

Government Orders

suicide rate among aboriginal people is 50 per cent higher than among non-aboriginal people. That difference is even more pronounced in the age group of 15 to 25.

This country can simply not afford to lose another generation of aboriginal people able and willing to make a contribution to this country. The young aboriginal people of today can be our professionals, our trades people, our inventors of tomorrow. They represent our past and our future. If we lose them it will be an incredible waste.

We cannot afford to continue to condemn aboriginal peoples to lesser lives in lesser lands. We cannot afford to judge any longer. We must start facilitating a process that is indispensable.

In my riding of Vancouver East I have one of the largest aboriginal urban communities in the country. It is an active community. Its members are engaged in bettering their situation by making everybody aware of their past and their plight. In Vancouver East there is the Aboriginal Friendship Centre and the Native Education Centre which help us understand them.

The people of B.C. have told their government to get on with it, to negotiate fair and just agreements which protect the rights of both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people alike, and the sooner the better.

We must do it in an organized manner and this is what the B.C. Treaty Commission has been doing and will continue to do. It wants to establish a stable economic climate which in turn will help to bring in investments, dollars and opportunities for all British Columbians and bring peace to our forests, our waters, our lands.

[Translation]

My colleague from the Bloc has explained very well how important aboriginal peoples are in British Columbia and I thank him. I also want to say that native peoples are very important to our culture, our past and our future in B.C. In fact, they are an extremely important part of the history of British Columbia, which, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is a wonderful part of Canada, where aboriginal peoples, anglophones, francophones and other communities from around the world all live in harmony.

[English]

In 1993, speaking in favour of the legislation creating the treaty commission, Jack Weisgerber recounted his experience in 1989 as a member of the premier's advisory council on native affairs: "It became clear to us as we travelled and met with groups around the province that if we were going to address the root of the social and economic problems we had to deal with the land claim question".

Those are wise words from a man who now leads the Reform Party in British Columbia, words echoed by members of all parties in the British Columbia legislature when that great body

passed its own enabling legislation; words I commend to my friends across the floor today, words which we now have the opportunity to honour through our actions.

The history of this legislation is a story of partnerships between cultures, between political parties, between generations. Let us continue in that same spirit of partnership now as we open the way for a brighter future for all British Columbians and a prouder day for all Canadians.

We have already waited too long. We should have settled this problem long ago. We now must ensure peace and harmony with our aboriginal brothers and sisters by working with them on the settlement of their land claims and on their needs.

In the last two years we have done a lot of work and with everybody's co-operation we will be able to solve a long and overdue problem and ensure peace and certainty in British Columbia.

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in support of Bill C-107 and in support of the comments made by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Bill C-107 creates the legal framework for the British Columbia Treaty Commission to act as an arm's length body and facilitate treaty negotiations with British Columbia's First Nations.

• (1720)

I support the creation of the commission and its mandate. As hon. members are aware, very few of the First Nations in B.C. have ever signed treaties with the crown. In lower Vancouver Island several First Nations signed treaties with Governor Douglas in the mid-1800s. By the end of the 19th century the Peace River district was included in treaty number 8 signed with the federal government. Obviously it is well known to people from B.C., although it may not be known by other people in Canada, that was the last one. There have been no treaties signed in this century.

In recent years the Nisga'a Tribal Council has been actively negotiating with the federal and provincial governments. When those negotiations are complete and an agreement is signed it will be the first treaty with a B.C. First Nation signed this century, and we are almost in the next century.

The people of B.C. want to enter the 21st century knowing we have completed the unfinished business of the 19th century. The land claims of B.C. First Nations have to be resolved. Some people would ask why. Resolving these issues creates an environment of certainty which means economic growth and job creation. Settling land and resource issues creates the environment needed for increased investment and local economic activity.