

*Private Members' Business*

Arctic to be more diplomatic and more aware of what is going on in this part of Quebec.

The motion presented by the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau reads as follows:

—the government should consider the advisability of creating the *Société immobilière Oka-Kanesatake (SIOK)* and to transfer to the *Société* the budget already allocated by Treasury Board for the purposes of negotiating there unification of lands at Oka-Kanesatake.

As a member of this House, I feel I must congratulate the hon. member on her efforts since 1990 to find a solution to the problem of land reunification in Oka-Kanesatake. Her proposal includes a number of very interesting aspects which deserve further study. For instance, I welcome her suggestion to create a unit that will be responsible for informing the people of Oka-Kanesatake about the federal government's plans.

In fact, since the end of the crisis, the people in these two communities have had no mechanism for getting information on what is happening and how their interests are being defended. As a result, there is a lot of misunderstanding and disagreement which is certainly not conducive to restoring good relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities in the region.

In fact, I was delighted when the hon. member announced a few weeks ago that an information office, staffed by Public Works Canada, would open its doors. I think this office will be extremely helpful in disseminating information to both communities. In this way, any false rumours that might upset the normal negotiating process for the reunification of Kanesatake lands could be defused immediately.

By opening this office, the government has made it clear it is concerned about the well-being of the aboriginal and non-aboriginal population. Last year the health minister announced several initiatives that would be helpful to the local economy. Funds were allocated to stimulate the region's tourism industry.

The proposal by the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau to create a unit consisting of representatives of all parties concerned to manage the land acquisition process would nevertheless cause serious problems. It would also cause additional delay in settling the land claims issue.

The lands reunification and acquisition process is starting to show some interesting results. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has asked Public Works Canada to start negotiations with non-aboriginal property owners who want to sell their property. A number of purchase offers have already been made and others will be made very shortly.

Incidentally, the entire process is based on mutual agreement, and no property owner will be expropriated by the federal government.

Members on both sides of the House are aware that the piece of land referred to as the pines is very important to the Mohawks. It is important to them both culturally and as part of their heritage.

For the village of Oka, however, this happens to be a park next to the municipal golf club.

We know that ownership of this land was the focus of the various events of the 1990 crisis. The Minister of State for Indian Affairs and Northern Development recently made a very important and innovative announcement concerning these lands.

Under this proposal, the village of Oka will acquire certain properties south of highway 344 in exchange for the pine grove. This is a fair and reasonable solution that would enable the municipality to acquire land to use as it sees fit. At the same time, it will allow the Kanesatake Mohawks to obtain the pine grove that they say they want so much. That is another important step in resolving the grievances related to land unification in Kanesatake.

As I said before, more progress is being made at the negotiating table. It is up to the parties involved to inform the public about it. That is why I believe that the proposal from my colleague, the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau, is unacceptable in its present form. Furthermore, it implies that the municipality and village of Oka would have their say in managing the land that the Kanesatake Mohawks consider their own.

I am convinced that this proposal is completely unacceptable for the native people concerned. Everyone yearns for the land unification issue to be settled quickly. We must all ensure that this matter is resolved as soon as possible. We cannot afford more delay in unifying the land at Kanesatake, and the negotiating process begun by Public Works Canada must not be impeded. We must