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We need to do something significant for National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

On Sept. 30, we all need to practise expecting Indigenous success.

Rose LeMay

OTTAWA— Let's assume that the country is not still completely inundated with news coverage of Queen Elizabeth II's death, and that we actually do something significant on Sept. 30, the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Yes, the Queen will be missed. But it's particularly ironic for this most massive symbol of colonization to swamp the news cycles in the days leading up to our National Day of Truth and Reconciliation.

The one question I get most often in providing adult education on anti-racism and reconciliation is, "What is reconciliation?" This might be a bit of an issue, given that we're already on the journey. Then again, the question itself might be reflective of this country's steadfast resistance to seeing Indigenous peoples in anything but stereotype.

If there's any question about the strength of Canada's stereotype that Indigenous peoples suffer deficit, just imagine this: Indigenous peoples made up one-quarter of the board on your local health network, or your hospital, or your school board, or owned the biggest ho-

tels in the city, or led the federal political parties. Didn't expect that, did you? Why not? Because Canada suffers from this intergenerational stereotype that the successful Indigenous individual is unique, because Indigenous peoples don't succeed.

On Sept. 30, we all need to practise expecting Indigenous success.

Australia's reconciliation journey named five overarching goals for their country. Their goals are no different from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's themes, but one has to wonder if our TRC met so much resistance in telling the truth that it didn't have enough time to get to the reconciliation part. Case in point: the federal government didn't even want to hear about unmarked graves a decade ago. Well, that didn't go well, now did it? Australia defined its reconciliation with five themes: good race relations built in trust and free of racism; Indigenous equality and equity; institutional integrity in which political, business and community structures actively support all dimensions of reconciliation; unity in which

Algonquin Elder and University of Ottawa chancellor Claudette Commanda, pictured on the Hill on Sept. 30, 2021, at the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia

the country values Indigenous cultures as part of national identity; and historical acceptance of all citizens of the past wrongs with support for amends so that these wrongs are never repeated again. The most recent evaluation found some positive progress with still more work to be done.

If Canada were marked on these five Australian measures, we might be found lacking.

Canada is doing better on recognizing racism against Indigenous peoples, but it's doubtful that police forces are doing better in prosecuting criminal consequences for racism and hate crimes against Indigenous peoples. We still don't have good national measures. Canada is working towards equity on Indigenous social determinants of health (except for those pesky issues like water and housing and educational outcomes), but provinces and territories are conve-

niently left off the hook for the equity outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Institutional integrity is important. But we failed to demand that governments, corporations, and community structures must take action on reconciliation. So some have done some good work, and some haven't even considered it at all. We have no shared expectations for museums or municipal governments or corporations to do reconciliation, much less measures for institutional integrity.

On Sept. 30, ask municipal candidates to pledge to lead reconciliation in the city.

And then there's the question of widespread historical acceptance of the crimes of residential schools and colonization. Professor Sean Carleton at the University of Manitoba recently wrote that "residential school denialism is not the outright denial of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system's existence, but rather the rejection or misrepresentation of basic facts about residential schooling to undermine truth and reconciliation efforts".

On Sept. 30, practice challenging denialisms Do more than wear an orange shirt.

Rose LeMay is Tlingit from the West Coast and the CEO of the Indigenous Reconciliation Group. She writes twice a month about Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation. In Tlingit worldview, the stories are the knowledge system, sometimes told through myth and sometimes contradicting the myths told by others. But always with at least some truth.

The Hill Times Stories, Myths, and Truths