

*Private Members' Business*

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider developing special initiatives, in consultation with aboriginal peoples, to respond to the serious employment, education and health needs of aboriginal youth.

I am also very pleased that the committee which oversees these things saw fit to make this a votable motion because I think it is very important that every member of this House reflect on this situation and vote on it in order to put clearly on the record how they feel about this question.

I am very proud to speak in this debate because in my constituency of Prince Albert—Churchill River there are 12,000 Indian and Métis children and young people growing up whose hopes are to develop a life in that part of the country, people whom I represent in this House.

When I reflect upon my duties I do not think there is anything more key to how that part of the country develops and what the future society of northern Saskatchewan is going to be than what happens to those 12,000 young Indian and Métis people. Therefore, I compliment the hon. member again for putting this motion forward and causing me and all other members to reflect on the situation.

It is very easy, because of the statistics involved in health issues, employment issues, and the different social problems which exist, to view this as something that is steeped in hopelessness, on which there is not a sense in the community that progress is possible and that the whole thing is sinking into some kind of an abyss. That is a record that needs to be corrected.

When I travel around to the schools throughout my constituency, because there are Indian and Métis people living in rural areas and the cities and towns as well, I find a lot of pride in Indian young people in who they are and in who they want to become. I find that families have a lot of pride in their children. There are a lot of hopes for those children, and a lot of vision for what they can become.

I find a lot of very dedicated teachers, social workers and other professionals, and now many of these are of Indian and Métis background. The training programs which have been instituted over the last 10 or 15 years are actually starting to work and as the Indian and Métis people who have been trained in these professions get into the classrooms and the different professions, we are really starting to see a difference.

We see a reassertion of the role of the elders in these communities and a new willingness on behalf of the young people in those communities to listen to the elders. I see a leadership which is very much aware of the young people in their communities and the very important role those young people will play. When I go to band council meetings and other types of community meetings, a very great part of the time that people spend discussing these issues is in fact spent on discussing the schools and the programs available to their youth. That is probably the biggest priority they have.

Then there are the young people who see themselves playing an exciting role in a future society. They see the same statistics we do. They see the health problems. They have grown up with them first-hand. It comes as a surprise to them sometimes when they hear us bandy those figures about in here. To them it is part of their daily experience.

The problems with pneumonia and tuberculosis have a much higher incidence in those communities than anywhere else. They see rates of suicide among their peers which, depending on the communities, range as high as seven times those of the average population. That is very depressing for communities and families to have to live with. They see employment prospects that are often very dismal.

I note that even in the federal civil service only seven-tenths of 1 per cent of the employees are of native Indian ancestry. If it was not for the Department of Indian Affairs, there would be virtually none at all. This is in spite of the fact that there has supposedly been an ongoing employment equity program in place and that Indian, Métis and Inuit people form about 3 to 3.5 per cent of the population. We are way short in that particular regard.

There is unemployment in many of the Indian communities of 70 and 80 per cent. With regard to the off-reserve employment situation, to our shame, in spite of the fact that the economy has been growing in this country, private sector employment among Indians has actually been falling. Part of that is due to the fact that the policies of this government have focused employment growth on the large urban centres and when Indian people move into those centres they have all kinds of barriers to overcome. Whereas the areas they have lived in, the traditional native communities in the north and isolated areas, are those that have been hammered by