

Government Orders

The member talked about the authority. I do not have the answer to that. I can take it under advisement. I am sure the appropriate departmental officials are watching and will be able to get back to the member with an answer.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak in this debate on Bill C-107, following the member for Western Arctic. She has referred to her grandfather, a signer of Treaty 11 in the early 1920s, and talked of the passion, vision, and wisdom of the men who signed that treaty. I can tell the House and those watching the debate today that those qualities are very much in evidence in the granddaughter, in our hon. friend the member for Western Arctic. I would like to pay tribute to her as my colleague in the House, in caucus, and in cabinet for the qualities she brings to issues such as this. She contributes so much to assist us in our deliberations. It is indeed a pleasure to speak following her in the debate.

The events this summer in British Columbia and in Ontario have made all members of the House painfully aware of the tension in native communities across Canada. This is the result of years of injustice and poverty. This government is resolved to overcome these problems through the new partnership it envisages with Canada's First Nations. One of the first and most important unresolved problems in this relationship and in creating a better relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians is the question of treaties in my home province of British Columbia.

I remind the House that British Columbia is unique in Canada, in that the process of signing treaties has never been completed. Only a handful of treaties were signed in the pre-Confederation period. These include the Douglas treaties of southern Vancouver Island, the area that includes my riding of Victoria, which indeed were signed by Governor Douglas with the First Nations of the area in a very farsighted move. In 1899 Treaty No. 8 was signed with the First Nations of the Peace River area in north-eastern B.C. Generally speaking, British Columbia is without a treaty system. In the rest of British Columbia the issue of aboriginal rights remains largely unresolved due to hundreds of years of neglect by successive colonial, federal, and in particular provincial governments.

• (1555)

The First Nations have wanted to resolve these problems. Repeatedly they have pressed for treaties, but only in this decade did the provincial government have the willingness to negotiate with them and with Ottawa. Previously it maintained that there was no need to negotiate and it said that whatever rights to land and resources the aboriginal people may once have had were extinguished long ago. The result was decades of legal acrimony as the First Nations sought settlement through the

courts of what they were unable to achieve through the negotiations process.

I would like to mention in particular one case of great importance. In 1973, more than 20 years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada was asked in the famous Calder case whether aboriginal title to the Nisga'a traditional territory had been extinguished. Chief Frank Calder, with whom I had the privilege of sitting in the British Columbia legislature and who is now a constituent, a friend and adviser of mine, led the way in achieving recognition of aboriginal land title. In that case all six justices accepted that aboriginal title had existed in the past. Three ruled that it had been extinguished, but three ruled that it was unextinguished and that the government was obliged to negotiate treaties.

Since then the federal government has accepted the need to negotiate treaties in British Columbia. We have been negotiating with the Nisga'a people for these last 20 years, but resolution of the negotiations was next to impossible without provincial participation because of their responsibility under our Constitution for crown lands. That changed in 1990 when Jack Weisgerber, who was then the minister for aboriginal affairs in the province of British Columbia, announced that the province of British Columbia was willing to drop its traditional opposition to tripartite negotiations. It was this announcement of Mr. Weisgerber, who is now the leader of the B.C. Reform Party, that paved the way for the B.C. Treaty Commission.

I would like also to pay tribute to Mr. Weisgerber's premier at the time, Mr. Vander Zalm, who was responsible for this major breakthrough in the attitude of the British Columbia government toward the question of negotiation with First Nations people.

Today Mr. Weisgerber is leader of the provincial Reform Party and apparently is an opponent of this negotiating process, like his federal Reform brethren. I find it sad and ironic that Mr. Weisgerber, who should be proud of his role in the historic process of resolving this longstanding injustice, is now renouncing what is in my mind the finest moment of his political career.

I would ask the federal Reform Party to support the old Jack Weisgerber, the old Social Credit Jack Weisgerber, who was willing to help break a 120-year of pattern of injustice, and not the new Reform Jack Weisgerber, who wants to continue with the 19th century attitudes into the 21st century.

Many critics of this process, including many in this House, have emphasized the high costs of settling land claims. Indeed, there will be costs. I look at the *Sun* newspaper of Thursday, October 19, where the title on the city and region section says "\$10 billion figure baffles Ottawa". There is cost to settling land claims. When we are trying to settle issues that should have been resolved over a century ago, there will be a cost, a cost for long delay as well as the cost of the settlement itself. But there