

UFCW832 Access Live Event Full Transcription  
September 19, 2023

Jeff Traeger:

Hello, and good evening, everyone. My name is Jeff Traeger, I'm president of your union, UFCW Local 832. And I want to welcome you all to the September 2023 telephone town hall general membership meeting for members of UFCW Local 832, which is now called to order. As long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the river flows. UFCW Local 832 acknowledges that we are gathered and work each day on ancestral lands, the traditional territory of the Nisichawayasihk Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Metis Nation. Our offices are located on Treaty One and Two territory, and our work extends into treaties Three, Four, and Five. We recognize the injustices done to the indigenous peoples of this land, and are committed to supporting and collaborating with indigenous communities in a spirit of truth and reconciliation.

And that can be no more appropriate than it is tonight, when we're only 11 days out from the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. But before we get started, I want to say a couple of thank you's. The first thank you I want to say is to the Loblaw members of Manitoba. Thank you for bringing in a very solid strike vote for your bargaining committee, 97% of you voted in favor of a strike mandate for the committee. And I can tell you that it has had an impact on the table this week. As a matter of fact, Marie and Ron and I, who are in the studio here, just came from Loblaw bargaining for the last two days, and we're working hard to bring our Loblaw members the deal they deserve.

I also want to say a quick thank you to members of Celebrations Dinner Theater, who called the strike on September 5th or 6th. I think we started on the 5th, but started walking on the 6th. And their employer decided only 48 hours later that it was time to shut that operation down and serve termination notices to all those people. And so, I want to thank them for their solidarity, for their 100% strike vote for their doing the right thing by taking on an employer who would do no better than minimum wage. And we are working hard with our communications team and our education department to try to get these people some career transition and get them into new jobs. I also want to say thank you to all Local 832 members in Manitoba for the important work that you do each and every day to keep our community safe, fed, entertained, transported, and cared for. Together you are pillars of our province and you should know how important you are to our society, and how honored we are at UFCW to be able to represent you.

Tonight is our 2023 fall meeting, and I am very excited. We have a very special guest to hear from this evening, elder Eric Flett, who's a former Local 832 executive board member, when he worked at Saint Boniface Hospital. He'll be joining us tonight to talk about truth and reconciliation, to talk about the residential school system and other issues affecting our indigenous communities here in Manitoba. Very timely topic, as I said off the start. We are less than two weeks away from the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. And our final meeting of the year, which is coming up in November, on the 14th, will be chaired by our secretary treasurer, Marie Buchan, and we'll focus on mental health at home and in the workplace. This is a topic that's become so much more important following the pandemic.

With me in the studio for tonight's meeting is our secretary treasurer, Marie Buchan, my executive advisor, Ron Allard, our communications coordinator, Chris Nodo, who's at the controls for tonight's meeting. And also with us, our very special guest, elder Eric Flett.

As we normally do, we'll take breaks in between our conversation to answer any questions you may have for tonight's guest, or about anything relevant to all UFCW members at all. Remember that if you have a specific question about a grievance or an issue that affects your workplace alone, I would ask that you contact your full-time union representative whose name and contact information are available on the UFCW bulletin board in your workplace, or online at UFW832.com.

Let's get started. First order of business, required by our bylaws, is that we vote to approve three reports at this meeting, and they are the minutes of the previous full membership meeting held on May

the 16th, 2023, the secretary treasurer's report on the current finances, and my report. We will not be reading these reports, which will give us more time for our guest, and for you to ask any questions that you may have. And all three of those documents have been previously posted on our website for you to review, and they'll stay posted there in our archives so you can see all of the documents from all of our telephone town hall general membership meetings at any time you like.

Just a reminder, if you want to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the number three, and you'll be placed in a queue to ask your question. I would once again ask that you please remember that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues or ask questions about matters that affect all Local 832 members. And that if you have a question specific to your workplace or grievance, you contact your full-time union representative. Now I will need a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which took place at 7:00 PM on May the 16th, 2023.

Marie Buchan:

So, moved.

Ron Allard:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded. Please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad, or vote no by pressing the number two on your keypad. Once again, to get in the lineup to ask a question, simply press the star key followed by the number three, and you will be in line. Now, it is time to introduce our special guest UFCW Canada resident elder, Eric Flett. Eric is a former 832 executive board member. He is currently doing some facilitating work at our training center, off and on. Has been for several years. Absolutely has been a great advisor to UFCW on indigenous issues. Personal friend of mine, and someone who's taught me more about indigenous culture than anyone else in my lifetime.

I'll never forget walking through the museum in Ottawa, spending the day with you there. It was very, very educational. So [foreign language 00:06:45]. Merci, and thank you for joining us tonight, Eric, it's my honor to present you with a gift of tobacco as a token of our appreciation for your speaking to us this evening. I'm going to start; we're going to be doing a three-part interview. And the first part I want to do, is I really want to get into the history a little bit of how Canada, how we got here. UOCW has wanted to have you in one of these meetings for quite some time. It seems like the right time and the appropriate time. But if I think of truth and reconciliation, and I think of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, why did we need to have a commission like that here in Canada?

Eric Flett:

First off, thanks for having me. [foreign language 00:07:37] for the tobacco.

Jeff Traeger:

Very welcome.

Eric Flett:

You know what? I don't know if people know this about me, but I could probably talk for a little while.

Jeff Traeger:

I do. I know that.

Eric Flett:

I would love to go back. As soon as he said that, first thing I thought of was when back in the day they tried to kill our people through chemical warfare, during smallpox. They put it into blankets, gave it to our people. We can go that far back. We can go back to day one. Because in our culture, what was huge for my people was a buffalo robe.

I don't know if you know. I don't know if anybody's skinned an animal, a big animal like that here, cleaned it, tanned, it worked it. It's a lot of work. Buffalo robe was sacred to our people, but non-indigenous people saw it as something of value for us. Because it didn't just keep you warm, because that was basically our protector, this buffalo robe. Traditionally, sacredly. It's a spiritual gift that you have to earn. And everybody who had a buffalo robe, it was a huge honor to receive one. But non-indigenous people used that as a weapon. Because when they started bringing blankets, that's when they put smallpox in there so they could kill off our people. But because they knew we valued those blankets. Because today, the blanket, the star blanket. You know star blanket?

Jeff Traeger:

Yes.

Eric Flett:

Same idea. It all originates from the buffalo robe. And so, it was huge. Go out and buy a buffalo robe right now, it's a couple grand. It's a lot of money because it's a lot of work to do it. But I could talk for an hour just on that.

Jeff Traeger:

Please don't. Not because it wouldn't be interesting, but because we only have an hour for the program. And while you were talking about that, I actually read an article in the media this week talking about a First Nations community that was still impacted by the fact that they don't have buffalo anymore. That they can't be hunting buffalo in the traditional way, in the traditional manner. That the actual decline of the buffalo herds is still impacting indigenous people even this many years later.

Eric Flett:

Definitely. And you know what a big thing that you're just reminding me of, is working full-time. A lot of our indigenous people, traditionally we couldn't do that because there was a certain time of year you hunted buffalo, caribou, geese, fish. That's how we fed our families. Traditionally, we couldn't work full-time because we were working full-time on the land. I don't really care for this term, everybody's using land-based education. To us it's just getting back to your spirituality, because we do it all on the land. We've been doing it forever; it's just being said in a different way today.

But doing that work, we can't work full-time, so a lot of our non-indigenous people look at us like we're lazy, we don't want to work. But they don't know the value of our traditional teachings and the work that we had to put into even just go out and get a goose. Well, I know you fish.

Jeff Traeger:

I do fish, and I used to hunt when I was younger, but mostly just geese, upland game, ducks, that type of thing. But yeah, I have actually been involved. My uncle was big hunter and I've actually gone through

the process of cleaning a moose from start to finish. And you are right, it is a lot of work. An awful lot of work, and it's a lot of heavy work too. Hard on the hands.

Eric Flett:

Yes, definitely. And traditionally, we would use the brain of that animal. We'd have to take the brain out of the buffalo to tan that hide. That's the only way we could do it back in the day. Yeah, it was. Going out and hunting an animal, that wasn't even the beginning of the work. The hard work was to come yet. But traditionally, and we still do this, I was invited last fall. I couldn't make it though; I was too busy. Every fall we do a traditional hunt, and whatever we get, they got eight or nine deer. They cut it up, process all the meat, and we feed all the elders in our community.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, nice.

Eric Flett:

And that's just part of our traditions that a lot of communities have lost because of... Well, for starters, residential schools. When they took our kids from us, a lot of us were raised by grandmothers. Our grandmothers would take care of us. A lot of kids were lucky, some kids were lucky in the north. They had an advantage because they were isolated reserves. When they started residential schools back in the 1800s, when they started coming to get our kids, the first plane flew in. All the kids would run to the plane, they'd just load them up, gone. Next time the plane came in, all the kids were taken out on the trap line so that they couldn't find the kids, because they realized the government was taking all our kids. So, they had an advantage, because they could see the plane coming from however far away. Some kids were lucky, they grew up on the medicine trap line. That's what we would call it. They were lucky, because they were being raised by their elders, they were learning their language, but they were learning how to take care of Mother Earth.

I don't like them when people say this to me. "Yeah, you guys are the original owners of this land." To us, the way they teach us, our elders teach us, we don't own the land.

Jeff Traeger:

No one does. Yeah.

Eric Flett:

Yeah, no one owns the land. We were born from the land, in our traditional teachings. It was our duty to take care of the land. We're caretakers. I said this at the conference.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes, you did. How many have you, right?

Eric Flett:

Because of the work we do, we're stewards of the land. That was our role to take care of the land. We didn't have a concept for buying land, owning land. That wasn't for us. We just knew where our traditional territory was, and that's how we took care of it. Whether it was spring, summer, fishing season, caribou hunting season, whatever it was. But that all changed once residential school started.

Jeff Traeger:

Did the creation of reservations also change? Because I know that some indigenous communities were a bit nomadic following the food, as it were. The herd, whatever it might be. When the treaty system came in and when there were reservations brought into, well at least the west that I know of for sure, I'm sure there was maybe more elsewhere. Did that impact the way of life for indigenous people?

Eric Flett:

Yes, because they took away... Because we were moving because we had... We'd have summer camp, we'd go by the lake and fish for almost two months, but we would prepare that food so it could stay preserved over the winter. But then come fall, hunting season, then we would go hunt. So, we would move, we'd have a summer camp and a winter camp. But my reserve, they split it into three. Ebb and flow. Just to the north of us is Crane River, and to the south of us is Sandy Bay. We were all one tribe before treaty system, and they split us, so now we all have different territories. We lost a lot of our traditional hunting lands. And even to know where ancestors, how many generations back were buried. Because if you were traveling and somebody passed, they would bury them there. Even that, we lost a lot of knowing where our ancestors were, because a lot of that was lost to residential schools when we lost the language.

Our elders back then, six, seven generations ago, couldn't speak English. Now our people can't speak their own language, so they don't have that access to know where their ancestors were buried. Yeah, I can go back to Oka. They want to put a golf course on Oka. And our people fought there saying, "Well, our traditional burial ground is right there. You can't do that."

Jeff Traeger:

It's just outside of Montreal, isn't it? Because my sister's house, actually, she lives in a community called Pointe-Calumet, and her house backs onto Oka. Yeah, it was a very interesting time for her when all of that was going on.

Eric Flett:

It was difficult time because I married a Metis, but they identified as French. We got married. I was just telling these guys, my anniversary is Friday, 33 years. 1990-

Jeff Traeger:

Congratulations.

Eric Flett:

Thank you. 1990, that was the height of the Oka crisis. We had a buffet style dinner. All the Indians were all one side, and all the Frenchmen were on the other side of the hall. But my father-in-law had a very good joke with it. We had a good laugh. And you know what? We got together, because it was a wedding. We got together, everybody danced, laughed. Not one fight, nothing. We all got together in a good way at the height of this crisis, which there was so much bad stuff going on at that time. Just even the slandering, it was not a good time. But we actually proved we can all sit together nice and play nice in the same sandbox as long as we just respect people.

And even that, going back to that residential schools. All of that residential schools. My friend always said this, Marie Sinclair, "There's a monster inside of residential schools." That monster went to the 60 Scoop. Now that monster is in the Child and Family Services. Because it's done so much to our people.

It's hard for me when I get people who are 20 years older than me, who are indigenous, come to me and say, "How do I get my spirit's name?" Because they should have had all that already. We had the spiritual ceremony that you had to do while you were in the womb. I talked to my wife's womb when she was carrying our kids. I talked to my daughter's womb when she was carrying my three grandkids. That's how we teach. And a lot of people can't do that. A lot of people can't even say their own name, or they don't even have a name.

That's what residential schools, 60 Scoop, and Child and Family Services took away from our people. But TRC, especially when they recovered the 215, I always have a hard time when people say, "Yeah, they didn't find them." They weren't lost. Somebody knew where they were, somebody put them there. Somebody buried them there. Please don't say they were found, they were recovered. And like I say, for the four sisters who are in the landfill that the government doesn't want to dig up, we do traditional ceremony. And a lot of our people have lost that, unfortunately. But they're still ones who carry it on. I carry it on because my elders teach me. And those ones that are in the landfill, they have a right, that my elders would say, the rite of passage. They have a right to ceremony to make their final journey to the other side, to the spirit world. And it's being denied because somebody doesn't want to spend money.

But it's always been like that since... Well, I'm treaty to my reserve. Really, I'm a ward of the state, because an Indian. Under the official Indian Act, I'm an Indian. We weren't even considered human beings; we were less than. It's like I'm a child that belongs to the government. Who else has to walk around with a card identifying your status here? Nobody else that I know.

Jeff Traeger:

Nope.

Eric Flett:

Unless you're Metis. Truth and reconciliation, it's hard because some people have, I would say very strange ideas about it. One of the 94 calls to action was having the Pope apologize. But part of that also was now they have to put up money, the church has to put up money to do all this healing, but also get all... How many churches have burned down in the last 200 years? We lost all those records. We don't know who's been found, who hasn't been found. The church has [inaudible 00:20:43] those files covered.

Jeff Traeger:

Covered. I was listening.

Eric Flett:

You were listening. I'm talking about the ones who-

Jeff Traeger:

Yes, I know.

Eric Flett:

... ran away from-

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, I see. Okay.

Eric Flett:

... ended up somewhere else.

Jeff Traeger:

My apologies.

Eric Flett:

Couldn't make it to the reserve. Yeah. Well, I should have specified. But hey, good for listening.

Jeff Traeger:

You're good, man.

Eric Flett:

They basically sent some people over there to go ask him to come here and apologize. We shouldn't have to do that. All that was done here, should have been done here. And this is just one of the calls we're talking about, there's 93 to go still. What did they do? I think 13 they're working on right now. It's a long way to go. But in Alberta, they gave him a head feather, eagle headdress. Which is so wrong because it's a sacred item like this.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes.

Eric Flett:

You have protocols to take care of it, and he's just going to take it, and he probably never saw it again. It probably goes in the cabinet or a closet as far as I know.

Jeff Traeger:

For those of you that can't see what Eric was talking about, since we're on a town hall, he's carrying... Can you describe what you have in your hand?

Eric Flett:

It's an eagle fan. Count how many feathers, there's seven feathers.

Jeff Traeger:

2, 4, 5, 7. Yeah.

Eric Flett:

Yep. Seven's big. Seven teachings.

Jeff Traeger:

Seven teachings, yeah.

Eric Flett:

We have our seven original clans. We have the seven sisters, the star system, the Pleiades. That's this doorway to the spirit world. Those seven sisters, actually, if you look at them in a certain angle, it's also the teachings about our sweat lodge.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, okay. I want to get back to truth and reconciliation, but I have to take a very quick break before we move to the second part of the interview. As I see that the motion to approve the previous minutes has passed, and I also see that we have two questions on the line. We're going to start with Osman from Dunn-Rite Foods. Go ahead, Osman.

Osman:

Hello.

Jeff Traeger:

Hello, there. How are you tonight?

Osman:

Good. No, I don't have a question. Sorry, I pushed by mistake.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, okay. Very good. Well, thank you very much, Osman. And thank you for joining our town hall. We have Larine from store 4844. Go ahead, Larine.

Larine:

Hi. I wanted to find out if there's anything we can do about the amount of violence that is happening in the stores with shoplifters. One of our members was punched in the face today and bitten and ended up having to go to the hospital.

Jeff Traeger:

That's awful.

Larine:

And I know it's getting worse. I know there was another store that somebody came in and they had a knife attack, and we see this almost on a daily basis. It's so getting out of hand that the cashiers are all scared now.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, Larine, you know when we were bargaining with Safeway in '22, this was a big topic of discussion at the bargaining table. And I'm at the bargaining table right now with Loblaw, and we are certainly talking about that issue. I know Marie has been focusing on this issue a little bit on seeing what we can try to do to keep our members safe. Marie, did you want to comment on this one?

Marie Buchan:



Yeah. First and foremost, Larine, I'm really sorry that happened at the store. Definitely want to make sure... We'll take down your information and make sure that the rep is connecting with you and is followed up. There's obviously things that we can do making sure that protocols were taken place, filing grievances if we need to for not providing a safe workplace. We are looking at some initiatives with our staff, first and foremost to be trained in these issues in regard to health and safety, and the Workplace Safety and Health Act, pardon me. After that, we are going to be looking at doing some training with our activists. We want to make sure that we have everyone trained and are well aware of what their rights are, but we're definitely going to make sure that your rep follows up with you and that we make sure that everything's done to ensure the safety of all of our members, and that we follow up with that member who is also injured and see how we can assist them as well. Thank you for bringing that to our attention.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes, thank you very much, Larine. And before getting back to our interview, I'm going to do the second motion of the evening, and that is to approve the secretary treasurer's report.

Marie Buchan:

Moved.

Ron Allard:

Second.

Jeff Traeger:

It's been moved and seconded. Please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad, or no, by pressing the number two on your keypad. Now, if you have a question about the secretary treasurer's report, or a question for Elder Flett, or anything else at all, please press star three and we'll gladly take your questions.

Back to the interview, Eric. Why do you think it's important for Canada to recognize September 30th, and to have a day set aside, a national day set aside for truth and reconciliation?

Eric Flett:

Okay, where can I start? I have to be nice, right?

Jeff Traeger:

Well, to an extent. You got to be nice to me.

Eric Flett:

I love you, Jeff.

Jeff Traeger:

To an extent, but I also want you to be honest. I think honesty is very important, and it's important that we hear what you really think.

Eric Flett:

Oh, lordy. You know what, it would just be nice, like I said with the Indian Act. It would be nice that people would know and understand that we're human beings just like everybody else. The way we're taught traditionally is we're all the same, no one's better, no one's less. I don't care if you're homeless or if you're the prime minister, no one's better than anybody else. And it's hard to get that across to some people. It doesn't matter, people like to judge. And it's hard on some people because everybody, to a certain degree, has mental health issues. I know I have my own, Ron doesn't need to go into those.

But you know what, we all have a little bit of issues. But you know what, as long as we can walk in a good way. The way I was taught, is we all have to walk in kindness. And September 30th, when that woman's T-shirt was taken away from her from school.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes. The orange shirt?

Eric Flett:

Yeah, the orange shirt. It was huge for her. She was so proud of that orange shirt, and first thing they did was take it away from her. It's like, I don't know how many people know this. But you know what, if you went to residential school, because they started taking you at three years old, right until you graduated. But it could have been 16, 17, 18, whatever. That whole time, not one birthday party, because they were all numbers. They only recognized them as numbers. They took their names away, gave them numbers, gave them English names, but never celebrated a birthday ever.

You know what's the first thing they do when they started choosing reconciliation? Everybody was having birthday parties. So cute. 80-year-old grandmothers and grandfathers having birthday parties. Everybody's singing happy birthday. That's not having that kind of stuff, things we take for granted, right?

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, we do.

Eric Flett:

But choosing reconciliation. That day, man, even my people have been arguing for this for a long time. We should have a day of recognition. And it's not just the recognition part, it's like, let's have a day to honor our ancestors.

Jeff Traeger:

Some people would say that would be June 21st. That would be Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Eric Flett:

But not every indigenous person gets it off.

Jeff Traeger:

No. And not everybody gets Truth and Reconciliation Day off, which is really one of my next questions. Which is going to be, which is what do you think of the provincial government's decision not to proclaim Truth and Reconciliation Day as a statutory holiday in Manitoba?

Eric Flett:

Well, that burns, but a lot of stuff burns. Some burn brighter than others. Especially when it affects you personally. Residential schools, I know so many people, my brother and who my sisters went. And all three of them, they turned out so differently from each other.

Jeff Traeger:

Tom on our executive board was a 60 Scooper, right?

Eric Flett:

60 Scoop.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah.

Eric Flett:

And it's so hard because once you take away your land, but your culture, your spirituality, your language, you're taking away your whole identity. And the way I was taught by my elders, is we have to know who we are as a people today, but we have to know where we came from. Everything we do, we have to honor the last seven generations for what they did for us to be here today. So, all the work I do is for the next seven generations coming. It's not for me and my wife and my kids and my grandkids, it's for the next seven generations coming. And if we do that, if everybody keeps doing that, then everybody will be looking out for generations and generations to come.

Like in your opening, as long as the rivers flow-

Jeff Traeger:

Grass grows and the river flows.

Eric Flett:

That's how it should always be. But September 30th... June 21st, I wish it was holiday. Or even have in your bargaining agreement to have time to take off for spiritual ceremony.

Jeff Traeger:

Like I said about... Sorry, it's just interesting that there's more than just one cultural group asking us that question. Because there are some folks that don't celebrate Christmas or don't celebrate Easter, which are traditional Christian holidays. They're starting to be more and more of a push at the bargaining table for people to say, "I'll work Christmas, you give me Ramadan off," or something like that. Something that's important to me. So, we are seeing more of that, and I'll talk about it in a bit, I want you to be able to finish what you were saying. But I have a different view of what truth and reconciliation should be, versus Indigenous Peoples' Day.

I think Indigenous Peoples' Day is important, and I know June 21st is an important date on the calendar. That's summer solstice, correct? Right, which is an important date on your calendar. But I just have a different view of what truth and reconciliation should really be specific to that commission and that report and those recommendations. And should really be used as an opportunity to reflect and not take a long weekend, a late beach weekend or something like that. That's not how I see it. And I'll explain more of that in a minute, but I'll let you talk.

Eric Flett:

That's where I was going to go. The way I see it, it should be a holiday, June 21st, for starters. Because that's one of our most important solstices. Because for people who were non-indigenous first came here, they called us sun worshipers. Because in our teachings, the sun represents [foreign language 00:32:26]. In my language, it's God. The sun is male, mother earth, female. They come together to create life, and that's who created our lives. When we do our sun dance is the longest day of the year, June 21st.

I'm going to a ceremony on Thursday, September 21st, for solstice teachings. And I said, "Who's teaching that?" And they said, "You are." I was like, "Oh, thanks for letting me know." Yeah, we're going to do ceremony to do those teachings. Because those teachings, in our medicine wheel, there's four quadrants to our medicine wheel, and each solstice brings in that new season. September 21st will bring in the fall, and there's certain things traditionally and spiritually that we have to do during that time. We have to teach our kids that, so we celebrate all the solstices.

But going back to September 30th, that should be a day off for... Imagine that, having an actual day off, not just so you can go golfing or whatever, it's a day off so that everybody in your community can get together and do ceremony. And usually what's involved there, is there's always four things involved there. There are pipes, we smoke our sacred pipes, sing songs, we'll share teachings, and we'll share in feast food. That always happens in ceremony. But how can you do that if some people are working days, some are working nights, some are out of town, or whatever it is? And that's not how I understand it, why we ask for a day off. It's just to have another day off to go golfing or have a long weekend down in the States, or whatever it is. It's a day to celebrate with everybody and gather and have ceremony, honor your ancestors.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, my view of it is the same as what it was with the Labor Management Review Committee, which is a group that gets together to make recommendations to government on employment standards issues and labor legislation. And after we had a discussion with three indigenous leaders, Ann Marie Sinclair, about what this day, truth and reconciliation, should look like. We were told that to capture the true spirit of what the commission intended, that an ideal T&R day would not be a state holiday, it'd be more like a Remembrance Day. A Remembrance Day where there were certain cultural traditions. On Remembrance Day we wear red poppies, we go down to memorials, we listen to some speeches, we hear cannons being shot off. There's a recognition of what the soldiers sacrificed so that we could have our freedom here today. And at the Labor Management Review Committee, we envisioned that day being the same, except there would be no exemption for retail to open up at one o'clock.

It would be closed the whole day. And the only people that would be paid for Truth and Reconciliation Day, are the people who had to work because they were in an essential service, like driving an ambulance or a police officer, or something that was an essential service. We made that recommendation to government, and we did that in the spring of 2022. And government said they would take it under consideration. And then an announcement came out late August of 2022 that they were still having consultations with indigenous groups, so they weren't going to proclaim it. And then an announcement came out this year that because it's an election year, they didn't feel it was appropriate to proclaim it. That's the vision that I see for truth and reconciliation, not just a holiday, not a day that moves. It would always be recognized on September 30th, just like we always recognize Remembrance Day on November 11th.

We wouldn't move it so that people could have a long weekend, because it's not about a holiday. It's about taking some time to pause and reflect, to think about the truth of what the past is, and to think about the path to reconciliation going forward. In my mind.

Eric Flett:

Oh, man. Oh, man. Did I say I love you already?

Jeff Traeger:

You might have.

Eric Flett:

You know what, there's so much I could say, but I can be nice. That day, to me people have to learn what happened to my people during residential schools, and that's the... People keep asking me this, how's it going to work for truth and reconciliation? How do we reconcile? How do we reconcile? It's like, how do you heal?

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, right.

Eric Flett:

How do you heal? [inaudible 00:37:22] How do you balance that out? There always has to be a balance. But in the beginning it's truth and reconciliation. And that even hasn't happened yet. Because the church, the RCMP, and the federal government, they need to come to indigenous people and speak their truth about what happened during residential schools. And their part in it. Have they done it yet?

Jeff Traeger:

No.

Eric Flett:

No. That's why I say, call to action, they've done 13 or whatever.

Jeff Traeger:

But you ask the Catholic Church, they'll say they did. They sent the Pope down to apologize. I think they believe they have.

Eric Flett:

They think they have. Okay, if you want to give it to them, I wouldn't, I'd still hold their feet to the fire. But still, federal government and RCMP, they have to speak their truth. And you know what? It's not about, we made you say it. It's about their own healing. I speak in a lot of places, and I always get people who come to me and say, "You know what, I feel so ashamed of what my church did." And I said, "You don't have to feel ashamed; you didn't do it. Just a certain few did." "Yeah, but I don't want to follow this religion anymore." And it's like, that's your call to make. I'm not here to approve that decision. But you know what, those were the actions of a few people, it's not your burden to carry. If you want to make a change, make it inside the church. Don't just jump to a different religion or spirituality, whatever you're doing.

Jeff Traeger:

I agree. I have to take another short break. I know. This should be the last one. I just noticed that the vote to approve the treasurer's report has been passed. I need a motion to approve the president's report, which is the final document to approve at the meeting.

Marie Buchan:

So, moved.

Ron Allard:

Second.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded, so press the number one on your keypad to vote yes, and number two to vote no. If you have a question for Eric or about the president's report, or anything else at all, please press star three and we'll gladly take your question. I see there is nobody on the line for questions, that's a little unusual. But I think that because of the gravity of tonight's topic, maybe that has something to do with it.

We've talked a lot about truth and reconciliation today, we've talked a little bit about residential schools. What impact do you think the whole situation with missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people has had? And was that part of why we had to have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Or worse, is that part of a bigger part of the bigger problem?

Eric Flett:

Yeah, a bigger part of the bigger problem. What year? I can't remember what year when the RCMP came out with those numbers. Do you remember?

Jeff Traeger:

No, I don't. Ron, do you remember? Marie?

Eric Flett:

I don't remember the year.

Jeff Traeger:

Chris? No? No, I don't.

Eric Flett:

Reconciliation was started already, but I can't remember the exact year when RCMP... I can't remember when they came out with those numbers.

Jeff Traeger:

We'll get our comms guy on it right away. He's digging into his computer to see if he can get a year for you on that.

Eric Flett:

This is heavy stuff. I'm going through so much stuff right now.

Jeff Traeger:

And I really, really want to stop and appreciate that you're sharing with us and appreciate that you agreed to be here. I know this can be triggering for you, I know this can be hard for you, and it's probably hard for other people who are on the line right now. But I think it's important-

Eric Flett:

Very.

Jeff Traeger:

... to hear what you're saying and to feel what you're feeling. I think it's important. And I think it's important for all of us that are listening to you tonight to hear this. I really, really do want to thank you.

Eric Flett:

Same. Right back to you. [foreign language 00:41:35] for the opportunity. Because you know what, I know a lot of my ancestors who didn't have a voice, the ones they recovered, they're speaking louder than anybody else right now. But I'm able to speak to it. It still affects me, but because it is so close to me. But that's my role as a warrior, is to speak for those who can't speak for themselves. And people need to hear it. People need to hear how bad and awful humanity can be towards each other.

I can talk about things that happen. I don't want to get graphic, but some people need to hear it. Because when I teach people this, they're like, "No way. They really did that to you?" Even just little things. If you spoke your language, they would make you hold your tongue, that.

Jeff Traeger:

With your fingers.

Eric Flett:

For a half an hour. Do that for a minute, you'll start drooling. You have to do that for half an hour. Or if you spoke your language-

Jeff Traeger:

We got Ron on it.

Eric Flett:

Ron's doing it.

Jeff Traeger:

Ron's trying it.

Eric Flett:

If you spoke your language, they would make you kneel on marbles.

Jeff Traeger:

Just cruel.

Eric Flett:

Yeah. I can only imagine what they did to the ones that they recovered, 15. Because I've heard personal stories, like babies getting thrown into those. Yeah, and it's hard to say because it always bugs me. I could still see this guy's face when he was speaking to it, he followed them downstairs, and they did that. And you know what? He's still affected. This guy was in his 60s, I could still see his face when he was telling me this. Because he watched this baby being thrown in the furnace because priests got our young girls pregnant. And some people think it didn't happen, but I've heard it firsthand from survivors. That's why I have no doubt that stuff happened. We could talk about so many things like that, that have happened. But once you take them out of there and you're finished in the school, say you graduated. Or even that, when you graduate from somewhere, you're alumni, right?

Jeff Traeger:

Yep.

Eric Flett:

What happens when you graduate from residential school? You're a survivor.

Jeff Traeger:

You made it. You didn't die. Yeah.

Eric Flett:

They didn't die. They didn't kill me. I made it. But you go home, and you weren't even welcomed into your own community now because you didn't speak your language anymore. A lot of people saw it as, oh, he's trying to be better than us. He thinks he's white now. And so, our own people had that own lateral violence because of mainstream society, colonization, residential schools, all of it. Now we have that own lateral violence, our own people against our own people. But that's why for me, I always talk about ceremony, spirituality, because that's [inaudible 00:44:58]-

Jeff Traeger:

... safe place to be. The only safe place to be.

Eric Flett:

And it keeps us strong as a people. If you think, even just go back to the last 200 years, residential schools, 60 Scoop, Child and Family Services. All that stuff that happened, terrible. But even since contact with the smallpox and the blankets, all that stuff that happened, we're still here. But that colonization has forced even my own people to be like that with each other. Like I said, you take away their land, their identity, their language, their culture, their spirituality. And the last thing they took was our kids when they started residential school, 60 Scoop and Child and Family Services. Now, even that today, a lot of our kids don't speak their language. I'm doing my best to teach spirituality, because I teach all over the place. I go wherever I can when I have time.

But how many people know 18-year-olds who are homeless? I know quite a few. Because once you age out of Child and Family Services, if you don't have family, you're on the street. You're lucky if you have your grade 12, you don't have a work history. Who's going to hire you? Nobody. So now you're stuck on



the street. And unfortunately, a lot of our young women had to sell themselves so they could survive. It's sad when that comes down to that if you want to survive. Some people have no idea about, what, 18, 19-year-old and you're homeless? How does that happen? Didn't your parents take care of you? Some people are lucky if they knew who their family name was, because they changed their names, gave them all new identities. And gave them misinformation.

In 60 Scoop, once people reached 18, they go back to the government and ask information on their birth parents and all that. They were given misinformation. They didn't want them to reconnect with their families.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, boy.

Eric Flett:

It's just always separate. Separate.

Jeff Traeger:

What would you say? Because I've heard this from non-indigenous people that we're doing a lot of the right things now, and we're headed in the right direction. And they believe, some of the people that I've spoken to about this who are not indigenous, believe that Canada's on the right path with respect to bearing the truth about our past relationships with indigenous people. And the Canadian government and its people are taking the right steps towards reconciliation. Would you agree with that?

Eric Flett:

I don't know. It's hard. We'd have to sit and talk for a while. Because what some people might think the right steps are for other people, are not the right steps. You know what I mean? For me, I see certain steps that should be taken, and they haven't not been taken yet. I've had a lot of people tell me that, "You know what, I think we're doing good." Yeah, we're doing good. But right now, too little, too late, I guess. But there's a lot more that could be done.

Jeff Traeger:

And there's some people that would say better late than never. At least we're finally starting to uncover the ugly part of our history, and we're finally starting... Maybe we're not doing the right things yet, but we're at least searching for the right things to do. And I'm not speaking in favor of these other people or anything, I'm just saying that listening to the non-indigenous community, those are some of the comments that I hear. I sometimes wonder, isn't the real question going to be, will our indigenous communities be able to heal from the past? From what's happened in the past?

Eric Flett:

And you know what my elders tell me, but I've said this myself. I said, "I won't see truth and reconciliation." Hopefully I'm here for another half century, that'd be nice. But I won't see it in my time because all this stuff has been done to us since contact, really. But if you just go to residential schools, the last couple hundred years. The way I always thought is there has to be a balance. How do you heal that? You can't just throw some money at it and say, "Okay, you're healed now. We're sorry, let's move on." It's like, get over it.

You see that warrior side from me, the one part of the warrior where, okay, don't you ever come up to me and tell me, "Get over it." Because getting over it is, we all carry that trauma, whether it's in our mind or in our blood. Talking lots now about that blood trauma, and it goes through generations. But the way I was taught is my ancestors are in my blood. So, we go out and we fast, and we quiet our mind, and we can hear and talk with our ancestors. But our ancestors didn't only just give us trauma in our genes, they gave us strength, resiliency, all of that. It's unfortunate that people focus on the negative without looking at the positive.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. Well, sometimes I got to tell you, I'm skeptical whether or not we're actually going in the right direction. Just because I can remember being a very, very young man. Which, just secret, I'm not now. But I can remember being a very young man and thinking, why is it that people that live in Canada can't have clean drinking water? Why is that? That should be a very, very, very basic human right. Everybody should. Especially in a country that has two-thirds of the cleanest drinking water on the planet. Here more than anybody else, nobody should have to boil their water to drink it or cook with it, or whatever. We have communities, surprisingly they're all indigenous communities, that have been under boiled water advisories for decades. Some of them for a generation. Why can't we fix that? If we can't fix something that's a matter of putting a water purification system in place or filtering water. If we can't even get to that in 30 or 40 years, how are we going to get to healing our indigenous communities, trying to make amends, or at least recognize the truth of our ugly past and work towards meaningful reconciliation? It seems to me that task is much bigger than providing clean drinking water, and we can't even do the first one.

Eric Flett:

Definitely. Right. I agree with you totally. Imagine, say you're 25 years old and your whole life all you've known is boiled water. Which, like I said, people take so many things for granted. Right? To me, like I said, I'll never see it in my lifetime, because that balance that has to happen. We're talking about 300 years of trauma. We're going to heal that in the next 20 years. It's not going to happen. I don't see it happening. But there are steps we can take to start these next generations coming that can walk in a better way with our people.

Jeff Traeger:

Absolutely. All right, well we're almost at the end of our hour. We're getting close. I'm going to ask you a question, and then I'm going to throw it open to you for any final comments you have. The question I have, we talked about it very briefly earlier. I've got my own opinion on this, but what do you think of the current Manitoba government's decision not to search that landfill? And what do you think of the reasons they've given us about safety and cost? Even though there are calls from across the country, including yesterday in Ottawa and in Montreal, and there's been calls as far as the coast and into the north to say, search the landfill. And yet, Stefanson continues to hold the line and refuse to do that. You really think of that? And why would she do this?

Eric Flett:

She's not indigenous.

Jeff Traeger:

I noticed. Yeah.

Eric Flett:

Technically I'm a lesser human being than she is, so are the sisters that are in there. But what we talked about earlier a little bit, traditionally we have to do ceremony when somebody leaves this world. They can go back to the spirit world. Their body has to go back to Mother Earth and the spirit, then can journey to the other side. But this is not available right now. Families are waiting, have been waiting for this to happen. And it's not going to cost billions of dollars to do it. They did this in Ontario, spent a million searching for three months to find... I don't think they found all of them, I think they found parts of them.

Jeff Traeger:

They found enough to get a DNA sample to know that was his remains. Yes.

Eric Flett:

A million dollars. I was asked to speak when we had our Canada 150, east of Winnipeg where the... I'm [inaudible 00:54:42]. They built a new facility there. You can take pictures, center of Canada.

Jeff Traeger:

Geographic center of North America.

Eric Flett:

They asked me to go, if I would sing sacred songs and bless it. And I said, "No, I won't do that." I was being angry. Because at that time the federal government spent over \$500,000 to do this, and yet how many reserves did we have under boil water advisory that they still couldn't fix? That they promised for how many years ago that they would help and fix it? And now they want me to come and bless a big red chair so people could take a picture. I'm in the center of Canada. It's not that I don't like the idea, it's just, I was just putting up my own-

Jeff Traeger:

It seems wrong.

Eric Flett:

Yeah.

Jeff Traeger:

It is fundamentally wrong.

Eric Flett:

It pissed me off. Spend 500 grand on that. Sorry, I could go on and on. I don't want to get angry, but Center of Canada.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, that.

Eric Flett:

But they made a big flag out of people right at Portage and Main. Everybody's honking their horns. Yeah. Great, great, great. We do that for murdering and missing... Murdered-

Jeff Traeger:

And missing indigenous women.

Eric Flett:

Indigenous women. I'm getting angry here.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Well, we're running out of time, so calm down.

Eric Flett:

We do that, within one hour and people were livid. People were livid. And it's like, maybe we slowed you down for half an hour. Our people have been asking for stuff for over 100 years. Just treat us like human beings, please. Ooh, I stopped you from you breaking the speed to go home and watch TV. Really? We're asking for real life stuff here.

Jeff Traeger:

Meaningful stuff.

Eric Flett:

Right?

Jeff Traeger:

[inaudible 00:56:38].

Eric Flett:

Yeah, some days I get a little heated and I want to put a dent in someone's forehead, but I can't do that because I'm not supposed to.

Jeff Traeger:

Can't even say that.

Eric Flett:

I'm just being honest.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. All right. I'll give you another... We got no questions, and we got three minutes left. I'll give you two of them, and then I need one to sign off for tonight. To any final comments you have for our members this evening.

Eric Flett:

You know what, the biggest thing, I won't take too much time. Biggest thing is, I always talk about my wife. My wife was on the other side of the table in her profession. She was in management on the other side of the table from the union. But it does my heart good when wherever we are, my wife will speak to how much good work 832 does. That she loves the work that we're doing. And that's coming from the other side of the table. It's like, that just speaks volumes. But for me, it would be non-indigenous people being our allies. If they can speak out to the injustices done to our people, that speaks louder than I can yell. Because people don't want to listen to me. Okay, here, listen to our allies. They get it, they understand. Listen to them.

Jeff Traeger:

[foreign language 00:58:02] to you, my friend. So much for being here. Thank you so much for doing this with us tonight. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with us. And let's hope we're at least moving in the right direction, if nothing else. If nothing else. We do have a couple of folks that came in very late for the call, but unfortunately it is 7:58, so we're going to have to take your information down and we'll pass that along to your rep, and we'll get the rep to return your call as soon as possible. I want to thank all of you for joining us on our September telephone town hall GMM. We will be conducting our next GMM on Tuesday, November 14th by telephone town hall beginning at 7:00 PM. Have a great fall everyone. Stay safe and well. And thank you for everything you do. We are now adjourned.