find to be very restrictive. The Minister will be quick to point out that that amount can be increased by Order in Council, but he will also recognize at the same time that that is an awkward and cumbersome way, and it still means that all of the strings are attached. In Government-Indian relations we must start cutting those strings. I do not believe at all, as the Minister seems to think, that it would be imprudent to do so. If we believe in self-determination for our First Nations, if we believe in self-government, as we repeatedly say in all our rhetoric, then when are we going to begin to demonstrate it by cutting some of those strings and saying that, yes, within the context of our federal system our First Nations do have status, they do have authority, and that authority is unencumbered by obstacles, monitoring devices, and means and methods to keep a watchful eye, all because we say if it were otherwise it would not be prudent.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I have a few remarks to make in relation to Bill C-123, a Bill of considerable importance to minors, families, and surviving spouses of First Nations.

In the Consolidated Revenue Fund there is presently between $900 million and $1 billion held by the Minister under discretionary authority for (a) minors under Section 52 of the Indian Act, and (b) estates for surviving spouses' preferential share in the estate under Subsection 48(1) and 48(2) of the Act.

Paragraph 64(1)(a) provides that the Minister with the consent of the band may authorize a per capita distribution to the members of a band of an amount not exceeding 50 per cent of the band's capital moneys derived from the sale of surrendered lands which, according to interpretations by the Government of Canada, includes oil and gas revenues.

In 1986-87, 13 bands all in Alberta made distributions. Sadly, the Government and the present Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. McKnight) refused to accept the proposals put forward by the working group on Indian minors' funds as presented by Tony Mandamin and moved earlier today by my friend, the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner). In my view, those amendments are entirely proper and evidently related to self-government. My friend tabled these for consideration and we heard from the Minister why we have to wait for some more global breakthrough in self-government before any of the smaller things can be done. It seems to me at every opportunity every Member of the House should be supporting those incremental moves toward self-government, rather than waiting for panaceatic move which may or may not come in the next few months or years.

We have certainly seen the failure of the First Ministers' approach to attempt to get some type of better definition of self-government and some movement on the evolution and implementation of the full box of Section 35 of the Constitution. Frankly, I find the response of the Minister on the amendment, and the response in relation to self-government, albeit he believes in it, somewhat shallow and hollow when an amendment such as that put before the House could not be accepted.

The amendment we were considering that the legislative committee had promised to look at seriously and deal with at report stage would, first, permit a band to name a person or corporation to act as a trustee for the funds of Indian minors. Second, it would allow a band to set by regulation distribution for an infant child for maintenance and benefit of the child. That wording is very clear in the motion we have just disposed of on division. Third, it would give band councils the right to determine who is the parent or guardian to whom a payment is to be made something we covered in debate on the amendment, or for the council to hold such distribution in trust. That is a very important point when one thinks of the degree of funds, close to $1 billion between the minors and the surviving spouses estate trusts.

On these principles First Nations are told that they must wait. I am advised that the Department, in fact the federal Government, is and for sometime has been involved in widespread lawbreaking in this area. The amendments found in Bill C-123 patch up a few legal holes and complications but fall far short of allowing First Nations the responsibility and authority of self-government.

This legislation should allow First Nations the right to establish trusts independent of government, to manage Indian minors' trust funds, but we are told again today by the Government that they must wait. These hundreds of millions could provide the base capital for leverage on myriad developments for First Nations.

First Nations should not in any way have to deal with provincial legislation in this field. That was made abundantly clear by the witnesses in the evidence they put before us. First Nations should be provided the authority to determine to whom the distributions are to be made. In no other sector, in the provinces or where trusts are set up for families, or in any other way, is there this type of intervention.

Fortunately, on both the $3,000 per annum ceiling on minors' trusts, and on the amendment to raise from $2,000 to $75,000, the surviving spouse's preferential share is also given some room to be increased without having to return to Parliament. This is a principle for which I wish there had been another way to do it, but at least that window was opened by amendments moved in the legislative committee so that this Bill would not have to be amended a year or two down the road and actually brought back to the floor of the House to do so.

There are presently approximately 1,000 estates awaiting settlement. For example, there is one in Ontario where a widow has been waiting some 20 years for the Department to settle. I think that various Ministers and bureaucrats should make the commitment with the passage of Bill C-123 to clear up those types of situations, not within a matter of months, but within a matter of weeks. I hope to hear from the Minister