or the outside world, said Dorothy Myo, interim president of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre.

"Our children, no matter how hard we try to teach them, the language, it's becoming their second language," said Myo. "We have to figure out ways to revitalize our language and our culture."

Now that the problem is being recognized, Myo and the centre are calling on their friends and neighbours for suggestions to deal with it. At a three-day conference called Reclaiming Our Voice, which began Wednesday in Saskatoon, concerned elders and older adults filled a banquet room to discuss ways of saving their culture.

Although all aboriginal languages are in danger, of particular concern are the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota languages, said Myo. Their populations are the smallest, she said.

There's also a problem of perception, according to keynote speaker Brian MacDonald, an educator from the Onion Lake First Nation. He said many parents want to enroll their children in language immersion courses, but they believe enrolment may mean children won't learn English properly.

There's also a widespread belief English is the ticket to a better life, MacDonald said.

More government money for resources are desperately needed, but families should also be teaching their children the languages themselves, he said.

"We don't have to rely on governments to do what we need to do," said MacDonald.

Some parents and grandparents have already taken matters into their own hands. Dalyce Wambdiska is teaching her 21-month-old grandson to speak Dakota because her daughter doesn't have enough confidence in her abilities.

The results of Wambdiska's efforts are encouraging.

"My grandson, at 21 months old, says a few words already," she said.

Child, Youth Overseer Gets the Ted Hughes Stamp of Approval

The Vancouver Sun

By : Vaughn Palmer

VICTORIA - When the B.C. legislature convened Wednesday afternoon, the faces looking down from the public galleries included one of our most eminent citizens, Ted Hughes.

The ostensible reason for the brief and controversial sitting was the appointment of a new child and youth representative.

Hughes himself had recommended the creation of the watchdog post in his review of the troubled child protection system.

Because of that proprietary interest, the 78-year-old former judge had boarded an early morning flight in Saskatchewan -- where he is serving as full-time federal commissioner on residential schools -- to fly home to Victoria to be on hand as the legislature moved to appoint the new representative.

He came, as well, to offer his endorsement of the soon-to-be-appointee: Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, administrative judge of the Provincial Court in Saskatchewan.

"Impressive choice," Hughes told reporters, as the name circulated through the legislative corridors Wednesday afternoon.

Well, yes: Four degrees, including a doctorate of laws from Harvard. Twice chosen by Time magazine as one of the most promising individuals in Canada.

Hughes also drew attention to her special qualifications for the child protection post. She's aboriginal, born to a Cree father from Manitoba and a Scottish mother.

Natives account for fully one-half of the children in care in B.C. And Judge Turpel-Lafond would know something of their challenges first-hand.

"Like so many native homes, hers was rife with alcoholism and violence," according to a profile of her published in Saturday Night last year. "She regularly witnessed her father striking her mother and suffered abuse herself."

British Columbians can expect her to speak her mind, too. "She'll say what needs to be said," says Hughes, who has been known to do that himself from time to time.

Quote: "The biggest mistake people can make about me is thinking I have no independence in my perspective."

She said that in the spring of 1998, when she was made a Provincial Court judge at age 35.

She wasn't long in showing she meant it, generating headline after headline with her outspoken views.

One of her most controversial cases involved a 12-year-old girl accused of arson who suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome.

Instead of incarceration, Turpel-Lafond ordered the government to create a treatment program for the youngster.

Some thought she crossed the line more than once. Right-wing politicians threatened to take her to the judicial council. The New Democratic Party government went to the appeal court to overturn some of her decisions.

But after eight years on the bench, her stature was indisputable. Indeed, her name was among those being touted for eventual elevation to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Instead, she's agreed to uproot her husband (academic and former native leader George Lafond) and four children and move to the West Coast for a five-year, \$220,000-a-year posting as representative for children and youth.

"We're very lucky to have her," Hughes emphasized, which is not to say that he was involved in the selection process.

He learned the name only as it leaked out in the last 48 hours, when he'd already made up his mind that he wanted to be in Victoria.

But it made it all the more satisfying to know that the post would be in good hands. If you'd searched the whole world over, "you couldn't have come up with a better person for the job."

So said Hughes after the house adjourned Wednesday, by which time the appointment should have been completed, it having been the unanimous recommendation of an all-party committee of the legislature.

But the Opposition used a procedural move to delay the appointment. Not out any objection to the candidate, but to register a protest at the B.C. Liberals' decision to scrap the regularly scheduled fall session of the legislature.

A point worth making. And it may have provided enough time for Turpel-Lafond to be here in person when the house gets around to formal ratification, as expected, on Monday.

But no one should lose sight of the main point, Hughes said. Superb choice, endorsed by both parties, and certain to be formalized in "a few days at most."

As for the procedural wrangle, "it was just another day in B.C. politics," as Hughes put it "and nothing to lose any sleep over."

With that he picked up his coat and shuffled away, en route to the airport and a 7:30 p.m. flight back to Saskatchewan and his day job.

Plus, he's thinking he should put through a call to Turpel-Lafond later today. Congratulations are in order, of course, and he may have a thing or two to tell her about B.C.

Native Reserves Must Face Reality

The Toronto Sun

By : Mindelle Jacobs

Critics of a proposal that the residents of a troubled Northern Ontario reserve be moved south to an urban area have been predictably overwrought.

A lawyer who specializes in aboriginal issues described the idea as "**cultural genocide**."

And in a recent column in the National Post, native writer Waubageshig (also known as Harvey McCue) declared that moving the residents of the remote Kashechewan reserve 450 km south to Timmins would result in assimilation.

Instead, Waubageshig suggests, we should help the Kashechewan Cree and other remote native communities create a northern economy.

But you can't transform hundreds of small, isolated reserves into self-supporting entities.

It's the pie-in-the-sky dream of arm-chair philosophers -- the inevitable result of creeping acceptance of the troublesome notion of First Nations sovereignty.

As Tom Flanagan pointed out in his book *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, aboriginal "nations" are only viable through massive, ongoing government support.

Throwing even more federal money at out-of-the-way native communities to try to make them economically sustainable is utterly impractical.

Consider some sobering statistics. Almost 60% of Canada's 630 reserves have populations of 500 people or less. More than 20% of reserves have less than 250 residents. Only 35% of on-reserve status Indians live within 50 km of an urban centre. Another 44% live in rural communities between 50 km and 350 km from the nearest centre with year-round road access.

NO YEAR-ROUND LINKS

And 21% live in isolated areas -- mostly in what Indian and Northern Affairs officials describe as "special access zones." These reserves have no year-round road links to communities with services such as health-care facilities.

In short, hundreds of reserves are located vast distances from the benefits of modern-day life -- good-quality schools, jobs, health care and opportunity. Urban life has its

drawbacks, of course, but it remains the best chance for aboriginals to leave behind the poverty, disease, addiction and social decay that have infected so many reserves.

Pining away for the life of the hunter-gatherer serves no useful purpose. Success lies with education and jobs -- linked mostly to urban life. We've seen what life on remote reserves brings -- welfare dependency and despair. And natives in these communities are killing themselves, either quickly by suicide or slowly through the mental and physical anguish spawned by hopelessness.

In contrast, **assimilation** doesn't seem such a bad idea. It doesn't mean natives must forget who they are. It means they need to take the best of what the wider society has to offer to succeed.

"Call it assimilation, call it integration, call it adaptation, call it whatever you want: it has to happen," Flanagan wrote in his book.

He is right that natives need to acquire the skills and attitudes that bring success in a market economy. Imagining that we can turn remote native communities into economic engines is fantasy.

Jim Wastasecoot, publisher of the First Perspective, a Manitoba-based native newspaper, agrees that it's time aboriginals swallowed a dose of reality. The days of living off the land are largely gone, he notes. "You've got to think about the future," he says. "If the community doesn't have the resource base to develop economically, they should consider moving."