

Government Orders

such a tool could be more useful rather than less useful in the present debate?

Mr. Graham: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to say how much I am glad of the support that the member of the Bloc has given my argument, but I can tell him that he is following my own line of thought.

I was rather of the same opinion. In the old debate, I was completely against the tests but the situation has now become much more delicate and complex. One of the complexities that must be taken into account is precisely the element of terrorism linked to the multiplication, the proliferation of sophisticated weapons, to which the Leader of the Opposition referred in his speech before the House.

So I come back to my proposition: Can the government give members of this House in the present debate the assurance that the tests in question will improve that type of defence against those weapons? If the government can give us this assurance, I think it would be our duty to accept its explanation and to carry on with the tests until we have the best possible defence in a world which has become more complex, more difficult and to a certain point much more dangerous.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): With less than two minutes remaining for questions and comments, I recognize the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped to be able to take a bit more than two minutes, but I will not abuse the rights of the Chair and will summarize a letter I received today.

My riding is in northwest Saskatchewan on the border with Alberta and contains the Saskatchewan side of the Primrose Lake weapons range, as well as the home of the Canoe Lake Indian Band which some years ago placed a claim on the lands now occupied by the Department of National Defence for the testing of various weapons and training systems.

The member talked about involving northerners and I assume aboriginals in the decision making, et cetera. Therefore I would like to ask him a question relating to a letter sent to the Prime Minister of Canada yesterday by the Chief of the Canoe Lake Band.

The chief indicated that the Government of Canada rejected the claim of the band to those lands but that the Indian Claims Commission established to inquire into this claim and others had recommended the acceptance of the Canoe Lake claim on the Primrose Lake land.

The letter to the Prime Minister today asks the government, in addition to considering the testing of the cruise missile, to

consider the report and recommendations of the claims commission that the claim be accepted. The chief of the Canoe Lake Band indicates that as in similar situations in Canada the Primrose Lake air weapons range testing program has been very detrimental to the people who live nearby the Primrose Lake air weapons range and therefore this program is quite detrimental to them.

● (1650)

Would the member indicate whether he is prepared to accept the invitation, put on the table by the Canoe Lake Band, to approach the Prime Minister to discuss as participants in this process the acceptance of their claim?

Mr. Graham: Mr. Speaker, there are two elements to the member's question and I would like to start by going back to the finish of my talk which, given the time constraints, I did not have time to address properly.

The thrust of what I was trying to say about the Arctic Council—and I would recommend this to the hon. member because it does not directly relate to the Canoe Lake Band to which he refers—is that it is a proposal which has been espoused in Canada for a long time. It would involve the Soviet Union, Alaska and all the countries and participants in the Arctic Circle. It would enable the peoples of that area, including the aboriginal peoples of the Soviet Union and other countries in the Arctic area, to get together and co-operate.

As a backbencher what I was urging on the government was that if the testing was to go forward an opportunity might be seized to say to our American counterparts that if they proceed with these tests we would like to see some movement on the development of the Arctic Council. This might go some way toward addressing the concerns of the member for Western Arctic to which I referred in my talk.

Forgive me but I am not familiar with the specific concerns of the Canoe Lake Band and the facts to which the member referred. Therefore just in the light of what he told me, it would seem that the position is more than reasonable to say that we should pursue with all vigour an examination of the legitimacy of the claims and do our best to make sure of the result in the light of the debate and see if we can make sure that anybody living in the area where the missile might or might not be tested would be ensured of the full preservation of their rights as was suggested by my hon. friend, the member for Vancouver Quadra, in his intervention.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): On my first formal speech in this House, I am pleased to extend to you, Mr. Speaker, my most sincere congratulations on your election to this distinguished position.