



BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY  
OF FIRST NATIONS



June 4, 2026

## **British Columbia and Ontario First Nations Leadership Condemns Senate's Rejection of Residential School Denialism Protections**

The British Columbia Assembly of First Nations and the Chiefs of Ontario are outraged and deeply disheartened by the Senate's decision to vote down the amendments to Bill C-9 that would have recognized residential school denialism as hate propaganda under the Criminal Code. Canada continues to neglect their legal obligation to align all new legislation with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as directed in their UN Declaration Action Plan, by ignoring the meaningful input of First Nations.

Let us be absolutely clear about what happened. The Senate Committee on Human Rights studied this issue, heard from First Nations witnesses, Survivors and leadership, and adopted these protections by a near-unanimous vote of 7 to 1. How does a Liberal government that claims to want to walk the path of reconciliation silence the very protections the Human Rights Committee fought to establish?

"This government looked a residential school Survivor in the eye and told her to wait," said Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict. "They will apologize for our history, but they will not protect us from those who deny it ever happened. That is not reconciliation. That is cowardice dressed up as process."

"Canada has told First Nations once again that our needs are secondary to the national political agenda," shared British Columbia Regional Chief Terry Teegee. "Canada continues to forget their legal obligations to First Nations, while undermining and ignoring our inherent title and rights. Canada knows the truth about the residential school system, and by not sharing this truth, they are responsible for the growing hate and violence faced by our people."

This is a betrayal, plain and simple. It is a procedural game. The government hides behind the language of "consultation" and "proper process," but First Nations people know exactly what that means. It means delay. The denial of the Holocaust genocide that wilfully promotes hatred is already captured by the Criminal Code. First Nations asked for nothing more than the same protection against the denial of the genocide that



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affected, and continues to affect, First Nations people in Canada. The government said no.

The development of Bill C-9 has been flawed from the very beginning. By rushing the legislation through the parliamentary process, it intentionally bypassed meaningful co-development and consultation with First Nations. Amendments to recognize residential school denialism within the Bill were raised on several occasions.

Since First Nations and the UN Declaration were intentionally ignored, these concerns did not make it into the legislation. In an attempt to restart these conversations, Regional Chief Benedict and Teegee, as well as Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige presented amendments and written submissions on denialism to the Senate Committee, followed by lengthy discussion with the Senators on the important consideration of including this provision. It is clear now that the involvement of First Nations at this stage was purely symbolic.

Grand Council Chief Debassige said "I sat as a witness in front of the Senate Committee on Human Rights. They heard our voice; they voted to include our suggested amendments. To have the Senate outwardly reject all recommendations, during Indigenous History Month no less, from this committee is not only wrong, but should be a scary revelation for all Canadians. Canada is picking and choosing which Human Rights they protect, no longer even trusting the very Senate committee established to be provide a Human Rights specific perspective."

The Senate heard the words of a residential school Survivor, a sitting senator who stood in that chamber and poured her lived experience into an impassioned plea for these protections. Seven of her eight siblings were taken to residential schools. She told this country, in the plainest terms and at the highest level of government, why denialism is not a matter of historical debate, but a weapon used to diminish our suffering and fuel hatred against our people, and she was ignored. If this government will not listen to a residential school Survivor speaking her own truth on the floor of the Senate, we must ask who they are prepared to listen to.

A government that calls itself Liberal has just behaved like the very opposition it claims to oppose. We are calling on the Prime Minister and his government to explain to First Nations how they intend to make this right, because the actions of the Senate prove



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they do not have our best interests in mind. C-9 is a major missed opportunity by Canada to set the record straight by rejecting and condemning residential school denialism for good. Instead, Canada rushed through their own defined process and ignored any input from First Nations.

When will legislation to criminalize residential school denialism be tabled?

Reconciliation is built on actions, not words. Today, the government's actions show us exactly where they stand.

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