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## **OttawaWatch 176: A time for everything**

**By Lloyd Mackey**

*This piece, as well as its immediate predecessor, can be a precursor to the 2021 Residential School discussion precipitated by the discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 people, presumed to have been students at the Kamloops Indian Residential School at the time of their passings.*

A time for apologies, for questions and for resurrecting motions.

It does not take the wisdom of Solomon, as expressed in Ecclesiastes 3, to get some sense that timing is important.

Last week, I suggested that I expected to be listening to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apologies on my car radio. As it happened, my timing worked out so as to have resulted in pulling into World Vision Canada's parking lot in Mississauga at shortly before 3 p.m., Wednesday, June 11.

When I asked the nice lady at reception if any television sets might be available to watch the apology, she pointed overhead. And there was a screen showing the prime minister descending the staircase into the Commons. Walking beside him was First Nations Assembly Chief Phil Fontaine, in full head dress.

So, I got to observe the visuals as well, and was grateful that a number of busy WVC people were seeing to it that facilities were available to both visitors and employees, to view the historic event.

The auditorium at the humanitarian organization's Canadian headquarters was the site, a few hours later, for the The Word Guild awards gala which, each year, prefaces Write! Canada, TWG's Christian writers' conference. The conference started the following afternoon at the Guelph Bible Conference Centre, a couple of dozen kilometres east.

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Away from The Hill and surrounded by writers who likely take less of an interest in politics than do I, the preponderance of interest was in the apology, with hardly any awareness of the offsetting embarrassment of Ottawa-area Conservative MP Pierre Pollivere.

Young Pollivere, of course, is the fellow who, in a local radio conversation just hours before the apology, raised questions about the billions spent in supporting aboriginal programs.

There was much outcry about his comments, although some letter-writers to the *Ottawa Citizen* wondered if his undoing was in the timing, rather than in the validity of his statements.

In Guelph, among the writers, almost all the comment was about the apology itself – as well as the class with which Opposition Leader Stephane Dion made clear that the Liberals had been in power most of the time during the existence of the residential schools. That was as it should be. If the prime minister had talked in that fashion, singling out the Liberals for attention, he would have been roundly criticized and rightly so. And if Dion had failed to specify the Liberal responsibility, his part of the apology would have been incomplete.

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As to Pollivere’s “timing”, it was a most dramatic example of something happening all the time (pun intended) in the world of politics.

There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence, as the aforementioned Ecclesiastes declares. And then, there is a time for truth and reconciliation, blended into one significant roll.

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And there is a time, as well, to return to issues that were visited years ago and abandoned.

That is something presently engaging the attention of the MP who has employed my dear spouse for the past ten years.

When he first entered the house in 1997, Saskatoon-area MP Maurice Vellacott pressed for conscience legislation. Such a law would protect health care workers from being forced to participate in abortion procedures and other practices that their beliefs, or their consciences, would preclude.

Later, before he retired, BC Liberal senator Ray Perrault, like Vellacott, a serious Christian believer, advocated a similar conscience motion in the upper house.

Neither of their actions succeeded. Now Vellacott is introducing a similar motion again. As well, he is raising support among MPs for acceptance of the concept of “equal parenting”. Such a motion would encourage divorced or separated parents to agree to equally sharing the parenting of their children. Again, a similar motion had been encouraged several years ago in the senate, by Anne Cools, who has served as both a Liberal and Conservative in that chamber, and is presently an independent.

Sometimes the recognition of the importance of timing helps a concept or even a policy to be accepted, when before it was ignored or even discouraged.

For the residential school question, it took a long time.

Better late than never.

But, hopefully, better early than late, as politicians fine-tune their sense of right and wrong.

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