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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1200)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): We now begin the 137th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We are continuing our consideration of Bill C-369, An Act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Indigenous Peoples Day).

[English]

I'd like to start by apologizing to the witnesses for the fact that you have had to wait. Thank you for your patience.

Also, to give a little shout-out, we saw a person jumping over to set up the camera. This is actually going to be our last meeting of the heritage committee for this sitting, and I would like to take a moment to thank all of the staff who provide support to us every day.

[Translation]

I also want to thank the interpreters.

[English]

We wouldn't be able to do the work we do if we didn't have a big team around us helping. I know we're going to be short on time at the end, so I wanted to make sure we said a big thank you to everyone who helps us out.

Because we have reduced time for our committee hearing, we will go straight through all the witness testimony one after the other. We have someone who is being heard remotely, but she does not appear to be up on the screen yet, so I was going to start with the Canadian Labour Congress.

No, I take that back. I am going to start with Phyllis Webstad from the Orange Shirt Society. That way, if we have any technical problems, we can bring her back.

Ms. Webstad, if you feel comfortable with beginning, your time can begin now.

Ms. Phyllis Webstad (Founder and President, Orange Shirt Society): Thank you and good morning. *Weyt-kp*, hello to everyone. My name is Phyllis Webstad. I'm from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation, the Canoe Creek/Dog Creek First Nation, in Secwepemc, Shuswap, territory. Stswecem'c Xgat'tem is approximately one and a half hours southwest of Williams Lake, B.C.

Kukstemcw, thank you for the invitation to speak on Bill C-369, regarding National Indigenous Peoples Day.

It is my story of losing my shiny orange shirt that has spread across Canada and beyond. September 30, Orange Shirt Day, is bringing awareness of the history of Indian residential schools and the impact on the generations. It is a day to honour residential school survivors and their families, and remember those who never made it home or have since passed.

Orange Shirt Day is all about reconciliation. It was born out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the TRC, event in Williams Lake, B.C., in May 2013. Our theme was "Remembering, Recovering and Reconciling". First nations, local government, schools and the RCMP all came together to hear the truth from residential school survivors. Chief Justice Sinclair challenged us to keep the conversation happening after the TRC event in May 2013 was over. I was part of the planning for our TRC event, where I told my story of my orange shirt for the first time.

In July 1974, I turned six years old. The age of six was when children in my family were taken away, and I was no different. My grandmother, whom I lived with until the age of 10, brought me to town, to Williams Lake, to choose something for my first day of school. I picked out a shiny orange shirt. When I got to the residential school, my clothing was taken away and I never wore my shirt again. That was the story that I told at our TRC event.

We picked September 30 because September was the time when children were taken away from their homes. We chose the 30th to give teachers time to settle into their classrooms, to prepare an event and to teach the children about the history of residential schools. At the last TRC event in Vancouver in May 2013, I heard an elder say that September was "crying month". I knew then that we had chosen the right day. If September 30 falls on a weekend, the schools or communities can have the event before or after the 30th.

Our slogan, "every child matters", comes from my story of how I felt, at residential school, that I didn't matter. When we talked more about it, we realized it fit for all residential school survivors, that they matter as children being taken away. It also fit for those children who never returned home. They matter, too. On the day of reconciliation, every child matters. It fits in the current day, and it's inclusive of all people to find a better way forward together.

This past year I published a book. This is the French version. It's called *The Orange Shirt Story*. It's available in English, French and Shuswap. It was on the bestseller list in Canada for most of September.

•(1205)

Regarding TRC recommendation number 80, I've gone over and over the wording of the recommendation, and it is specific to residential schools. June 21 is a day of celebration, and a celebration of indigenous peoples overall. It's an overarching day for indigenous people. Orange Shirt Day on September 30 is a fit for the implementation of TRC call to action number 80, as Orange Shirt Day is a day to honour and remember residential school survivors and their families and those who have passed on. I'm not here to advocate for any particular day. Both days are important.

Honourable members, we the Orange Shirt Society hope you decide that Orange Shirt Day will be a nationally recognized day. September 30, 2019 will be the seventh Orange Shirt Day.

Kukstemcw. Thank you for having me.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Webstad.

We'll now go to the Canadian Labour Congress. We have Mojdeh Cox and Ron Rousseau with us today.

Ms. Mojdeh Cox (National Director, Anti-Racism and Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you.

It's an honour to speak after such powerful and moving testimony. Thank you for your presence here as well.

I would like to first acknowledge that this is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. We recognize and deeply appreciate the historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions that Métis, Inuit and other indigenous peoples have made in shaping and strengthening our country.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on Bill C-369, an act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code.

My name is Mojdeh Cox. I'm here in my capacity as national director for anti-racism and human rights at the Canadian Labour Congress. The congress is the largest labour body in Canada, representing over three million working people.

I will be sharing the time today with my colleague, Ron Rousseau, who will introduce himself momentarily.

First nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada have been subject to gross human rights violations throughout history. Statistics today point to the great need for reconciliation and for a deeper understanding of generational trauma. There is also a great need for people in Canada to deepen their understanding of their resilience and share in celebrations for first nations, Métis and Inuit cultures.

In September 2017, at the United Nations, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a compelling statement about Canada's long and complicated interaction with first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. In his own words, he delivered hard truths about the legacy of colonialism, the paternalistic Indian Act, forced relocation, marginalization and abuse of Inuit communities, and the disgrace and mistreatment of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and their families, scratching only the surface of the root causes of generational trauma haunting first nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

Since then, the government declared reconciliation with indigenous communities to be a priority for Canada. With Bill C-369, there is an opportunity to turn that language around reconciliation into action.

There may be objections to Canada needing another statutory holiday. To respond to this reluctance, it is critical to take a comparative perspective. Compared to other advanced industrial countries and its most important trading partners, Canada offers relatively few public holidays. Adding another statutory holiday would simply move Canada into the mainstream of OECD comparator countries. Furthermore, Canada will join countries such as Australia, Brazil, the U.S. and New Zealand in formally recognizing indigenous peoples nationally.

As mentioned by the previous speaker, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action number 80, Canada is to designate a day to remember residential schools and reflect on the generational trauma this colonial tactic imposed on indigenous communities for generations.

National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 21, can mark this day as the national statutory holiday to do just that. Although, as the former speaker said, we're not here to particularly advocate for one day over the other, we do feel that taking away from the presence and the sea of orange that we see on September 30 across communities and in schools would really take away from that profound movement that was built on one story and has touched so many people in changing our narrative around reconciliation.

With that said, National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21 can be that day for us. This day, which marks the summer solstice, has distinct cultural significance for the very communities we aim to honour. It is a day of celebration, setting the stage to change the narrative on Canada's first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

An Angus Reid Institute public opinion survey report pointed to a deep gap between what government must do in the spirit of reconciliation and what Canadians really think about the state of indigenous people. A statutory holiday where celebration is the primary focus will make way for everyday people in Canada to engage with indigenous cultures and practices in a way that is inviting and reflects their values across diverse cultures.

Humanizing the plight of first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples is a natural first step to not only participate in reconciliation figuratively, but more literally and in the spirit of many calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report recommendations. One of the most gripping quotes from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report states, "Too many Canadians know little or nothing about the deep historical roots of these conflicts", referring to the violent and catastrophic legacy of colonialism in Canada. It goes on to say that this lack of knowledge has serious consequences for first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and for Canada at large. If that doesn't make a more compelling business case for why this is a need, I don't know what will.

•(1210)

We don't have to decide whether people in Canada engage with this statutory holiday by celebrating or by reflecting and commemorating. It does not have to be about either-or. We only must decide that the lip service we have paid to real reconciliation calls for action, and action now.

As part of the efforts to foster reconciliation in our workplaces and communities, the Government of Canada must develop a strategy to encourage people in Canada to participate in celebrations taking place on June 21. There is a need for a public awareness strategy to deliver hard truths in the same manner as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered them at the United Nations.

People in Canada deserve truth, even when the truth is uncomfortable, and they deserve truth on multiple occasions. Indigenous, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada deserve reconciliation. As per the TRC report, reconciliation "is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between [indigenous] and [non-indigenous] peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour." We can do that through celebration, in light of change and progress, and moving forward with June 21.

The Chair: Ms. Cox, I'm going to jump in quickly. Technically, all witnesses have eight minutes. You are almost at the seven-minute mark, and I know you're sharing time with Mr. Rousseau.

Ms. Mojdeh Cox: I'm sorry about that.

The Chair: I can give you another couple of minutes, but because of our time constraints, I really can't give you more than a total of three more minutes.

Ms. Mojdeh Cox: Thank you. That is all we need.

One of my last sentences is that reconciliation is a process. It is continuous. Reconciliation is complex. It is about learning and unlearning. It is about challenging ourselves. Most of all, reconciliation is necessary, and necessary now.

Mr. Ron Rousseau (President, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you for the space you've created for me to speak today. My name is Ron Rousseau, from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

I'm here today in my capacity as the indigenous rights equity vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress. Within my union and the broader labour movement, I have worked for 15 years for such a bill to pass, more specifically, for June 21 to be declared and recognized as a national holiday.

My mother, Marjorie, was Anishinabe, from a small reserve outside of Sudbury, Ontario. Just out of residential school, with three young children, she ran as far away as she could because of the trauma she had experienced. You can't get any further than the Yukon and that's where she settled.

During the era of the sixties scoop, and the ongoing operation and imposition of residential schools, my mother made her escape. My siblings and I grew up never talking about our culture, dance or being Anishinabe. It wasn't something we knew how to talk about, and it certainly wasn't something we knew how to celebrate.

Later in life, I started studying the history of my people. I'm grateful that before my mom passed, we spent many an hour talking and crying about our family history. I learned of the impact of residential school on my mom's life, and how we ended up in the Yukon. I slowly and painfully embraced my culture, joined a dance group and immersed myself in local culture. I shared with my adult children, Jayla, Samantha and Nicole, the dance, song, history and potlatch. My grandson, Roland, has had an amazing childhood of watching grandpa dance, sing and tell stories.

My family was able to break many cycles that are intertwined with the legacy of colonialism, the devastation caused by residential schools and the threat of the sixties scoop. My family eventually learned how to celebrate who we are, and what we have become. We recognize the resilience in our communities. We recognize the strength and the wisdom. I wish that for all first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across Canada.

One of the most sacred days in indigenous culture is the summer solstice. We have an opportunity to celebrate our culture with dance, song, art and potlatch, as well as to share our almost-lost cultures with settlers. With celebration comes the invitation to move forward on the road of reconciliation. National Indigenous Peoples Day as a statutory holiday will mean that while we need to take our own personal journey towards healing, a day dedicated to celebration and sharing of diverse first nations, Métis and Inuit cultures has the potential of making a healing journey less isolating.

I ask you to consider my story, and many stories similar to mine, as you consider June 21 as a statutory holiday. The government has the potential to be on the right side of history.

I don't speak for all of my people, but I do speak for many who believe that the statutory holiday must be about celebration. It must be about inspiring reconciliation. It must be about more families breaking the cycles, just like mine. I'm from Yukon, a territory with 23% indigenous culture that has June 21 as a statutory holiday already built in. The NWT, with 51% indigenous culture, has June 21 as a national statutory holiday. Nunavut, with an 86% indigenous population, has already passed June 21 as a statutory holiday.

Gunalcheesh. Thank you very much for your time.

•(1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and Ms. Monique Moreau, please.

Ms. Monique Moreau (Vice-President, National Affairs, Canadian Federation of Independent Business): Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. You should have a slide presentation in front of you that I'd like to walk you through over the next few minutes.

CFIB is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization representing more than 110,000 small and medium-size businesses across Canada. Our members collectively employ more than 1.25 million Canadians. Small businesses across Canada account for \$75 billion or nearly half of the GDP. They represent all sectors of the economy and are found in every region of the country.

As you may be aware, CFIB takes our direction solely from our members through a variety of surveys, which makes us a bit different from other organizations. We don't have a board of directors that gives us our mandate. We get our information solely from our membership. We are a one member, one vote organization.

We know that business owners are often too busy to come to committees such as these, so we go directly to them for their feedback through the survey process as well as through our field force of 220 district managers across Canada. These district managers knock on approximately 4,000 small business doors each week, and this provides us with an opportunity to understand the realities of running a small business at the grass roots level.

I'd like to set the stage of my presentation by having a bit of a look at the state of the economy.

One of the surveys CFIB conducts is our monthly business barometer. Our latest barometer from the month of November shows that small business confidence remains muted. Ideally, we want to see this index between 65 and 70 when the economy is growing at its full potential, and it's at 61.2 this month, up only slightly from the last few months.

Small business owners are also facing increased costs in January, starting with the CPP payroll taxes increasing. In many provinces across Canada, we are now looking at carbon pricing starting in April for federal backstop provinces, in addition to those provinces that have already begun their own carbon pricing.

I'd like to highlight that CFIB is supportive of reconciliation efforts, and we count several indigenous business owners among our membership. However, the introduction of a new statutory holiday will have costs for the economy and for small businesses in particular.

We have polled our members over the years on this issue, not particular to an indigenous statutory holiday but to statutory holidays overall. Approximately two-thirds of our membership do not support additional statutory holidays. These tend to have a negative impact on the finances and productivity of a business. On slide 5, you'll see the reasons for this in more detail.

When asked about the impact of a new statutory holiday on their business, over half of business owner members identified lost sales and revenue, while 46% cited higher than average wage costs to stay open during the holiday.

Over a third of entrepreneurs themselves will have to work longer hours, while another third identified increased employee morale as an outcome of an additional stat holiday. Twenty-nine per cent had concerns about lost production; their business would have to operate longer hours to make up the shortfall of time lost.

On slide 6, you'll see that we're giving you a flavour of the comments our members have shared with us as the outcome of

additional statutory holidays on their business. I won't read them in detail to you, but you'll see that their concerns have led them to calculate the cost and plan for the financial consequences of a closed production day.

In some areas of the country where they rely on natural resources and fisheries to run their businesses, for example, they cannot create another day of the week to have their production facilities up and running. In some instances, they highlight that the holiday would end up coming out of planned wage increases that business owners already had in place.

When calculating the cost to the economy, we turn to Statistics Canada to get a sense of the daily production value of the Canadian economy. I know this caused some discussion amongst members at prior hearings, so I'll just be very careful in citing that the information that was in our letter that we sent to committee was from Statistics Canada.

You'll see that, overall, this business sector creates just shy of \$3.6 billion a day in business and closing down an extra day would, of course, lead to costs to the economy. You can see here, of course, the costs of federally regulated industries as well as goods-producing businesses. These are chunks of this \$3.6 billion. Just to be clear, they're not additional costs on that chart.

I will conclude by citing again that we are supportive of reconciliation efforts and that we count indigenous business owners among our membership. However, the introduction of a new statutory holiday would have major costs for the economy and for businesses, which will have an additional impact on small businesses in particular given the recent evolution of the Canadian business environment.

If the government is to go ahead with an additional statutory holiday, we suggest that it look at ways to help business mitigate or offset these additional costs or that it consider renaming a currently existing statutory holiday.

• (1220)

This concludes my presentation. If we do have time for questions, I'll just note that I can answer them *également en français ou en anglais*.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give floor to Derrick Hynes, who is president and chief executive officer of Federally Regulated Employers - Transportation and Communications.

[English]

Mr. Derrick Hynes (President and Chief Executive Officer, Federally Regulated Employers - Transportation and Communications): Good afternoon and thank you, Chair.

I represent FETCO, Federally Regulated Employers-Transportation and Communications. Our members are all federally regulated firms operating under the Canada Labour Code. We've existed as an employers' association for over 30 years. Our members are generally large employers within the federal sector.

To give you a sense of colour for who they are, we represent major airlines such as Air Canada, Jazz Aviation and WestJet; telecommunications firms including Bell, Telus, Shaw and Vidéotron; railways including CN, CP and VIA Rail; the ports, the Maritime Employers Association in Montreal, the B.C. Maritime Employers Association in Vancouver; and all the major courier companies in Canada, including Canada Post, UPS, FedEx and Purolator.

FETCO is pleased to submit comments on Bill C-369, regarding National Indigenous Peoples Day. As you know, in its final report the Truth and Reconciliation Commission included 94 recommendations in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation. Today we are here to talk about recommendation 80 around a statutory holiday.

I would like to first say that FETCO members are unanimously and strongly supportive of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Reconciliation with Canada's indigenous people is most appropriately a high priority of government and members are supportive of these important efforts.

FETCO represents some of Canada's largest employers with operations providing key products and services to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Members share the government's commitment to reconciliation.

In its outreach to Canadians, your committee has requested feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on what a national indigenous peoples day should look like. Below are some specific comments from FETCO, on behalf of a large majority of federally regulated employers who are all captured by the Canada Labour Code, where this legislative requirement will reside.

FETCO members support a day being set aside to celebrate and recognize Canada's first peoples and to reflect on the unfortunate legacy of the residential school system. Members believe that healing is required between Canada's indigenous and non-indigenous people and a specific day to recognize this is appropriate, as noted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

FETCO has no specific comments on what should specifically be included in this important day of commemoration. This is a question best answered by those for whom this day is going to be set aside, that is, Canada's indigenous people. Employers will support the direction recommended by those most affected. We do suggest that government engage stakeholders in a consultative dialogue on recommended courses of action in the event our members have value to add to this important conversation.

FETCO members do not believe it is necessary to add another general holiday, in other words, a paid statutory holiday, to the Canada Labour Code to accomplish this important goal. Currently, the code provides nine statutory holidays. Most FETCO members, as a result of previous negotiations with employees and unions, exceed this minimum number. FETCO employers typically provide between 10 and 13 paid holidays throughout the year. Adding an additional paid holiday to the Canada Labour Code represents substantial productivity losses and business cost increases for Canadian businesses. We do not feel these concerns are in any way inconsistent with our support for the concept of a day being set aside.

Employers in the federal sector have seen significant change in the past three years that has had business cost and productivity loss implications. Two weeks ago, while responding to another parliamentary committee on the most recent budget bill, we stated the following:

Over the past three years, enormous workplace changes have been introduced via the legislative and regulatory process that amount to major cost pressures for business. In the past three years, the following have been introduced (or are currently being contemplated): paid personal leave, family responsibility leave, expanded vacation leave, caregiver leave, indigenous practices leave, leave for victims of domestic violence, medical leave, changes to the EI program, accessibility legislation, flexible work arrangements, pay equity, termination compensation and elimination of wait periods for certain compensatory benefits. On an individual basis (in isolation), each of these changes could be justified. But the cumulative cost effect of these changes on employers is consequential. To FETCO, it seems contradictory for government to be engaging in a national dialogue on concepts like business investment, workplace productivity and economic competitiveness while simultaneously driving up the cost of doing business. FETCO believes it is reasonable to demand that business cost implications receive greater attention from government when workplace changes are introduced.

●(1225)

A paid general holiday can be a double-edged sword from a business perspective. Consider the fact that FETCO members represent some 500,000 employees, or over half of all the private sector employees in the federal sector. Consequences of a paid day off are twofold.

First, it means that most employees are not at their jobs, representing a substantial productivity loss for companies operating in an intensely competitive global marketplace. Customers go elsewhere when a business is not available.

Second, many FETCO members are continuous operations given the essential services they provide. Airlines, railways and marine vessels do not typically stop on a statutory holiday. Those employees obliged to work on those days are paid a premium to do so, so not only are companies paying some employees to not be at work, but they're also providing extra compensation to others to be there.

Our members respectfully suggest that there are other options to consider when setting aside the appropriate time to show respect and reverence for this important issue, outside of paid day off for all employees. If the purpose of National Indigenous Peoples Day is to raise awareness of this issue which contributes to ongoing reconciliation, we're not convinced that a paid holiday is going to achieve this important objective.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to our final set of witnesses. We have with us Barbara Morin and Angela White from the Indian Residential School Survivors Society.

●(1230)

Ms. Barbara Morin (Policy and Human Resources Advisor, Indian Residential School Survivors Society): Thank you for inviting us to appear before you today on unceded Algonquin land.

My name is Barbara Morin, and I'm the HR and policy adviser for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society. With me is our executive director, Angela White.

In 1994, the Indian Residential School Survivors Society was formed in B.C. and now has eight regional offices that work directly with survivors and their families in many capacities. IRSSS provides direct community-delivered services, including crisis counselling, crisis support, emotional support and cultural care from our resolution health support workers and our elders team. We provide workshops and presentations to schools, businesses and many organizations, non-native and aboriginal, on a variety of topics, including colonialism, history and impacts, and understanding trauma, anger management and grief and loss. There are many other topics.

Since 1994, IRSSS has worked to counteract the lasting legacy of the Indian residential school and its direct impact on our communities. The impacts from 126 years of residential schools not only affected the 150,000 people who went there but also their family members, whom we call intergenerational.

The effects destroyed our familial bonds as well as our cultural and linguistic bonds that tied us together as a community. Our services are planned to redress the legacy of the Indian residential schools and reach out to the next generation.

For example, Joe Norris, an elder IRSSS board member, states, "They took away our culture and our language." Out of the 285 band members in his community only two remain who speak the language. He is a much-used language teacher there. He recounts many stories about the horrific beatings and pain he suffered in residential school. Today at 82, he still bleeds from his ears from many of those attacks. He is a voice for his people to make sure what happened is known and demonstrates our elders' strength, resilience and pride.

IRSSS has recognized that future generations are a great deal of our focus now. They too need reparations and healing. Byron Joseph, our chair, who is also an Indian residential school survivor said, "It's not about us, it's about our families."

In 2015, when the TRC, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, report came out, it was received with overwhelming support by IRSSS. Since it was a six-year process that reflected what 7,000 survivors had to say, the TRC recommendations were pivotal in advancing the process of reconciliation and Canadian reconciliation in particular. These survivors called for an independent national day for truth and reconciliation. This recommendation was critical. More specifically, TRC recommendation 80 states:

We call upon the federal government in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

TRC recommendation number 80 clearly states a national day for truth and reconciliation. To recognize survivors and to get to the almost forgotten and soon to be forgotten truth, IRSSS believes there must be a way to make this a reality, a historic commemorative day that will focus on the history of the Indian residential school and its impacts on our people.

One of our resolution health support workers, Shirley David, who is an Indian residential school survivor, said, "I believe the world should never forget the history and impacts of our dark history of Canada. Reconciliation is rebuilding broken relationships between first nations and the next generations, restoring friendships, working together on differences. As Justice Murray states, "Education brought us here. Education will help us get away from this."

●(1235)

Shirley states that as an Indian residential school survivor, she often goes into schools, universities and agencies to share the Indian residential school history, the impacts of healing. At every presentation, many natives and non-natives alike not only never knew about what happened, but are shocked and angry. Education is needed, with generations working together toward mutual understanding.

I believe we should keep June 21 as aboriginal day and have September 30 as a national reconciliation and remembering survivors day. IRSSS hopes that this is a national holiday that will be set aside on September 30 to provide education and information about the past history of IRS, or Indian residential schools, a national day for truth and reconciliation. Rather than a celebratory day, it should be commemorative and be an educational day for Canadians to acknowledge survivors and move towards reconciliation.

It is about the truth about what has happened in our history with residential schools and about educating the public about that. In order to right the wrongs of the past we must have a day that recognizes and includes acknowledgement and commemoration of the survivors, that includes an educational component and that is inclusive.

It is our belief that without truth, justice and healing, there can be no reconciliation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. White, you have two minutes.

Ms. Angela White (Executive Director, Indian Residential School Survivors Society): [*Witness speaks in Hul'q'umin'um'.*]

I don't speak my language, but I speak the best I can, and that's the impact of residential schools and colonialism. Our elders always tell us to speak what we're able to speak, and speak it with pride, so I try my best.

What I basically said is that on behalf of my people of the Snuneymuxw, I would like us to bring forward all of these ideas with an open heart and an open mind. That's all we can ask.

As the executive director with the IRSSS for the past eight years, talking and interacting with all the survivors, from across B.C. and from other provinces, who are doing their statements, I've heard the worst of the worst.

Canada has the opportunity now to lift the veil of shame that was placed upon us. That's how we grew up. I may not have gone to a residential school; residential school came home to me, and that wasn't fair to me or my children.

I say with my heart, if you're going to do this, do it right. Don't throw it out there as a band-aid solution. It has to be right. It can't be half done. It has to provide the education and the commemoration and the stories that were listed here today. It's not just about a paid holiday off. I don't agree with having a paid holiday off if all we're going to do is stay at home. What I do believe in is that it has to provide the context behind it. It has to provide information with regard to why this day is so important. It has to have all of those things available to every single Canadian out there, because when we have Canadians that don't understand our history, we have a problem. This great country is known across the world as having open arms to diversity, when not so long ago it wasn't open to our own people.

I say this to you: If we're going to do this, let's do it right.

[Witness speaks in Hul'q'umin'um']

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

We will have time for one quick round of questions.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. Anandasangaree, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all of you for your presentations.

I want to direct my first question to both the IRSSS and the Orange Shirt Society.

Both of you are suggesting September 30 as the appropriate day for this commemoration, and to mark call to action number 80. We've heard this on a number of different occasions through some very important stakeholders.

What is your response to the request or suggestions by some that it should be June 21? Keeping in mind that we have limited time, I would really like to get a response on that.

Ms. Phyllis Webstad: June 21 is a day of celebration. September 30 is a day to remember survivors and their families. One day in Canada, there will cease to be any residential school survivors.

Orange Shirt Day is September 30; National Indigenous Peoples Day is June 21. Both are important, and both will continue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Angela White: We had this debate at our office, and we posted a survey on our social media with regard to this. The IRSSS page is national, as opposed to just provincial. People see it and know that they want the support.

Overwhelmingly, people have said they would prefer September 30 but wouldn't be opposed to June 21. They are two completely separate days, in the sense that June is the celebration—it's the change of season and you're moving forward in a good way—whereas September, as Phyllis said, is the month of tears. That's when people started getting the ability to shut down their feelings and to know they were being taken away. For us, that would be an opportunity to change perspective, not just for the survivors and injured ones, but also for the general community.

If we had that statutory holiday, we could give voice to who we are in a positive way, as opposed to those stereotypical voices that are continually being heard across the country about the indigenous people of this country.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

For Ms. Cox and Mr. Rousseau, again very briefly, you're suggesting June 21. I don't think the question today is a matter of if we're going to do it, but a matter of when, in terms of the date.

Would you have serious objections to September 30 being recognized as the day, instead of June 21?

Mr. Ron Rousseau: I sit down every Orange Shirt Day—I have about five of them which have been sent to me over time—and I absolutely love it. It's a day of remembering and understanding what's happened: what's happened to my mother, to our culture.

To me, June 21 is a day of rebirth, a day of a new season, a day of starting over. It's a day of celebration. It's a day about taking back what was lost. My culture was taken away from my mother in school. She was not allowed to talk about it. Our songs and dances were almost completely removed. Our art was destroyed. We're reclaiming it, and we're starting over.

I can't talk negatively about Orange Shirt Day, because I think it's very, very important. For me, it's about taking back what we've lost. It's about us standing up and rejoicing and being proud.

My mother was not proud to be indigenous. I grew up never talking about being indigenous. I was not proud to be indigenous. My children knew nothing about their heritage until I started getting involved. My union started having me facilitate courses around truth and reconciliation. I learned and I cried, and my mother cried.

Now my grandson is growing up being proud of being indigenous. He has his own set of regalia. We dance, we sing; we talk about the history.

For me, it's about starting over, about a new day, and being proud to be indigenous.

Thank you.

•(1245)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, sir.

I'd like to direct the remainder of the questions to you, Ms. Moreau.

The organization you represent, with its over 100,000 members, is very important in the business community. What is your plan for reconciliation with indigenous people? What is the framework that your organization has put together to ensure there is a plan to reconcile with indigenous peoples?

The Chair: I'll jump in here to let you know that you have only about half a minute, but you may get a chance to revisit that with other questions.

Ms. Monique Moreau: I'll keep my answer very brief.

We are a survey- and research-based organization and we haven't asked that question of our membership. We don't—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: You don't have a plan specifically, but in terms of responsibility, do you believe that you have a responsibility as an organization and as members to undertake reconciliation as a mandate?

Ms. Monique Moreau: We're a grassroots organization, sir, and we haven't polled our membership on that. I can't profess to speak for them on that. This is an important issue. There's no question that our members support reconciliation values. In terms of specifics, I don't have answers for that at this point.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Would you be able to provide some?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you are out of time. We will be going to Mr. Yurdiga now. I'm really trying to keep it to six minutes.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for participating today.

I've talked to many different groups over the past number of months. There are two lines of thought. From the younger generation, I hear about June 21 as a day of celebration, of celebrating culture, and a day of learning for the next generation. When I talk to the older generation, they say it's a day of remembrance and mourning on September 30.

Whether it's a stat holiday or not, there are two lines of thoughts here: celebration of the culture and mourning for what happened. How do we balance the two? I'm not sure who would want to answer this. Maybe I could hear from each of you on your perspectives, because we can't have both.

Ms. Mojdeh Cox: Thank you for that question. I can start and will of course leave room for others to comment.

I mentioned in my opening statement that we don't have to decide on either-or. If government were to provide and actually design a strategy whereby we're encouraging people in Canada to engage in celebrations, commemorations and ceremonies of honour in a way that is respectful to the communities presenting and is inviting everyday people in Canada into the fold, we could have both.

On the elimination of that sea of orange in the schools and that presence in the community, there is a risk of that happening should

we have September 30 as a day for honouring truth and reconciliation but not necessarily aiming our attention fully to residential schools. From the perspective of Canada's unions, of course we will support and move forward with any day that is picked.

We're making a case for one day or the other through various rationales. One is that this is an opportunity to partner with government to say that we need a strategy. Let's design and execute a strategy that will bring everyday Canadians into the fold so that we can start changing those narratives and that perspective that is saying, yes, we can attribute these circumstances today to the legacy of colonialism, but we don't believe indigenous people should have specific rights and justice in certain areas. That has to change.

•(1250)

Ms. Angela White: I understand the question. You're right. Our younger generation believes that June 21 is the day. The older generation believes that September 30 is the appropriate time. For us, the balance is having even our youth understand what the difference is between the two. Because of colonialism, they don't actually know their own history when it comes to why things are the way they are.

For us, we already celebrate June 21. We go to the powwows and we go to the organizations. Our non-profit closes on June 21. We also participate quite closely with Ms. Webstad's Orange Shirt Day. If it truly is about indigenous celebration and taking back what we once lost, I think that if we do come up with a collaborative plan with regard to taking back our culture on June 21—with an actual session on how we can unroll it across to September 30 and an education period going on up to that point—then we can have the best of both worlds. Not only are you actually celebrating June 21, but you're actually providing the curriculum and the history that need to be put out there to our country, and then having the day of mourning, celebration and taking back in September.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. Hynes. There was a suggestion that we have to be very respectful of the costs for businesses, and we have to be very mindful of that also. I heard that a lot of people said that there's a solution to this issue. We can rescind, maybe, Labour Day and add a national indigenous peoples day.

Would that be acceptable to the business community?

Mr. Derrick Hynes: What I would say is that we're not prepared to say which of the holidays should or should not be rescinded. I think that Labour Day is certainly a very important day, and we partner with our friends at the Canadian Labour Congress on many initiatives around that important day of remembrance as well. However, the concept of repurposing, if you will, an existing day to commemorate this important day is something that we certainly would be open to.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

I'll share my time. We're running out of time here, so I want everyone to have a chance.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Yurdiga.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nantel, you are up for six minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank Ms. Webstad, who is joining us by video conference, as well as all the witnesses here this morning.

I don't know whether all the committee members share my viewpoint. When we began studying Ms. Jolibois' bill and hearing testimony, we were expecting to discuss an additional paid statutory holiday. I personally did not at all expect to get drawn into a much broader debate on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I see today that the day proposed by Ms. Jolibois is a day for celebration and festivity, similar to how we celebrate July 1 or June 24 in Quebec.

With that in mind, I can't help but draw a parallel with another study we have done—with essentially the same members as those here today—where the representatives of the Royal Canadian Legion and the Canadian Forces debated the relevance of making November 11 a statutory holiday. Those two groups had the same objective to commemorate the efforts and sacrifices of our people. However, some were saying that young people should be in school on that day, so they can be told about what happened, and not in the basement watching a movie or playing a game, while others wanted there to be commemoration activities.

I feel that, naturally, we are headed toward instituting two days. That is a bit strange. We started our study on the statutory holiday proposed by Ms. Jolibois, but in the end, our first recommendation should be to have two days. Making that day a statutory holiday is even optional.

I am not sure to whom to put the question, but I am sharing my thought process. As for the day that would take place in the fall, everyone could be in class; we are not talking about instituting a statutory holiday here. The objective would be achieved. All young people would be in school and would be told that it is not St. Catherine Day, but “Orange Shirt Day”. I think that would be wonderful.

As for June 21, as I already said, it could not be made into a day of celebration without a budget attached to it. For people, July 1 brings to mind big shows on Parliament Hill, and that requires money. The same goes for Quebec's national holiday.

I am a 55-year-old white man of Irish descent who has lived in absolute ignorance of issues at aboriginal residential schools. In 1976, much more important things were happening in Quebec than the election of the Parti québécois: the last remaining aboriginal residential schools were being closed. Yet I only learned about it five or six years later. There is indeed a duty to remember.

I know this may seem bold, but should we recommend that there be two days? I don't know what a statutory holiday would mean for public finances, but I think reconciliation also means steps must be taken for everyone to become fully aware that they have a holiday on that day because we are proud of our indigenous peoples.

My question is for all the witnesses.

● (1255)

[English]

Mr. Ron Rousseau: I just want to say that as we talk about Thanksgiving, about the land of discovery where we all sat around a big table and ate turkey, that's not our history at all. Our history of discovery is a whole different story, so I agree with you in some ways.

Let's talk about Victoria Day. I do not want to be offensive to anybody. I have to tell you that the Crown created the residential schools. That's there. The Crown created the isolation of our people in landlocked jails inside of our reservations. The Crown has done more to our people than most would ever understand.

When I sit down and look at Victoria Day, I do not see floats. I do not see people out celebrating. Mostly I do not see our people celebrating the issues that have been brought on us inside this country.

[Translation]

The Chair: We have one minute left. Would anyone like to comment?

[English]

Ms. Cox.

Ms. Mojdeh Cox: Thank you.

The compounded costs of statutory holidays were mentioned earlier. I fully support the two days, if that is something we can work towards.

In the 2018 federal budget, we designated \$4 billion to research on the health of indigenous communities. We invested a further \$1.5 billion in improving indigenous health. That doesn't include the costs already compounded by poor health and all sorts of different considerations, from lack of infrastructure and the water crisis to mental health.

If we're looking at investment and we're really working at moving towards reconciliation, a two-day system is by far the investment we want to make.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

That's all the time we have today.

Witnesses, I want to thank all of you for your patience and for your testimony. It was really helpful to have your testimony today.

That brings this meeting to an end.

Happy holidays, everyone. *Joyeuses fêtes.*

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