

*Private Members' Business*

I am convinced that one of the reasons Canadians elected the Liberal Party to majority government was the sincerity and progressive nature of our policies for aboriginal people. Canadians have long acknowledged that action must be taken on aboriginal issues and the Liberal Party of Canada has the political will to deal with those issues.

The Liberal plan for Canada, the red book, which outlined the Liberal Party's policy initiatives during the election campaign made some very clear commitments to aboriginal people, commitments we have been working hard to fulfil.

For example, we made the commitment to implement the inherent right to self-government, something we are now working on with aboriginal leaders and others. We will achieve this. The advantage is that it moves toward the local control for which the member was arguing. We made a commitment to dismantle the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, a process which has already begun in Manitoba.

• (1750)

That dismantling will leave the local control which the member knows is necessary to deal with this particular problem.

We made a commitment to uphold the honour of the crown by settling land claims through a fair and equitable process. This House has spent a great deal of time and energy over the past year dealing with enabling legislation for a number of land claim agreements. I have spoken in the House in those land claim debates. I have worked in committee on those land claim debates and I was glad to see some of them going through.

The land claims process also leads to the local control which the member knows is necessary to deal with this problem.

Also in the red book we promised to increase support for post-secondary education. Several months ago the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development announced that \$20 million would be added to the budget of his department's post-secondary education program bringing the total spending for 1994-95 to over \$247 million.

Improved post-secondary education will lead to expertise at the local level which is also necessary to deal with this problem.

I, like the member, have dealt with the Hiawatha First Nation and the Curve Lake First Nation on matters of self-government and education and treaty matters. I am very interested personally in his suggestions.

We also promised to address health issues by giving aboriginal communities the tools and resources necessary to tackle these problems. Toward this end the minister of health recently announced the building healthy communities strategy. This strategy will provide almost almost a quarter billion dollars in additional funding over the next five years to address priority

needs in the areas of solvent abuse, mental health, and home care nursing.

The member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake knows that these matters are related to the problems which he is raising in the House today.

We also made a very clear commitment in the red book to address the housing issue which the member has raised in the House of Commons this evening. This again is something to which we have been devoting a great deal of effort.

Hon. members here must recognize that this is an extremely complex issue, one that requires a range of innovative solutions and the co-operation of many parties. It is not an issue that will be solved by money alone or, for that matter, by the federal government alone.

The red book acknowledges that: "Adequate shelter is a fundamental need of any society and a basic prerequisite for community prosperity". That statement was made in direct reference to the precarious housing situation in many aboriginal communities.

In response to the shelter challenge the red book commits the government to work with aboriginal people to develop an approach to housing that emphasizes community control, which the member has rightly stressed, local resources and flexibility in design and labour requirements, the local approach which the member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake is arguing for.

I am pleased to inform the House that the government has been doing just that. Both the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation have made it very clear that the housing crisis is a personal priority. To fulfil the government's commitment both ministers have directed their officials to work together to develop a new aboriginal housing policy.

Toward that end in the past several months federal officials have been working with the Assembly of First Nations task force on housing along with representatives of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, and others to develop a new policy.

Many issues need to be addressed in devising a new aboriginal housing policy, everything from ownership and financing to aboriginal involvement in construction, maintenance and management of the housing.

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While aboriginal groups such as the Assembly of First Nations and the Inuit would like to see action taken quickly, they too acknowledge the need to work co-operatively with government and the private sector to develop viable solutions to this serious housing problem. The aboriginal leadership have shown determination and commitment in addressing this difficult issue.