

*The Address*

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of North Island—Powell River who have given me the opportunity to represent them in this House. North Island—Powell River riding takes up the north half of Vancouver Island and half the mainland coast in British Columbia. The population within this large diverse area is evenly split between Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland. It is a resource based riding.

The population has a very strong feeling that government decision making is not representative and sensitive to their interests very often. It is my pledge to bring their concerns to the House of Commons regularly. I pledge also to bring to the House of Commons constructive thoughts from my constituents on how to improve life in the riding and throughout the nation.

Within the riding we have a diversity of progressive aboriginal groups with a living culture. The Sechelt Indian Band took the initiative to negotiate unique legislation to replace the Indian Act for their band alone and as a result they have been operating under a municipal style of self-government since 1986.

• (1750)

The primary focus of my speech today is aboriginal affairs. As the Reform Party spokesman for aboriginal affairs, I want to discuss the current direction of federal policy in respect to Canada's indigenous peoples with a B.C. perspective.

British Columbia is in a unique situation. We have 15 existing treaties including 14 on southern Vancouver Island and one in northeast B.C. We have a predominantly non-treaty aboriginal situation and a very significant portion of the nation's aboriginal population.

In general there is a spirit of good will between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations. We all want aboriginal people to enjoy a standard of living and quality of life and opportunity equal to other Canadians. There is consensus that a self-government model is essential to create a climate of certainty for investors and to bring together the population at large.

The federal government has a paramount mandate and responsibility in the area of aboriginal affairs. It is essential that government direction and policy unify rather than divide the population.

The government has pledged to wind down the department of Indian affairs at a pace agreed on by First Nations. There is a consensus that a wind down is called for, replacing the current outmoded and outdated department with a system of accountability provided by self-government. Federally chartered municipal status on reserves such as the Sechelt arrangement is a good way to go, giving the bands autonomy to run their affairs.

I believe it is time for some new points of view. Some recent federal initiatives have been divisive, not uniting and I would like to offer a new perspective.

The aboriginal fishing strategy of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is one area that needs overhauling. The commercial fishing industry in B.C. until 1992 was a colour blind industry with 25 per cent aboriginal participation. There is a longstanding aboriginal food fishery which remains unaffected.

The federal AFS policy implemented two years ago has created a separate aboriginal commercial fishery based on race. This is a two-year pilot project with agreements under the AFS umbrella expiring March 31, 1994. Implementation of these agreements has been very divisive within the industry and socially. Also it has not been conducive to conservation management. In 1993 several B.C. Court of Appeal decisions served to reject the necessity of a separate aboriginal commercial fishery. The promised DFO review of the AFS this spring must be carried out with transparency and sensitivity to the conflicts that the agreements have created.

We recommend avoidance of this conflict and new direction for our important fishery by orienting the AFS to the recreational fishery and to fisheries enhancement. No new commercial fishing agreements should be negotiated under the AFS umbrella.

There has been a great deal of recent discussion about the terminology "inherent right to self-government". According to my understanding the term "inherent" can mean that federal and provincial legislation would not apply to aboriginal people without their agreement. I also understand that it could be the basis for claims to international sovereignty which would signal aboriginal government immunity from all federal and provincial laws. This is unacceptable to most Canadians.

• (1755)

We believe that aboriginal self-government means a mix of federal, provincial and aboriginal laws to be worked out through negotiations. Regardless of the framework, it must work within the structure of Canadian society as a whole.

British Columbia residents want to resolve the issue of unsettled land claims so that the investment climate is improved and so that individuals, business, government and aboriginal groups can go forward with certainty. The recently formed B.C. Treaty Commission which is federal, provincial and First Nations is up and running, having already received 38 proposals from bands in British Columbia. The commission will be a positive influence on negotiations but there are major shortcomings. To overcome these shortcomings I have recommendations related to interim measures, third party interests and transparency.

Recent resource related interim measures negotiated between the province and aboriginal groups are eroding federal aborigi-