

Adjournment Debate

Will the government take the first step to relieve the anxieties over the land claims process and establish the new, independent commission called for by the Indian Claims Commission in its 1994-95 annual report?

Mr. John English (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question raised by the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake on September 27 regarding the 1994-95 report of the Indian Claims Commission and its first recommendation which called for the establishment of a new, independent land claims policy and process.

The work the Indian Claims Commission is currently doing in the area of claims is commendable. The minister has the highest respect for this effort.

The Liberal Party of Canada's election platform states:

A Liberal government will implement major changes to the current approach. A Liberal government will be prepared to create, in co-operation with aboriginal peoples, an independent claims commission to speed up and facilitate the resolution of all claims. The commission would not preclude direct negotiations.

Let me assure the House that the government is committed to building new partnerships with aboriginal peoples based on trust and mutual respect. The resolution of land claims is an important part of this initiative.

The federal government is committed to increasing the rate of land claim settlements. We are seeking innovative ways to resolve the impediments that slow this process. There has been, however, significant progress in resolving claims, including 44 specific claim settlements as well as five comprehensive claim settlements since the government took office.

The minister has invited substantive commentary from First Nations and First Nation organizations on concrete proposals for change and is awaiting further guidance from aboriginal people and others. The government in co-operation with First Nations needs to think through how the claims policies could be overhauled within the climate of restraint that affects us all. The recent report of Justice Hamilton will assist in this regard.

It is important all Canadians understand and respect this process as it benefits all Canadians.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is deemed to have been adopted. The House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

(The House adjourned at 6.42 p.m.)