

Electoral Boundaries

However, I do see a problem with the name of the other constituency. The majority report would call this riding Mackenzie River. The choice of the minority report is Mackenzie Arctic. Both these names are faithful to the history and tradition of the area. However, I still feel that they would be confusing because there is already a constituency in northern Saskatchewan known as Mackenzie. If these ridings were anywhere else in the country, I would not mind, but as I said, the general level of knowledge in the rest of the country about the north is very low, and anything which would tend to confuse northern issues even more should be avoided.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I should, therefore, like to ask the commission to reconsider its report with a view to retaining the tree line boundary and the names Nunassiat and Western Arctic. This has the support of all my colleagues. It has the support of native groups in the Northwest Territories. It has the support of two of three of the northern members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and if my memory serves me correctly, this concept also had the support of hon. members to my right. As a matter of fact I hope that a former minister of Indian affairs and northern development who is now the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) will support this view.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, the trouble with some younger members is that they do not understand anything about Canadian history. They think everything began in 1963.

Mr. Blais: 1940.

Mr. Dinsdale: However, this is an historic occasion, and that is why I take part in this debate. What is happening today is the fulfillment of initiatives which began back in 1961 when a proposal went forward from the Northwest Territories Council for a division of the territories. The proposal arose out of a speech to the Territorial Council by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) on July 20, 1961. He was then prime minister. At that time he said:

I was particularly interested in one view that you expressed: More and more the Council believes that to a greater extent than ever before, self-government should be made available to the people of the north, and I'll join with you in that. Already the field has greatly widened the responsibilities of the Council, and I can assure you of this fact: that having seen at first hand something of the achievements of the past, something of the things that have already been done, anything that you may suggest—and the members of the Council—to increasing the field of your responsibility, and also providing, to a measure not before known, of self-government, will receive my warmest approval and support...

When you mentioned that you hoped that there would be, not too far away, a division of this vast northern area into two districts, I think that too is something that deserves the most sympathetic consideration on the part of the federal government...

Based on that speech, the council moved a resolution in January of 1962 in the following terms:

Whereas the construction and improvement of transportation facilities and increasing activity in the exploration for and development of mineral and petroleum resources in the Northwest Territories are bringing about rapid growth and change, especially in the western portion of the District of Mackenzie;

[Mr. Firth.]

It went on to indicate that it was suggesting the division of the territories.

For the benefit of the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) there is where the plot thickens. There was legislation on the order paper back in 1963 to divide the territories. With the change of government in 1963 that legislation fell by the wayside, and it is not until some 13 years later that we see the great resurrection we are witnessing here this afternoon. In the meantime, many years have been lost. The target date of 1967, our centennial, which was to have seen greater autonomy and responsible government for the western Arctic district, has never been achieved. It was interesting that reporters of the stature of Don McGillivray stated on January 15, 1963 that this proposed division meant that the north was a step nearer independence. There were other things which went down the drain as well, such as accelerated exploration for Arctic oil which had been launched in 1961. Now we are moving forward once again, after this long delay, and I do want to support the proposal for the division of the territories into two districts.

I want to pay tribute to the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), who has kept this issue alive over the years. It became necessary, because of the proposal, to give the native people in the territories the vote for the first time in 1962. Believe it or not, they did not even have the right to vote, a basic right of all people in a democratic country, until 1962. As a result of their close involvement they were consulted as to how the territories should be divided and how they should be named, so the exercise we are going through this afternoon is largely based on the activities of that period of some 13 years ago.

The native people themselves, the Inuits in particular, chose between four names for the eastern district: the first was Nunassiat, meaning the beautiful land; the second choice was Nunamarik, meaning the homeland; the third choice was Nattilik, meaning the land of seals; and the fourth was Inuit Nunanga, meaning the land of the Eskimos. It was interesting that the majority viewpoint was in favour of Nunassiat, the beautiful land.

It was on the basis of that recommendation that the boundaries were drawn. The boundaries are similar in some respects to the majority report, with the exception that it was strongly recommended that the districts covered by Victoria Island, Banks Island and the surrounding smaller islands should be included in the western Arctic region. I support the hon. member for Northwest Territories. "Western Arctic" is much more appropriate. We have always referred to that area as the western Arctic. The name "Mackenzie River" is a survival of the past, surviving from the designation "Mackenzie District". The original decision made back in 1962, chose "Nunatsiat" as the right name for the eastern Arctic. The inclusion of Victoria Island and Banks Island in the eastern division was recommended because of the natural lines of communication, transportation and trade with the Mackenzie Delta. These considerations concerning the natural line communication still prevail, because of geography.

● (1550)

The centre of communications and influence for Nunatsiat, or the eastern Arctic, will be Baffin Island, at Frobi-