

Private Members' Business

Yesterday I received a letter from the Union of Ontario Indians. That letter addresses in part budgetary cuts to aboriginal programs in the last budget of the Minister of Finance. It says that the Government of Canada, through the recent budgetary cuts, has all but eliminated core funding in this organization. They have been notified that the union will only receive the first quarter funding of \$45,548 for the 1990-91 fiscal year. This is a reduction of 75 per cent from \$181,863 and it is a net loss of \$136,646.

Core funding was designed to enable Indian political organizations to consult with their membership and the government. It was initiated as a way to create dialogue and inspire democratic political participation for the First Nation of Canada.

This organization can be an extremely useful tool for policy makers. I have to wonder about this government's commitment to the native people of this country. Why is it eliminating the voice of our aboriginal people?

Another problem that we must address is the level of education. The statistics that I gave earlier show how far behind the level of education is among aboriginal people compared with the national average. Part of the reason why the level of education among natives is well below that of the national average is due to accessibility and the stress due to cultural transition.

Youth must often leave home at an early age and move to a bigger centre in order to pursue their education after grade 9. They are away from home without the family as a support mechanism and they are living in a different world. The culture is alien and sometimes communication is difficult. A young person has to adapt to the cultural changes on his own, and this is not always easy. The statistics show that the level of substance abuse and the high rate of suicide is often an alternative to the cold reality.

I spoke earlier of the Friendship Centres and this is a perfect example of how these centres could provide support for youths attending school away from home. The centres would provide support to the young person in order for him or her to adapt to his new environment. We must, as a government, provide all the possible support to young aboriginals who want to pursue their

education if we want to increase the level of education and start eliminating unemployment.

The alternative for these youths to going to school is to stay at home and face the problems of unemployment and a clouded future. The unemployment rate among aboriginals ranges from 35 per cent to 53 per cent depending on the region of the country. Unemployment is a pressing problem, especially because of the population growth of the Inuit and the Indians.

As my colleague from Nunatsiak said in his speech, the population growth now stands at 3 per cent a year among the native population, which is well above the national average. In the Northwest Territories, this translates into 600 potential entrants into the labour force every year for the next decade. The government needs to stimulate the northern economy in order to find work for these young people before they fall into desperation.

• (1750)

I hope that in the few minutes that I have had I have been able to shed some light on some of the problems the young aboriginal people face in this country. The young people of our country are the future and we have to make sure that all the youth of this country have the same chance to contribute to that future. As a government, we have to include the aboriginal peoples in the decision-making process if we really want to address their concerns.

Last night on the news I saw our Prime Minister announce that the Canadian government will be forgiving debts of hundreds of millions of dollars owed to us by the Caribbean countries. As I watched that I was reminded that, in our own country, some people have a living standard which is comparable to some Third World countries.

I challenge this government to reconsider the cuts to native programs and to actually increase funding. I am pleased to support the motion of my colleague, the hon. member for Nunatsiak, and I call upon all members of this House, regardless of political affiliation, to support this motion.

Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Madam Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to be able to speak on the motion of the hon. member for Nunatsiak which reads: