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SCO WELCOMES LYNN BEYAK'S DEPARTURE Residential School Deniers Have No Place in Canadian Senate – Grand Chief Daniels

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is pleased to learn that Lynn Beyak will be leaving the Canadian Senate. Earlier today it was announced that she will be retiring after spending eight years in the red chamber.

“While this news is positive, it comes eight years too late,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “Anyone who shares or believes Beyak’s views on residential schools and other horrific chapters of colonialism has no business serving in Canada’s so called chamber of sober second thought. She should never have been appointed in the first place.”

Beyak rose to infamy during her time in the Senate due to her destructive and racist comments. In 2017, Beyak stated that Canada’s residential school system was “well-intentioned.” She also refused to remove letters written in her defense, which made derogatory comments against Indigenous people, posted on her official website. Ms Beyak stood by her past comments in her retirement announcement.

In June of last year, SCO fully supported a Coalition made up of Residential School Survivors, Grand Chiefs, and First Nations that called for her expulsion from the Senate.

“It’s disturbing but unfortunately not surprising that someone with Beyak’s beliefs could rise to a position of influence and power in this country,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “It is irrefutable that the Indian residential school system represents one of the darkest moments in our shared history. Over 150,000 First Nation children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to residential schools where they endured harsh discipline along with all forms of abuse and even death. Thousands of children never made it home. For Senator Beyak to never acknowledge these facts is unforgivable.”

Before today’s announcement, Beyak took part in a University of Manitoba led course on racism and Indigenous-crown relations but did not complete the course. She also received a failing grade in a cultural competency course delivered by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres in 2019. Despite her lack of commitment to learn and acknowledge the systemic horrors inflicted on First Nation people, Ms. Beyak was allowed to retain her position of power and will receive a generous federal pension with her retirement.

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“This is the true definition of the term bitter-sweet,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “While I am pleased to see her leave the Senate, I am dismayed that she is able to exit on her own terms, before she potentially faced harsher consequences such as expulsion. Ms. Beyak was granted the right to choose to leave. First Nation children had no such right when they were dragged from the arms of their loved ones and forced to attend residential schools.”

Today's news further highlights the continued issues that First Nation people face due to centuries of colonization and the attempted destruction of our cultures. However, it also represents an opportunity to affect change at the Senate level.

“My hope now is that any potential candidates for the Senate will be thoroughly vetted,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “We have seen meaningful representation by appointing deserving First Nation representatives such as Mary-Jane McCallum and Murray Sinclair. I implore the prime minister to consider the many qualified First Nation candidates to fill this vacant senate seat and others. It would be an important way to increase much needed representation for the First Peoples of this country.”

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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