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ing a traditional way of life it is no longer possible to live on the resources of the land in traditional ways.

The First Nations, the native communities of Canada, are surrounded by forests and have largely survived economically since the encounter with European civilization through the fur trade. It is a strange paradox that the fur-bearing animals are no longer accessible to them nor can they be sold in adequate abundance because of policies and environmental changes.

The forests which we cut down and convert to newsprint and two-by-fours from which we build our homes are largely used and enjoyed by non-aboriginal peoples, even though that is the primary resource that surrounds most First Nations communities.

We need to settle land claims and deal with the question of sharing more equitably in energy resources, mineral resources, forest resources and the power that can be generated from water.

Even if we can settle land claims, honour treaty obligations, provide enough land and resources, and the level of education is adequate we will still not see thriving, successful and self-reliant aboriginal communities without self-government.

In the years ahead that is going to be a fundamental challenge to all the members of this Parliament and those who come after us. We might achieve a recognition of the inherent right of self-government through constitutional change or accelerate progress in replacing the Indian Act with something more practical and more appropriate to the needs of aboriginal people. We might do so by eliminating the department of Indian affairs and replacing it with an Indian governments agency, an agency administered by aboriginal peoples not by government bureaucrats here in Ottawa, and one which gets its political guidance from an aboriginal assembly in which elected aboriginals can establish national policies on how funds will be distributed and how many of these problems will be addressed.

Unless we are prepared to think creatively about those kinds of changes then the mere appropriation of funds by Parliament directed through the existing kinds of programs that we can stand here and talk about will not solve the problem.

When the Prime Minister appointed me and shortly after the very challenging and significant summer of 1990 which we all experienced, when that was past the Prime Minister made a speech on October 24, 1990 to set out a new course of action. We called it the native agenda. Its purpose was to really create a new kind of relationship that would hopefully lead to a full partnership between First Nations people and all other Canadians.

One of the important aspects of that native agenda was that we would try to deal with some immediate problems. So the Prime Minister spoke of accelerating the settlement of land claims and unfulfilled treaty obligations. He spoke of introducing programs to improve conditions on reserve. He spoke of initiatives to develop a new relationship between the Government of Canada and First Nations, a relationship built on trust and respect. He spoke of trying to improve the role of aboriginal people in mainstream or contemporary Canadian society.

• (1835)

There were many initiatives that we took following those four themes: accelerating settlement of land claims, improving conditions on reserves, and developing a new relationship government to government. There was the constitutional process and the Charlottetown accord proposals. But we did not come with all the answers.

In fact, if self-government means anything to aboriginal people it means they cannot look to us and to this Parliament for all the answers, so we should not stand up here and give speeches pretending we know what all the solutions are. I will come back to that in a moment.

Where we did not have short-term answers, for the first time in the history of this country we set in place a process of seeking answers from experts to some of these most profound questions. The Prime Minister in May 1991 announced that we would strike a royal commission on the aboriginal question.

Rather than just striking a royal commission in the usual way and announcing who would be on it he said: "We will consult with First Nations leadership as to who should be on the royal commission and what questions it should address". He asked the former Chief Justice Brian Dickson to give some thought as to how to create this royal commission. That was the first time that the