

Government Orders

• (1115)

Bands are expected to begin almost immediately to purchase land and to inject money into the economy. Once that land has been transferred to reserve status we can be assured that bands will be aggressively pursuing development opportunities. In other words this is a good news scenario for all the players and for all Canadians. As we proceed through the stages of this legislation I urge my hon. colleagues to endorse Bill C-104 so the First Nations of Saskatchewan can build for a more prosperous future.

It was my understanding that this legislation was to be referred to a special legislative committee. However, more recently I gather that talks have been held among the parties and I think Your Honour will find consent to do all stages of Bill C-104 today including referral to Committee of the Whole in order that we might complete consideration of this important legislation in one sitting.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed with all stages of this bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Western Arctic): Madam Speaker, I am happy to speak in the House this morning on Bill C-104, the treaty land entitlement in Saskatchewan.

For over 100 years at least 27 First Nations did not have the full use and benefits of the land stipulated under treaties with Canada. First Nations people referred to this unfulfilled obligation as treaty land entitlement.

On September 22, 1992 a modern day settlement of this historic land debt was reached. This settlement has been secured through the process of mutual discussions and negotiations rather than confrontation. This is the preferred route for many land negotiations.

The purpose of Bill C-104 will help to facilitate the implementation of the Saskatchewan treaty land entitlement framework agreement based on certain undertakings given by the Government of Canada and the province of Saskatchewan during two and a half years of negotiations.

Once legislation is passed—and we have all agreed to go the whole route today on this bill—Bill C-104 will

enable 27 First Nations bands in Saskatchewan to begin acquiring land, resources and improvements which Canada undertakes to grant with reserve status. This is badly needed in a time when we are experiencing a major downturn and Saskatchewan is having its fair share of problems. As we know only too well, in economically depressed times we find certain groups at the bottom rung of the economy. Those groups are generally aboriginal peoples, women and children.

This legislation is highly appropriate and much needed. Appropriate provincial legislation is also being drafted to facilitate this process. It is always the struggle of the federal government and the claimants to reach an agreement with provincial and territorial governments on any land resolutions. Most important, this piece of legislation will create a special account or a consolidated revenue fund for both the federal government and the province of Saskatchewan to make payments with interest to the settlement bands. It is estimated that the framework agreement and the accompanying legislation will add approximately \$450 million in interest.

I have consulted with the parties who will be affected by Bill C-104. I have written to the treaty land entitlement bands affected by Bill C-104: the Minister of Indian and Métis Affairs, the hon. Robert Mitchell; Lynda Haverstock, the leader of the Liberal Party and MLA from Saskatchewan; the Assembly of First Nations land rights co-ordinator, Mr. Rolland Pangowish; Mr. Harry Laforme of the Indian Claims Commission; and Vice-Chief Dan Bellegarde of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. Bill C-104 has and is still being studied by the party. From the responses I have received, I believe there is a strong sense of support for the passage of this bill immediately. In fact the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations is very anxious for this legislation to receive Royal Assent as soon as possible.

• (1120)

However there are concerns. I have received a few questions regarding concern over the taxation of settlement money. In relation to that, it should be known by all First Nations that on March 29 there will be a major conference held on taxation in Ottawa with all of the chiefs across the nation.