

Catherine MacQuarrie: Notes for presentation, Session 3 –

“Back to the Future” with the Tait Report

May 8, 2018

(TITLE SLIDE) It’s a real pleasure being back among the Values and Ethics crew. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to spend more of today with you and dear colleagues and friends like Scott Serson and Ralph Heintzman. I’m not exaggerating when I say that working with them and others on these important issues over seven years was the highlight of my career.

Like for many of you, getting ready for today was a welcome occasion to re-read *A Strong Foundation*. My worn and marked copy hasn’t seen the light for several years, and so it was a pleasure to find that under the dusty cover, it is in many respects still as fresh and relevant today as it was 20 years ago. I found its contents both old and new. Our challenges and issues as public servants have definitely changed in the last two decades, but I think that it provides some enduring and important advice for how to think and talk about them.

Unfortunately, one of the problems with re-reading the Tait report was that I was tempted to try to bring so much of its content into today’s presentation, but I forced myself to try and focus on only two messages:

One, the continuing need for honest dialogue on public service values, which I argue is needed now more than ever - and

Two: that it is now time to broaden the dialogue to include thorny issues of public policy and the two important areas of public service values that the Tait team left for another day: constitutional and societal values.

(SLIDE) But first, in keeping with the conference title, “Back to the future” I want to take you back more than one hundred years before I go forward... to tell you the story of a public servant by the name of Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce. I hope you have heard of him, but chances are that sadly, you have not.

Dr. Bryce was a pioneer in public health and a leader among those who wrote the rules and created the institutions that continue to keep Canadians healthy and safe today.

As the first secretary of the Provincial Board of Health of Ontario, he was an early proponent of sanitation and a pioneer in preventive health care. He drafted Ontario’s Public Health Act of 1884—the first provincial public health act in Canada that became a model for the rest of the country. He later served as a founding

member of the Canadian Public Health Association and as president of the American Public Health Association.

In 1904, Dr. Bryce was hired by Canada's Department of the Interior to manage public health issues in both the Immigration Department and Indian Affairs. He was asked, in particular, to look into the health conditions at residential schools which were experiencing high student death rates. In 1907, he issued a critical report, laying blame on the federal government for negligence that led to shocking death rates of Indian children due to communicable disease, primarily tuberculosis. Statistics showed students were dying at rates between 24 to 69 per cent.

Although the report was shared widely within the department, it did not gain much publicity. Duncan Campbell Scott, head of Indian Affairs, (and who, incidentally, was honoured after his death as a Person of National Historic Significance for his career and his poetry) dismissed Dr. Bryce's recommendations to establish proper hospitals and overhaul the Indian education system, and eventually terminated funding for his research.

Scott didn't just ignore the report, he repudiated it. He wrote: "It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of this Department which is geared towards a final solution of our Indian Problem".

It seems that Dr. Bryce's stellar career did not end well. Although the history is murky, it is likely he was isolated and eventually forced into retirement. However, once retired, he published the results of his report in his book **The Story of a National Crime: Being a Record of the Health Conditions of the Indians of Canada from 1904 to 1921**. It got a fair amount of news coverage for the time... but it didn't change government policy or administrative practice – in fact, the federal government doubled down.

It is estimated that more than 150,000 First Nation, Metis and Inuit children attended residential schools until the last one closed in 1996. The chances that a child would die in the school were one in 25. Just for comparison, the odds of a Canadian soldier dying in WWII were 1 in 26. And we know now, due to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that for many children, their time in residential school was a fate worse than death.

So, why do I tell you this story? Well, in part it's a shameless plug for a film about him that is having its world premiere at the Mayfair theatre this Thursday night – doors open at 6 pm. ☺

Also, because from the first time I heard Dr. Bryce's story a couple of years ago, it struck me as a very rich case study in public service values and ethics. He is, for example, likely among our earliest whistleblowers and victim of reprisal.

But mainly I wanted to tell it because the repercussions of the issues he raised ... the decisions and actions of public servants at the time, in subsequent decades and even today, reverberate still in our society. The brutal legacy of residential schools, the application of the Indian Act and other assimilationist laws, policies and practices have ruined generations of lives and present us with one of our greatest future challenges as a country: how to reconcile relationships with Indigenous peoples so that they – and all Canadians – can have a better future.

Whether and how we meet that challenge – what values we will bring to bear in our advice to governments, in our policy design and operational practices – will define the lives of Canadians and especially, Indigenous Canadians, for the next 150 years.

I think there are two things to reflect on here. One is to remember that the power of public service is not insignificant. When we earnestly say we joined because we want to “make a difference”, how many of us imagine that we are perhaps making a difference that will persist for generations – for good or ill?

The second is to consider – as we tackle all future challenges, not just Indigenous ones – whether we are truly bringing all of our professionalism and family of values to bear in our work, or are we just reproducing old norms and attitudes dressed up as new? Are we just parroting the jargon, adopting the messaging, playing in the new sandbox, driving that next Cabinet submission... without fundamentally examining the implications and doing the hard work – including challenging our own assumptions and beliefs – that needs to be done to deliver our best advice and loyal implementation?

When the Tait task force did its work, the public service was undergoing a period of stress; and the team decided deliberately to focus on the questions of organizational values, leadership, employment, and organizational culture, the *raison d'être* of public service.

Now our very society and democratic institutions are undergoing great stress: covert disruption of our political processes; catastrophic weather events due to climate change; terrorism; seismic shifts in economy and labour not seen since the Industrial Revolution; mass human migration due to many of the above factors; and the promise and threats of new technologies including artificial intelligence. The

public service must simultaneously grapple with the effects of these changes on its own functioning, even while it helps government navigate these new complexities for all Canadians.

Re-reading **A Strong Foundation**, I took comfort in discovering that its guidance and discussion, along with its emphasis on honest dialogue as the critical tool for learning and discovery, remain highly applicable in today's context.

Today's public servant, who is grappling with their role and responsibility in this new world, will still find very sage advice within the report. But, as we necessarily shift the lens from a purely internal examination of the institution of public service to the broader societal shifts that are taking place, I think it is time to equip public servants to have honest dialogue about constitutional and societal values, which the Task Force had admittedly left for another day.

Let me give you a couple of examples of what I mean, and how I would apply them in the context of just one of our many future challenges: a new relationship with the First Nations, Inuit and Metis of Canada:

First, in discussing democratic values, the report says – "What public servants do and say matters to the lives of Canadians and the future of Canada. It is, therefore, crucial that public servants understand the Canadian system of government, the nature of responsible government, of relations in a federal state, and of the role of the state, and its limits, in a liberal democracy."

To this I would add, "Public servants need to understand Canadian history, how it continues to shape societal forces, and to learn about the specific responsibilities of the Crown to uphold the law in respect of historic and modern treaties and other legal obligations in respect of Indigenous peoples".

Quite apart from any moral reflex we might have as individuals to the question of Indigenous peoples, the courts have made it quite clear, many times, over many decades, that Canada has failed in this duty. And this, I'm afraid, is not due solely to the policy direction of any particular government. It is often directly due to the failure of public servants to implement treaty and other legal obligations – sometimes with malice aforethought as in the case of Duncan Campbell Scott but often times – and this I think is even more alarming – in total ignorance... in effect, deeming these particular duties as irrelevant or unimportant.

This brings me to professional values, which the Tait report closely linked to democratic values. For the team, it included such things as excellence, continuous improvement, merit, effectiveness, economy, frankness, objectivity and impartiality

in advice, speaking truth to power, balancing complexity, and fidelity to the public trust. They also spoke about “new” or emerging professional values like “quality,” innovation, initiative, creativity, resourcefulness, service to clients/citizens, horizontality, partnership, networking and teamwork.

Close attention to this particular family of values is absolutely crucial to modern public service. To me, they are what should define the job expectations of today’s public servant in everything we do, and are essential tools for competently tackling Canada’s toughest issues – including of course, a new relationship with Indigenous peoples. These relationships span government – they are not just relegated to specific departments. They touch on fisheries, environmental protection, public safety, the economy, infrastructure, finance... and until public servants across government see that our professional values are equally as important to working with Indigenous partners as on other issues, we are bound to repeat the terrible mistakes of the past.

I have been extremely encouraged by this government’s commitment to change the relationship but unfortunately, at the public service level I see efforts seriously hampered by the lack of knowledge and continued broad assumptions about Indigenous peoples and their place in Canadian society. I’ve spent the past two years working with public servants at all levels of government across Canada on reconciliation, and have seen first-hand how far we have to go, as institutions and as a society.

My last example is Tait’s commentary on the value of horizontality, about which was said, “will require public servants to change, in fundamental ways, how they think about and do policy. It will require them to work with other levels of government to define issues collaboratively and integrate objectives and, within the flexible framework of the Constitution and with respect for jurisdiction, to align federal actions with those of the provinces and territories to serve the public interest. And, it will require us to find more effective and realistic ways of engaging interested Canadians at the early stages and throughout.”

We still haven’t got horizontality right – but I’ve been delighted to see the many new policy initiatives that are dedicated to improving our performance in this. As I’m sure my panel colleagues will agree, our ability to partner and collaborate and engage Canadians in problem definitions and solutions is vital to addressing the many societal and other problems governments are called on to address.

The lack of knowledge about the history of Crown- Indigenous relations, and the unfamiliarity with First Nations, Inuit and Metis people and realities, mean that even the men and women of good faith and intention are not really equipped to do

this well, if at all. It means we are missing opportunities, creating unintended consequences, and failing in our responsibility to offer Indigenous peoples the same chance at inclusion and respect for jurisdiction as other Canadians enjoy.

While I hope I've inspired you to take a closer look at our public service values in the context of policy challenges such as reconciliation, I particularly hope that public servants also adopt the discipline of honest dialogue before rushing in; to take the time – with ourselves, our co-workers, our leaders, our partners – to figure out what we need to learn, what values are at stake, and what must be considered in shaping a way forward.

Are we approaching our responsibilities with humility, recognizing that we each wear blinders constructed of our own personal and institutional assumptions, values and perceptions, and that we need the perspectives and challenge of others to see more clearly? And in seeing more clearly, how can we also become more adept at recognizing and balancing the underlying tension between our values – which for John Tait and his team was the particular essence of public service and public administration – that lies in the balancing of conflicting values and purposes?

I was pleased to note on the program that you started today with an Elder, and that you have included a banner of the Seven Grandfather teachings. Adding these elements to the program is an important and appreciated gesture to reconciliation but, just like putting up posters of public service values on the office wall, they are only the beginning of a long journey of learning, reflection and dialogue to make them meaningful.

The Seven Grandfathers are part of a deep moral philosophy of the Anishinaabe people – just one of 60 different Indigenous cultures within Canada. Although these teachings are not pan-Indigenous, they do share a common world view of interconnectedness: where human beings are no more important than the land, air, water and animals that sustain us, and where every animate or inanimate object in the universe has a role to play.

The Seven Grandfathers are guidance for how to live “in a good way” – called in the language “Bimaadiziwin”. (In fact the word Anishinaabe itself means “good person”.) Each value is deeply defined, including with examples in nature, but like the Tait families of values, they are also meant to operate together in balance. Examples of meaning and how they should be practiced are conveyed in stories and teachings told from childhood. Anishinaabe are expected to develop these values within themselves to the highest degree possible and to always conduct themselves accordingly, not just in relation to each other, but to all of creation.

If the Tait Task Force were doing its work today, I hope they would have included an appreciation for Canada's Indigenous peoples in their work. There is much in common with the emphasis on values and on dialogue as the means to find a way forward together.

To illustrate, I will close with a few words from Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, a Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk Nation from the far western side of Canada. He is an Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada and the closest I've ever come to meeting Ghandi, the Dalai Lhama and Nelson Mandela all rolled into one!

Chief Joseph was removed from his community at age 6 to go to residential school and stayed there for 11 years. His experience of physical and sexual abuse in the school started him out on a path of addiction and struggle, but somehow, amongst all of this strife, he managed to retain his native language, the values of his culture, and his place in the world, and he has dedicated his life to becoming a positive force in our country and the world.

Although his advice is specifically for reconciliation, I think it is useful to consider in the context of public service values and all of the societal challenges that lie before us in Canada.

"Where do we start?" he said, "That's always the question". We start by educating ourselves... "Where do we start? We start by sharing our truth. We start by sharing our histories. We create space where we can have a dialogue. Out of those deep conversations we will find commonalities and shared values that will reshape our country."

"Let us find a way to belong to this time and place together. Our future, and the well-being of all our children, rests with the kind of relationships we build today"

Thank you.