

The Current

with Anna Maria Tremonti

Wednesday August 31, 2016

August 31, 2016 full episode transcript

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The Current Transcript for August 31, 2016

Host: Robyn Bresnahan

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Prologue

[Music: Theme]

SOUNDCLIP

Russian, Iranian and even the Chinese—all those countries supported Syria, with each one in its own way—with a political, military or economical.

ROBYN BRESNAHAN: President Bashar al-Assad of Syria says he has plenty of allies and support but now revelations say some of that help is coming from an unexpected source. An investigation by the *Guardian* newspaper has revealed the United Nations has paid tens

of millions of dollars in aid money to the Assad regime and businesses close to it. Critics say they are outraged. They are calling the UN morally bankrupt and accuse it of funding the Syrian government's slaughter of its own people. The UN says it's much more complicated than that and consider it more important to be in Syria than not there at all. We will hear from both sides coming up. Then it's our documentary **Out There**, set right here in Canada.

SOUNDCLIP

The system failed to look after Paul and I hope they change the way they look after our students.

RB: Paul was one of seven students, all First Nations. They traveled from their homes in northern Ontario to the city of Thunder Bay for high school. Each of them died. We will ask why in half an hour. I'm Robyn Bresnahan sitting in for Anna Maria Tremonti and this is the summer edition of **The Current**.

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Millions in UN aid for Syria paid to Assad-linked companies

Guests: Reinoud Leenders, Stéphane Dujarric, Dr. Samantha Nutt

SOUNDCLIP

My life is like a horrible movie here in Aleppo. The airstrikes are always bombing our hospitals. Always he's hitting the hospitals.

RB: Well, that is Dr. Farida, an obstetrician-gynecologist in Aleppo, Syria. I talked to her right here on the program last week and we agreed for her safety's sake not to reveal her full name. When we spoke, I asked her about the availability of medical supplies at her hospital.

SOUNDCLIP

We are working in a very bad circumstances. The medications are not existed for everyone.

RB: It's hard to hear that essential medicines are in short supply especially when millions of dollars have flowed from donor countries to the United Nations intended for Syrian aid. But a revelation this week by the *Guardian* newspaper raises troubling questions about those funds. The report suggests that tens of millions of dollars collected by the UN have ended up with friends and family members of the Assad regime as well as businesses and agencies close to the Syrian president. According to the *Guardian's* analysis, hundreds of UN contracts have been awarded to companies linked to regime members currently under US and EU sanctions. They range from the agricultural sector to a charity, The Syria Trust, which is chaired by President Assad's wife Asma and much, much more. Reinoud Leenders works in international relations and Middle East studies at *King's College* in London. He has been tracking the UN's handling of money in Syria and he joins me from a studio in Antwerp, Belgium. Hello.

REINOU LEENDERS: Good morning.

RB: What did you find as you examined the United Nations documents on where money was going in Syria?

REINOU LEENDERS: Well, the UN documents as such, they are basically lists of procurement contracts locally. They don't tell us very much apart from [unintelligible] and in some cases exotically named companies. But what I did is that—is to look at the—trying to figure out the ownership of these companies and how they are linked, if at all, to the Syrian regime. What I found were just scores of Syrian companies that are directly linked to the regime or are actually owned by senior regime incumbents.

RB: Give us an example of one that you found particularly disturbing.

REINOU LEENDERS: Particularly disturbing and perhaps two examples if I may—one is an association in an NGO or a so-called NGO which is run and owned and financed by Rami Maklouf, the cousin of president Bashar al-Assad. The NGO as such is known—and that's well-established fact—to take care of relatives of militiamen, pro-regime militiamen and can be seen as a source of finance for several militias operating on behalf of the regime. At the same time, the Al-Bustan Association, as it is called, is also so-called implementing partner of UN agencies operating from Damascus. So that's a flagrant example of how the regime and the UN are basically you know cozying up very, very closely. A second example involves a company called Transorient—which is also owned and that is also a fact—by a senior regime incumbent, basically a senior security official. They basically received millions of dollars, US dollars, in procurement contracts for humanitarian goods and services.

RB: So these companies, these NGOs, are receiving aid money but what hard evidence do you have that this aid money is actually being used to prop up the regime?

REINOUD LEENDERS: Well, we are talking about regime incumbents that are so close to the regime or actually should be seen as part and parcel of the regime. Otherwise, financial resources for the regime if some exceptions have largely dried up and the regime is basically has been reinventing itself by soliciting support from a very small group of people who profit from the conflict and the war. And it's a major support base for the regime. So we are talking about the same people here and given that there are very few business opportunities otherwise, any contract coming from the UN—and certainly in the quantities that we are talking about—should be seen as a way of you know a reinvigorated financial revenue flow to the regime and its support base.

RB: You have called the United Nations morally bankrupt. Why do you say that?

REINOUD LEENDERS: Well, I wouldn't have used such strong words if this was the first indication of complicity and a problematic relationship involving UN agencies and the regime. These revelations follow you know many other examples in the last few years by indicating that the UN agencies have been largely uncritical, have largely accepted demands—outrageous demands—put forward by the regime and have brought about a situation whereby the regime is in tight control of the UN-led aid operation. And that's not just a technicality. We are talking generally about a failing UN humanitarian aid effort that fails to reach most of the opposition-held areas. Now there are many reasons for that. But in that context, adding this, this conflict of interest and procurement of regime officials and so on, I think that's a moral outrage.

RB: Well, we'll be speaking to the UN in just a moment, but they would argue that they have actually saved five million lives in Syria and that it is better to be there and it's a very, very difficult situation, that they do have to cooperate with the government but it's better for them to be there than not at all. What do you say to that?

REINOUD LEENDERS: Well, granted, many UN agencies have done wonderful work and I don't think this story necessarily is the final conclusion or assessment of its performance. There are many good things they have done. They have taken risks and are trying. But overall, they are not doing it well enough and proof of that is that they still fail to reach rebel-held areas. Once again, the security considerations come into play there but increasingly, I don't think we can ignore the phenomenon of very intimate relations involving the UN and the regime.

RB: So what do you think the United Nations should do?

REINOUD LEENDERS: Well, obviously they should stop these contracts and at least you know not contract—handout lucrative contracts through to regime incumbents. More

generally, I think in its internal investigative panel within the UN, it's about high time that that is put into place, that looks into the UN performance and brings about total transparency and accountability of what they have been doing. I don't have the illusion that this will lead immediately to changes and recommendations being followed up but I do think that such an ongoing investigation would help UN negotiators in Damascus to gain much more leverage vis-à-vis the regime so that they can say well, all the demands you put forward to us, we cannot meet them because we are under scrutiny as well.

RB: Mr. Leenders, thank you very much for your time this morning. I appreciate it. That's Reinoud Leenders. He works in international relations and Middle East studies at *King's College* in London and he was in Antwerp, Belgium. For the United Nations' response to this story, I am joined by Stéphane Dujarric. He is the spokesperson for United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and he is in New York. Hello, Stéphane.

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: Good morning.

RB: You were listening to Reinoud Leenders there. How do you respond to what he has to say?

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: Well, you know, two things. First of all, if there is a failure to deliver aid, that failure lies in those who have their hands on the triggers, who are holding the guns, to make sure those guns fall silent. Whenever there has been a humanitarian pause, a cessation of violence, we have driven trucks with the amazing partnership of the Syrian Red Cross, Red Crescent Society to deliver aid wherever it's needed. Our colleagues at the World Food Program have done over 100 airdrops this year to deliver aid. You know, I think people also have to understand the context in which we operate. We of course welcome any scrutiny in any question of how we work. But the UN in every country in the world where it works, works and is accredited to the government. Every government has to be our partner. That's the way the UN works. But I think anyone who has been paying attention to what we've been saying in terms of being critical of all the parties, including the Syrian government, where whether it's the secretary general, his senior officials describe very publicly and directly the Syrian government's systematic removal of surgical items from humanitarian convoys, their slowness in giving us the green light to deliver aid or the use of barrel bombs. I think you can't—I don't think I can—no one can say that we are cozy with the Syrian government.

RB: But do you admit that the optics of this look bad? That millions of dollars are going to the Assad regime or to companies or to people close to the Assad regime.

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: Look. We work in Syria in a situation, in a political military situation that is not of our own making. When we work out of Damascus in Syria and we have to procure basic services—for phone services, for fuel—we put out bids and there are limited number of vendors. That is the situation in which we work. We have no other option. I think, as you said,

the only other option is to stop working in Syria. And if we did, millions would go without aid. The UN doesn't have the freedom that international NGOs have. We represent an intergovernmental organization that works within certain rules and parameters. But what we do, we do it transparently. I think as others have said, our partners our contracts are all listed.

RB: But could you not vet these contracts more thoroughly? I mean you were awarding contracts to Syrian companies that are under US and EU sanctions and lots of people are questioning how that could happen.

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: Well I think for the UN, the sanctions—you know the rules for us, broadly, is whether companies or individuals are under United Nations sanctions passed by the Security Council. You know, as I said, Syria is a controlled economy with limited choice of vendors for essential goods that we need to have in order to operate.

RB: And essential goods—if we use a specific example—the *Guardian* reports that the *World Health Organization* is providing millions of dollars to Syria's national blood bank which is being controlled by Assad's defence department. Does that mean that blood supplies are only going towards supporters of the Assad regime?

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: There is only one national blood bank in Syria, which is the government-run blood bank. The *World Health Organization* works with the blood bank through the ministry of health, monitors the way aid is distributed to ensure that everybody gets access. Obviously in territories that are held by the rebels, we have to work with other partners. We have the authority to go through cross-border aid deliveries, which we do. But again, we work within a certain framework. What the UN does every day in Syria is reach or try to reach—if a lull in the fighting allows it—millions of people who are dependent on the help coming from the United Nations to survive.

RB: But it still doesn't answer my question. Does that mean that blood supplies are only going towards supporters of the Assad regime?

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: No. We work through the national blood bank to ensure that all health facilities get the blood banks and the blood supplies that they need. And our colleagues of the *World Health Organization* monitor the distribution.

RB: Do you think an inquiry is needed to look into this matter further?

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: [sighs] You know it's not for me to say. Obviously we welcome any questioning and we welcome any suggestions for us to do our work better. But I think we are very transparent in the way we do our work. I think the *Guardian* did a great analysis and others a great analysis. But this is based on open source UN documents. So there is no secret in how we operate. Again, everywhere throughout the world where the UN is, the UN is accredited to work with the government. We have to work with the permission of government in every country in which we operate. We do it in a transparent manner. We do it with the full sharing of

information of our donors and our partners. Our aim in Syria is to help and distribute food to everyone regardless of their political affiliation, religious or ethnic background.

RB: But you are being criticized by your fellow humanitarian workers. The executive director of *Human Rights Watch* says in the name of delivering aid to some needy people in opposition-held areas, the UN is subsidizing the Syrian government's war crime strategy of targeting those same people. That's from the executive director of *Human Rights Watch*.

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: We have great respect for Ken Roth and we rely on human rights organization to keep us accountable but frankly we deliver aid to people in government-held areas, in rebel-held areas. The outrage here is that the fighting is continuing. That's where the focus needs to be. I think to say that we are subsidizing the Syrian government in my mind is an exaggeration.

RB: Stéphane, thank you very much for your time this morning.

STÉPHANE DUJARRIC: Thank you very much.

RB: That's Stéphane Dujarric. He is a spokesman for United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and he was in New York City. Well, beyond the UN, many aid agencies face the dilemma of how to distribute aid in complex war-torn areas. Dr. Samantha Nutt is the founder of *War Child Canada* and we have reached her in Haliburton, Ontario. Hello.

DOCTOR SAMANTHA NUTT: Good morning, Robyn.

RB: You've been listening to both sides of the discussion. What do you think?

DOCTOR SAMANTHA NUTT: To be honest with you, these are the kinds of conversations that within the aid community have been going on for decades and I should preface this by saying that I first started with the UN in Somalia in the early nineties. And these are the kinds of conversations that we were having back then. I mean unfortunately—and this is not an excuse in any way—but aid in and of itself is an imperfect response to an imperfect world and in many cases, you know, it's the application on the ground that gets to be very messy and very complex. And unfortunately, you know, this particular situation is more common than—it's not unique to Syria. Let me put it that way.

RB: Right. But can you understand why our first guest—who has been looking into the money flowing into Syria—why he would say that it looks like the UN is cozying up very closely to the Assad regime?

DOCTOR SAMANTHA NUTT: I absolutely do understand that. And I think that, you know—that the calls for certainly reform and greater transparency and accountability around that—I think that those are very much necessary. But I would also add to this—and I spend a lot of time working in the Middle East—that there is a certain context here that does need to be understood. When you're talking about regimes, dictatorships such as the Assad

regime—and again this is not unique to Syria, we saw this for example in Iraq as well—the idea of having non-governmental organizations, I mean they're almost pseudo-nationalized entities. They're very much embedded in that regime and in that government. And so it makes for a really challenging moral environment for many organizations because to be able—especially an organization like the United Nations to have the kind of reach, to have the kind of impact—you know there would be smaller civil society organizations that would have greater autonomy but unfortunately to have the kind of reach that they're looking for, in many cases you are dealing with some unsavoury elements and it's not uncommon for those agencies to be forced to hold their noses in order to get the job done. However, that is not an excuse for not being transparent about that and for not being as rigorous as possible in ensuring that those goods get to those who absolutely need it.

RB: Well, indeed donors listening might be wondering just who is getting their aid dollars. Does a story like this—does it cast a shadow over the aid community and do you think that it really stomps on the whole idea of neutrality in humanitarianism?

DOCTOR SAMANTHA NUTT: I believe that it does. Anytime there's a story like this, it harms the aid community more generally. I mean we have to remember that financial contributions to Syria have been in decline, particularly with Syrian refugees as well. And so I wouldn't want people to walk away from this and say well, there's nothing that can be done, there's just so much corruption and there's nothing I'm doing that is helping. You know the truth is that this should be a wake-up call for some agencies to make sure that they're providing, they're continuing to be very rigorous and be very critical about who they're partnering with and making sure that aid is getting to where it needs to be. But you know I certainly hope that it won't deter people. You know unfortunately, when it comes to neutrality, it's a critical tenet for most aid organizations, however, it is quite inconsistently applied and part of that has to do with—or the large part of that has to do with security and access. And it means that you do end up in some instances having to hold your nose in order to get to the most vulnerable and in some ways cooperate either implicitly or explicitly with very unsavoury groups and this is most acute in the Syrian crisis.

RB: Dr. Nutt, I appreciate your perspective this morning. Thank you very much.

DOCTOR SAMANTHA NUTT: Thank you so much.

RB: That's Dr. Samantha Nutt. She's the founder of *War Child Canada* and we reached her in Haliburton, Ontario. Well, the news is coming up next. And then First Nations students in Northern Ontario travel to Thunder Bay for high school. Why have so many died? That's the question that we are asking in our documentary, **Out There**. That's coming up in the next half hour. I am Robyn Bresnahan sitting in for Anna Maria Tremonti and you're listening to the summer edition of **The Current**.

[Music: Sting]

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ENCORE: Thunder Bay inquest examines death of 7 First Nations high school students

RB: Hello, I'm Robyn Bresnahan sitting in for Anna Maria Tremonti and you're listening to the summer edition of **The Current**.

[Music: Theme]

RB: Still to come, a look ahead to our new year-long project, **The Disruptors**. But first, our documentary, **Out There**.

SOUNDCLIP

We are gathered here in this room today because seven Aboriginal youths died while trying to advance their lives and the well-being of their community through education.

RB: With those words last October, coroner David Eden launched one of the largest inquests in Ontario's history—an inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students. They had left their homes in a remote northern Ontario community and travelled to the city of Thunder Bay for high school. The testimony of the nearly 200 witnesses who took the stand was filled with stories of the loneliness and racism that the students encountered, as well as alcohol and drug abuse, accusations of inadequate police investigations and a systemic failure to protect these young people. In March, as the inquest entered its final stages, family and friends hoped for answers. And Marc Apollonio brought us his documentary called **Out There**.

MARC APOLLONIO: In her small pre-fab home—her trailer, she calls it—Maryanne Panacheese pulls up a chair and begins sorting through boxes, showing me mementos of her son, Paul. Through the window, I see dogs running among other trailers and small homes. I've come here to her community, Mishkeegogamang—or Mish, as locals call it—to hear more of Paul's story. A story Maryanne told back in October 2015, when she travelled down to Thunder Bay and was the first parent to testify at the inquest. With me today, she begins with some happy memories of Paul.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: Yeah, we used to drive around the city. He'd ask me to let's go for a coffee and stuff like that. So one time anyways, we went to McDonald's drive-thru—not McDonald's, Tim Hortons drive-thru—and we got to that where you pay. And I thought

he had money and he thought I had money [laughs] and we started laughing. And the girl says just go ahead. So anyways, we went back and paid. [laughs]

MARC APOLLONIO: Maryanne smiles a lot when talking about her boy, especially his quirky sense of humour, his peculiar taste in T-shirts.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: "Tough guys wear pink," or something like that. [laughs]

MARC APOLLONIO: But she hasn't invited me here to reminisce. She wants to talk about what happened to Paul when he left Mish for Thunder Bay to get his high school education.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: I think the system failed to look after Paul and I hope they change the way they look after our students.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Water lapping]

MARC APOLLONIO: Mishkeegogamang is an Ojibway First Nation about 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, about the same latitude as James Bay but farther west. We're surrounded by water, lakes and rivers everywhere. And trees—deep in the boreal forest, spruce range far as you can see. But what Mishkeegogamang doesn't have, like most First Nations communities in the north of Ontario, is a high school. Paul, like any youth here who wants a diploma, had to leave home to get one. Like many of his friends, he ended up at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, or DFC, a school for First Nations kids in Thunder Bay. An arrangement his mom says was far from ideal but worth it for an education.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: I was comfortable because he was staying with one of our band members and I think he stayed there the whole year.

MARC APOLLONIO: It was in Paul's second year that Maryanne's worries began.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: It's when he started maybe get to know Thunder Bay or whatever reason. They started drinking with his friends. And after that, I think that's when he got bounced around too with the boarding homes.

MARC APOLLONIO: More than 10 boarding homes in just four years. The housing situation, Paul's drinking and skipping school, it wasn't sitting well with his mom. Maryanne, who'd been a Mishkeegogamang band councillor for six years, quit her job, packed her bags and headed to Thunder Bay. She rented a house. She and Paul moved in. It felt great to be reunited.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: I guess I treated him like a baby. [laughs] Just for him to be happy, to be home.

MARC APOLLONIO: Paul was still drinking with his friends and told his mom a bit about the drugs he was doing. But at least, she says, the communication was good. Until one night, laying in bed, Maryanne heard Paul come home. He'd been out at a party.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: I heard him go into the kitchen. After that I was just listening to what he was doing. Then all of a sudden, I heard a strange noise and I thought it was the TV. The next time I heard was him falling in the kitchen. I was wondering what's going on here? So I got up and came downstairs and I see him on the floor.

MARC APOLLONIO: Maryanne called 9-1-1. Here's how one of the responding officers at the inquest described what happened next.

SOUNDCLIP

VOICE 1: We saw that he was sort of in a confined space between the sink and the stove. He was lying on his back with a pillow under him because she had made him comfortable. He was warm to the touch but we couldn't get a pulse at that time.

VOICE 2: So what did you do?

MARC APOLLONIO: Not long after, Paul was declared dead in hospital.

MARC APOLLONIO: When did Paul die?

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: November 11, 2006. Nine years now.

MARC APOLLONIO: A forensic specialist told the inquest the cause of Paul's death remains unknown, but it could have been due to an undetected heart condition. Another question for which Maryanne has no answer.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Chopping wood]

HENRY BAKER: Really nice when it's cold, eh? Because it just splits in one chop.

MARC APOLLONIO: Down the road from Maryanne's trailer, a young man, Henry Baker, chops wood for his mother. Henry is 28. Back when he was 13, he joined the exodus of

youth leaving home for a diploma.

HENRY BAKER: I did kind of miss this kind of work when I was in the city.

MARC APOLLONIO: He only just moved back now, a decade and a half later. I help him gather up the split wood and bring it inside where his mom, Connie Gray-McKay is getting a fire going in the wood-burning stove. Connie's a good friend of Maryanne's. She's also the Chief of Mishkeegogamang. When Paul died, Connie helped care for Maryanne's other kids while she dealt with the death of her son. For months, Connie has been following the inquest, relaying new developments to Maryanne. But there's an even more immediate and personal element compelling Connie to track the inquest so closely—her own two girls, Hannah and Savannah, are in high school in Thunder Bay right now.

CONNIE GRAY MCKAY: You want to scare them. You want to scare them because it really isn't always friendly out there. Tell them somebody can throw you in a car and kill you, like you don't know what your neighbours are like.

MARC APOLLONIO: Connie knows firsthand the dangers of being native, a teenager and on her own in the city for the first time. Like her girls, Hannah and Savannah, like her son, Henry, like Paul, she went to Thunder Bay for high school too.

CONNIE GRAY MCKAY: Friendship Centre used to have dances on the Port Arthur side. We missed our bus so there were three of us. We hitchhiked and got in a vehicle and this guy tried to make sexual connotations to us. So we got really scared and just jumped out.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Phone dialing]

MARC APOLLONIO: I want to ask Connie's girls about life in Thunder Bay. I call 14-year-old Savannah several times.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Voicemail speaker speaking in alternate language]

[Sound: Basketball bouncing in gym]

MARC APOLLONIO: A couple of days later, I'm down in Thunder Bay. I go to meet Savannah at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School. I find her in the gym doing what she

loves. The loneliness hits, in particular, when she thinks of her mom, Connie.

SAVANNAH GRAY: I really do miss my mom. I miss her company and I miss when she's grumpy, tired. My mom's like my favourite person in the world so it's a little different not to have her around.

MARC APOLLONIO: Savannah is too young to have known Paul Panacheese well, but she's very aware that Paul and other youth, like her, came to Thunder Bay for school and died here.

SAVANNAH GRAY: I was pretty scared at first because of the things that happened in Thunder Bay. I felt really alone at first because I had no friends or anything.

SOUNDCLIP

VOICE 1: When did you find out that Jordan's body had been found?

VOICE 2: When we got a call from one of the searchers.

MARC APOLLONIO: Jordan Wabasse, Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morriseau—five teenage boys, each of them found dead in one of the rivers which run through Thunder Bay. Robyn Harper, an 18-year-old girl who died within days of arriving in Thunder Bay—medical experts testified it was alcohol poisoning. And Paul Panacheese. These are the seven students whose lives and deaths are at the heart of this inquest. It's one of the largest in Ontario's history. Families and friends of the students have travelled hundreds of kilometres—many by plane, from fly-in communities—to attend. They want to know how these young people—six of them from the same, small high school—died in just over a decade. Deaths many family members believe could have been prevented.

JULIAN FALCONER: It's a broken system and by definition, the institutions involved in the administration of the system are unable or fail to deliver.

MARC APOLLONIO: Julian Falconer is a lawyer with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a political body which represents 49 First Nations in northern Ontario. He says many institutions failed these kids including his own client and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, or NNEC, which runs the high school.

JULIAN FALCONER: Every institution that had a role in taking care of these kids and making them safe has to strengthen how they do business. Now having said that, there are some institutions, such as NNEC, where an absolute lack of resources and lack of wherewithal accounts for much of the failings as other institutions that don't have those excuses.

MARC APOLLONIO: One institution that doesn't have those excuses, Julian Falconer says, is the police. He says they botched the investigations into the deaths of the students repeatedly. He uses Paul's death as an example.

JULIAN FALCONER: I asked questions around why it took years before the police even queried the people that were in the company of Paul Panacheese in the hours leading up to his death. This is in circumstances where there was no apparent cause for the death. In other words, the cause was a mystery, leading authorities generally as a matter of protocol, to interview and get the best information possible on what the person might have ingested and the circumstances in the final hours before they died. Mystifyingly, that didn't happen.

MARC APOLLONIO: Julian Falconer says it's a common theme: police doing sloppier work for Indigenous people than for anyone else. Police lawyer Brian Gover calls that nonsense.

BRIAN GOVER: I think you have to recognize that his death was investigated forensically. We know, for example, what his blood alcohol level was, we know what the alcohol level in his urine was. We know that metabolites of marijuana were present in his bloodstream. And frankly, his girlfriend wouldn't have assisted in that respect because there was clear medical scientific evidence.

JULIAN FALCONER: That is not how standard police protocol happens. They interview witnesses in and around the time of death in order to ensure that they get real-time accounts while memories are fresh. The toxicology report itself takes weeks if not months to produce. If the suggestion is that they were going to wait weeks or months to go back and interview witnesses, well, I don't understand it and frankly I don't think that that is a reasonable suggestion. Police interview witnesses around a death at the time of the death.

MARC APOLLONIO: And there are other criticisms of police work. Testimony at the inquest indicated it took police two weeks before talking to the individual identified as the last person to see Kyle Morriveau before his death. Police responded to this by saying that during that time, they believed Kyle was alive and well. In the case of Jethro Anderson—whose body was found in Thunder Bay's Kaministiquia River— police issued a press release stating no foul play was suspected in the 15-year-old's death before a post-mortem examination was conducted. Critics say this shows the police had tunnel vision during their investigation. Regardless of what the inquest jury makes of the testimony, police are not on trial here. The inquest has no power to assign guilt. It's about figuring out what happened and making recommendations to police, to governments, to teachers.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Foot traffic in hallway]

MARC APOLLONIO: Walking through the hallway the day I visit Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, it hardly feels like the setting of so much heartache. I go see DFC's principal, Jonathan Kakegamic. He was a teacher here in Paul Panacheese's day.

JONATHAN KAKEGAMIC: He was a cool guy. He always helped. If we asked him to do dishes, he'd do dishes. You'd never forget him.

MARC APOLLONIO: Without any prompting, he goes right to Paul's T-shirts.

JONATHAN KAKEGAMIC: He used to always wear a pink T-shirt and it says, "Tough guys wear pink."

MARC APOLLONIO: In fact, Jonathan knew all six DFC students whose deaths led to the inquest. As principal, he's well aware the school itself is being criticized for failing them. He says he and his team are doing what they can to make DFC a safer place. But sometimes, he says, trouble comes looking for the kids, right up to the front doors of the school.

JONATHAN KAKEGAMIC: I had kids stand out here, right on my front step here and people call hey, Indian go home or bogan, you know what I mean? And that's sick. I still face racism once in a while and when I feel it, it's not good. When my students feel that way, I can't comprehend how they feel. They have to cope and with our students, most of the time it's alcohol. When you have a kid drinking Monday night or Tuesday night, they're drinking because they're hurting.

MARC APOLLONIO: Today, Jonathan runs an extensive after-school program every weekday. They have support teams patrolling the city in mini-vans until at least 1:00 a.m. every night, making sure kids are safe and giving them rides. But Jonathan says the most critical thing is teaching students to look out for each other.

JONATHAN KAKEGAMIC: Just to give you an example, last fall, three guys were drinking, one boy had too much. So the other boy panicked because he had charges with them. So he left. He bailed. The other boy—he ran to get help. That took about 20, 30 minutes. That was almost too much for that boy to survive hypothermia. He almost didn't make it. So that boy, I'm proud of him, he got in trouble but he knew he had to help his buddy. Our last student that we lost, Kyle Morriseau, his friends left him with other people. We don't know what happened but he was found in the river, two weeks later. But if those friends didn't leave him or if they went for help, we all believe Kyle would be still alive.

MARC APOLLONIO: Maryanne Panacheese welcomes Jonathan's assurances that his team is making life safer for the kids. But she says it's hard to be convinced when the school let her own boy fall through the cracks.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: Because even when he started drinking, I never got phone calls from them saying that well, Paul is missing school or Paul is out drinking. I never got those phone calls.

MARC APOLLONIO: Maryanne believes it's crucial that the vetting process for boarding families is improved. In his multitude of boarding homes, she says her son was subjected to a long list of poor treatment. He faced intimidation, his personal effects were stolen. In one home, he'd go hungry because his food was kept under lock and key.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: You expect that boarding home or that boarding parent to look after your child while they're away from home so they can get their education. Not to mistreat them or treat them differently.

MARC APOLLONIO: Jonathan, the principal, says a lack of cash contributes to the problem. He simply can't afford to offer as much money to boarding parents as other organizations, so it's harder to get quality families. Figures published in 2012 by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation show the provincial government spends significantly more money per student in the mainstream school system than is spent by the federal government on kids in First Nations schools.

CONNIE GRAY MCKAY: Those beads are going to be everywhere. I knew you guys were up to no good. Get out of here.

MARC APOLLONIO: Back in Mishkeegogamang, Connie Gray McKay is laying down the law.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Dog barking]

MARC APOLLONIO: Not in her role as chief, but as custodian of two dogs—a very large one and a very small one—Bruno and Oscar, her daughter's dogs.

SOUNDCLIP

CONNIE GRAY MCKAY: Bruno, come. Is that yours? [gasps]

CONNIE GRAY MCKAY: I hug them, take that loneliness away sometimes. I also have to referee between the two of them and sometimes I have to do that with my own girls.

MARC APOLLONIO: Despite worrying for her girls, Connie believes there are benefits for them to experience life off-reserve.

CONNIE GRAY MCKAY: I think you do need to have that experience out there because maybe the opportunities may not be in your community so you might have to go out there.

MARC APOLLONIO: In her home, her trailer, looking at pictures of her son, Maryanne says she too knew it was important for her boy to go out there.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: Well, I always told my son, you know, you just have to go out there and learn, explore. To be able to be successful, you've got to accept what's out there. And he wanted to be out there. One time he said he wanted to join the army and see other countries and stuff like that.

MARC APOLLONIO: So that was his dream, was to see the world?

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: Yeah, that was his dream.

MARC APOLLONIO: She points out a bright painting hanging on the wall.

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: This is the last picture I think he drew. There's two hands pointing the same direction and there's a sun behind it and there's a path leading to that place.

MARC APOLLONIO: So how often do you look at that picture up there?

MARYANNE PANACHEESE: I see it every day. Sometimes when I think about him, I think that's where he went. The place he wanted to go.

[Music]

RB: That was Marc Apollonio's documentary, **Out There**. Our documentary editor is Joan Webber. In June, the coroner ruled that the cause of deaths of Paul Panacheese, Kyle Morriseau, Jethro Anderson and Jordan Wabasse were undetermined. Robyn Harper, Curran Strang and Reggie Bushie's deaths were deemed to be accidental. The Ontario coroner's jury of five then went on to unveil 145 recommendations, some of which included providing a school to any First Nations community that wants one. Other recommendations: funding early childhood education, daycare and schools, the same as every other Ontario school; impoverished students to be given the means to phone their parents while they are away at school in Thunder Bay and opportunity to allow the same students the chance to fly home in the fall and holidays; and basic standards and inspections in boarding homes for students, including criminal record checks of boarding parents. For more on this story, you can visit our website www.cbc.ca/thecurrent where we will link to other stories about this.

[Music]

RB: I'm Robyn Bresnahan and you're listening to the summer edition of **The Current**. Behind the scenes here at **The Current**, everyone is hard at work on a new season which will be launching next week. And once again, the crew is launching a year-long special project. This season, it is called **The Disruptors** and you can expect stories about how people and their beliefs are upsetting the orthodoxy, changing the ways we live, our sense of ourselves and our society. So you will hear stories about entrepreneurs, politicians, philanthropists. But we also want to hear stories about you. We're looking for your personal experiences about moments when your life has been radically disrupted. For example, here is producer Liz Hoath with a story from last season and a moment when an Ontario family experienced a big disruption.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Pig grunting]

NARRATOR: Remember Esther? That tiny pig who wasn't supposed to be much bigger than a dog? Well, if you're looking for a story of disruption, you don't have to go much further than her adorable little snout.

[Sound: Bag crinkling]

VOICE 1: The magic noise around the farm. You can get anybody's attention. Miss Pig. Miss Pig, what's this?

NARRATOR: While Steve Jenkins and Derek Walter thought it was adorable, particularly when she could fit into the palm of their hands, Steve had brought her home one day as a rather pathetic little piglet. A micro-pig, they were told, who desperately needed a home. Derek initially took to calling her Kijiji, as in that's where her photo was headed if this didn't go well. But soon, Derek too fell in love with her and Esther became a part of the family.

SOUNDCLIP

[Sound: Bag crinkling]

VOICE 1: She loves her Oreos.

[Sound: Pig munching loudly]

NARRATOR: A big part of the family. Esther grew and grew and the truth started to become clear: she was no micro-pig, if there even such a thing. She was actually a commercial sow that was rapidly growing to 650 pounds.

DEREK WALTER: Litter became the biggest problem with training her. So the first few months were okay. We had her pretty good. But we started litter training her and she started growing at a pace that was—

STEVE JENKINS: Like a pound a day.

DEREK WALTER: Yeah. And outgrew our various litter box stages 'til the very end...

STEVE JENKINS: What was the last one? It was a kiddie pool.

DEREK WALTER: When the litter box, it was like the size of the couch and it was a kiddie pool. And she had it all down. She would get down, she would go into the litter box and do her business. But as she got so big, her hind end is—she's where she's supposed to be, but she's peeing outside of the litter box then.

NARRATOR: And it gets worse. Add in an ice storm, a power outage and a visit from Derek's family over Christmas that didn't exactly go very well.

DEREK WALTER: It was the perfect storm of the worst possible scenario you could imagine.

NARRATOR: That giant sometimes moody pig changed everything. The family bought a farm in the country. They became vegan. They left their jobs—Steve had been a realtor and Derek was a magician—and they set up a farm sanctuary where Esther has her own room decorated with cupcakes. Disruption complete.

RB: So that is just one example of the kind of stories we're looking for, for the next season on **The Current**. Send us your tales of personal disruption, whether it's something that happened because of an illness, an eviction, a lottery win—something you did not expect that totally changed your life path. And we'll feature your stories on **The Current** throughout the season. All you have to do is send us an email for our website at www.cbc.ca/thecurrent and make sure to put "Personal Disruption" in the subject line. Well, that is our program for today. I'm Robyn Bresnahan and I am sitting in for Anna Maria Tremonti. Thanks very much for listening to the summer edition of **The Current**.

[Music: Ending theme]

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