

Reclaiming Shingwauk Hall Exhibition Opening

August 3

[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]

Good afternoon.

Lieutenant Governor Dowdeswell, Chancellor Horn, Vice-Chancellor and President Vezina, my fellow speakers and guests, it is my pleasure to be here with all of you today.

I would like to thank Mike Cachagee and Jay Jones for welcoming us, Shirley Roach for the opening prayer, Cheryl Jamieson for the Acknowledgement of Traditional Land and Territories, and Barbara Day and Nimkii Anaakwat for the opening song.

Our community had the honour of hosting the Lieutenant Governor two years ago, this month actually, and I had the privilege of spending the better part of a day with her.

Her honour and I spent a considerable amount of time speaking about the importance of stories and storytelling. Stories and storytelling are essential to the foundational elements of community: common understanding, common language and shared experienced.

For far too long, we did not, as a Country, a Province or a City, acknowledge, tell or share the story of the Canadian Indian Residential School system.

I did not learn of the residential school system as a child in elementary school, a teen in high school or a university student who completed two degrees at two different institutes in two different parts of our country.

I was not told the story of how children were often taken from their parents, how parents and grandparents would resist, how siblings were separated, how the children were unwillingly divorced from their language, their culture, their history, how they were told what they knew and loved and believed in was wrong, how children were mistreated.

Tens of thousands of children. Tens of thousands of families. The social and cultural consequences are still very much a part of today.

This is the truth. It is a truth we must acknowledge. Most importantly, it is a truth we must share.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work, final report and calls to action show us a path forward but I suggest that it is critical we keep one simple idea constantly in mind: Truth comes before Reconciliation. Truth comes first.

I strongly believe, and have said for years, that Sault Ste. Marie has all of the elements to lead. We have tremendous First Nation and Métis leadership, we live in an important place, Bawating: the heart of Turtle Island, and we are home to a former residential school which is now a place of higher learning.

The establishment of a permanent Survivor-driven exhibition in a former residential school demonstrates this leadership and represents an important step for Algoma University and for our community.

I commend the leadership and staff of the university for making this project a reality.

I want to end by acknowledging all of the survivors of the residential school system across the Country and the Children of Shingwauk here in our community and their families, both their ancestors and their descendants.

We owe them gratitude for their perseverance, strength and spirit. For keeping their stories alive and passing them on, so that we can acknowledge the truth, learn from it and grow from it.

Thank you. Miigwetch.