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Residential schools panel to begin work June 1

Meagan Fitzpatrick , Canwest News Service

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OTTAWA - The Truth and Reconciliation Commission studying the legacy of residential schools will be up and running on June 1 now that the remaining members of the commission have been named, the federal government said Tuesday.

Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl announced the appointment of Jane Brewin Morley and Caludette Dumont-Smith as commissioners in the House of Commons. Last month, Justice Harry LaForme was named head of the commission, which will examine the conditions that gave rise to residential schools, and hear stories from survivors.

Morley is a lawyer in British Columbia who has been involved in the residential schools settlement agreement and Dumont-Smith is a health professional who has worked with several national associations.



Justice Harry LaForme will chair the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Chris Wattie/Reuters

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The last residential schools, which were run by churches on behalf of the federal government, were closed in the 1970s. Thousands of aboriginal and Metis children attended the schools, where they were not allowed to speak their languages or practise their culture. Many students reported physical, psychological and sexual abuse while in the schools.

"These appointments represent a significant step forward in a part of our government's commitment to delivering a fair and lasting resolution for former students of residential schools," Strahl told the House of Commons.

The federal government also is expected to issue a formal apology to students who attended residential schools. Speaking to reporters after question period, Strahl said it will come "in the very near future."

The minister said the government does not want the timing of the apology to interfere with the May 29 national day of action in support of First Nations people, and said the apology will come shortly after.

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