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BROCK'S BANTER: The more you learn...

By Brock Weir

Knowledge is power.

It can equip us for the future, impart ways of dealing with challenges even before they arise, and help us suss out fact from fiction, a powerful tool in this era of so-called ?fake news? which has become pervasive in just about every corner of our lives; and it hits from just about every angle, from social media to friends and colleagues eager to share unattributable and unsourced ?truths? they gleaned from a video posted by some guy from what can only be described as a dank and dingy basement-cum-recording studio.

But knowledge can, to some, be a double-edged sword. While, at the end of the day, it is a good thing, it can sometimes be distressing in putting into perspective just how much we actually know about what has been going on around us, and how we may or may not have the power to make a difference.

In recent years, we have seen this phenomenon unfold many times, particularly when it comes to issues facing ? or issues that have been faced by ? our Indigenous peoples and the lingering effects that are a part of it today.

For instance, when the reports of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada came out in the early years of this decade, many people were shocked and dismayed by its findings, and some even felt embarrassment that the Residential School System had persisted without their knowledge into 1996 with the final closure of the last remaining facility in Saskatchewan.

Despite no shortage of survivors willing to face the difficult task of sharing their stories, the very system as a whole was news to a great many Canadians and the horrors committed within their walls, particularly abuses suffered by children and the high rate of childhood mortality ? stunned those who had been previously unaware.

With increased coverage not just within newspapers, but on televised documentaries, podcasts and other media, I've been surprised by the number of people who are learning about the Sixties Scoop for the very first time, that is the practice by the government to remove Indigenous children from their families against the will of their parents, and adopt them out to non-Indigenous families.

Over the years, survivors have shared their experiences of having their familial links severed and the herculean efforts they have taken on to reconnect the fragments of these bonds,

but, for some people, the very fact this practice existed was an unwelcome, uncomfortable, and difficult-to-comprehend reality check.

As recently as last month, this disconnect has been evident in many pockets, including the recent Pride celebrations in Toronto. No stranger to controversy and tough questions, Pride Toronto found itself under fire for their non-traditional take on traditional land acknowledgement, posting at the festivities: ?Take a moment to connect with the land that you are currently standing on. Now introduce yourself spiritually; build a relationship with Mother Earth that provides for all our relations. No matter what part of Mother Earth our family originates from, we all have a relationship and a responsibility to the land. Let's build a healthy relationship together.?

This sounds like a positive message on the surface, but a superficial scratch reveals the obvious: there is no mention of Indigenous peoples whatsoever. Pride Toronto's assertion that the acknowledgement was penned by an Indigenous individual, however, merely fanned the flames of controversy with criticism that penning a land acknowledgement shouldn't be left to the Indigenous, rather it should be carried out by the non-Indigenous to recognize the traditional stewards of the land they stand on.

This issue cropped up mere weeks after the release of another national reality check: the release of Reclaiming Power & Place: The Final Report into the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was released to the public.

A lengthy document that lifts the lid on the full extent of systemic and other issues that have contributed to such a national scandal, it seems much of its findings, and its prescribed path towards reconciliation have been drowned out by just one key finding. It's a key finding that has spurred no small degree of national soul searching: genocide.

?The violence and National Inquiry heard about amounts to race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Metis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people,? the report finds. ?This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the increased rates of violence, death and suicide in Indigenous populations.?

As has been previously explored in this space the G word has been a bitter pill to swallow for some, with government and opposition leaders shying away from giving the word their recognition. Indeed, this one word has taken up so much airspace and column inches that the recommendations contained within the report have been lost in the shuffle.

Now, and in coming weeks, I would like to take the time to explore some of these recommendations, particularly those that can be addressed at our local, community level.

The first of these, as simple as it is, is to educate ourselves on the issues.

?As the Final Report has shown, and within every encounter, each person has a role to play in order to combat violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people,? says the report in their first recommendation to all Canadians. ?Beyond those calls aimed at governments or at specific industries or service providers, we encourage every Canadian to consider how they can give life to these calls for justice.?

Such methods we can carry out in our every day lives, according to the experts, is to ?denounce and speak out against violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people; decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous peoples' history, cultures, pride and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today; develop knowledge and read the Final Report, listen to the truths shared, and acknowledge the burden of those human and Indigenous rights violations, and how they impact Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people today.

?Using what you have learned and some of the resources suggested, become a strong ally. Being a strong ally involves more than just tolerance; it means actively working to break down barriers and to support others in every day relationships and encounters in which you participate; [and] confront and speak out against racism, sexism, ignorance, homophobia and transphobia and teach or encourage others to do the same, wherever it occurs ? in your home, in your workplace, or in social settings.?

So far, so achievable ? and there is much more where that came from.