Therefore, I am requesting that you withdraw the support of your government to the establishment of a world heritage site nomination for the Tatshenshini–Alsek wilderness park area in British Columbia. Until some mutually satisfactory resolution of Champagne and Aishihik First Nations aboriginal rights, titles and interests in the area are dealt with. This area was initially established as a class A provincial park in June 1993. This was done without any consultation with our First Nations. This is a breach of the fiduciary responsibility that is owed by your government and by Canada to our First Nations. Therefore I am appealing to you to withdraw your support for the world heritage site nomination in our traditional area in northern British Columbia.

I believe these people should have as much opportunity to be involved in land use decisions in northern British Columbia as the Council of Yukon Indians is in the Yukon territory. This does not seem to be the case. I urge members on the other side of the House to talk to their heritage minister and the Prime Minister, and get them to agree to withdraw the nomination for the Tatshenshini as a world heritage site at this time. There is no support for it.

In conclusion, this bill is vague in its rules and regulations concerning its principal responsibilities. It mentions minimum requirements for Council for Yukon Indians involvement, but none regarding its maximum. The notion of sufficient negotiation as a pre–requisite for mediation is misleading and has a great potential for favouritism and unfair treatment of some cases and not for others.

The idea of a per diem rate of pay for board members and their contracted staff, while mediating a case, may mask the reality of the formation of another level of bureaucracy for some, but it is the same old game from where I stand.

Nothing is stopping members from dragging out mediations for the benefit of more pay. As well, I am appalled that the government, which preaches democracy, is willing to let the minister of Indian affairs appoint half of the board members from a list of nominees submitted by the Council of Yukon Indians, but not let a similar list of nominees be submitted by the business industry. After all, is this board not meant to fairly mediate the claims of both aboriginals and non–aboriginals? Why then should the business community not be included on the same basis? Why was the business community not consulted on this bill and allowed to state their feelings on it before it is implemented? As I said earlier, they are forced to agree. They have no choice.

• (1640)

The government seems to be finally waking up to the reality that the national debt must be dealt with. We hear more and more talk about it all the time, particularly from the finance minister, but not from everybody else I might add. Since the board adds another level of bureaucracy to the already top heavy government, why then should not the now duplicated positions be abolished?

This is what the Reform Party has been asking of the government since day one, since we first came here last October. Stop duplication. We cannot afford it. Be responsible with the taxpayers' money.

Since the Yukon aboriginals want—and with closure invoked on Bills C–33 and C–34—and have now attained a certain level of self–government, why then do they not assist with the payment for this board which will be mostly made up of and hence representative of their interests? This would be too logical for the government to understand.

I would like to end by urging members who believe in fairness, honesty and accountability to oppose this bill as it portrays the epitome of patronage and racial bias for which Canadians should never be known.

I would like to remind the House that such land claims, self–government and racially segregated mediation boards will set a precedent for future negotiations with aboriginals which Canadian taxpayers will be hard pressed to pay for.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this very important legislation, Bill C–55, the Yukon Surface Rights Board Act.

I would like to clarify, since there might be some misunderstanding, particularly with regard to the previous speaker's comments, that this is companion legislation to Bill C–33, the Yukon First Nations Final Land Claims Settlement Act and Bill C–34, the Yukon First Nations Self–Government Agreement Act. Both of these bills were passed in Parliament in the spring session but will not come into force until Bill C–55 is passed in the House of Commons.

As someone who has represented Yukon for seven years and who previously has been very involved in land claims settlement in the Yukon, I urge all members to speedily pass Bill C–55 to ensure that all Yukoners, aboriginal and non–aboriginal, have the tools to move forward with the certainty that is necessary for business, the respect and dignity accorded to First Nations in the Yukon and that will lead toward self–sufficiency of the Yukon territory.

This is a technical bill establishing a Yukon surface rights board which will resolve dispute between parties, guaranteeing access to holdings of private lands. That is an important and key factor here. This board only comes into effect if there are disputes that cannot be reconciled other than through this process. However, there must be a process in place prior to that which will attempt to settle disputes.

This legislation will settle disputes between persons holding surface rights and those holding subsurface rights. It is obviously very important in an area where mining is an extremely important part of the economy. The board will also deal with the amount of compensation for the expropriation of settlement lands and the amount of compensation for pockets of government lands retained within settlement lands.