

Statement by Chair Jack following Tseshaht FN Announcement on Feb. 21, 2023

Feb. 22, 2023

On the 21st of February, 2023 Wahmeesh (Chief-Councillor Ken Watts) of the Tseshaht First Nation announced the first set of results in regards to the search for remains and gravesites at the Alberni Indian Residential School (AIRS) and surrounding area. The results were themselves tragic, but they are only the beginning of the story, one that needs to be told despite the pain – because of the pain.

While the numbers themselves are harrowing, the impacts are not behind us. I would point out that we have had members of this very Board who are survivors, and every indigenous member is one or two degrees of separation away from someone who was directly affected by institutions such as AIRS. Too often, there are those who mistake intergenerational trauma as culture when it has been our disconnection and severance from our families, language and economy that has fundamentally damaged the destinies of communities and peoples up and down the coast and across this great democratic experiment called Canada.

These challenges are things that cannot be addressed merely by individuals. Redressing the pain inflicted and the damage done will take the focused efforts of communities and governments going more than halfway, more than half the time. If we are to be a country that owns and celebrates the contributions of Jonas Salk and Terry Fox, we must also own the legacies of Duncan Campbell Scott and the literal litany of acts by and for this country.

While our friends and neighbours and relatives attend to the health of their hearts, minds and spirits, we should and will do what we can to ensure a future that includes space for indigenous people; space not only in an arms-length future, but for people in this place and in the present, and for everyone silenced and forgotten in the past.

We can do these things, it'll just take pressure and time. On behalf of the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District, we can and will continue to commit to keeping that pressure on, for everyone in the Region.