

As well I have had dealings with the Inuit people and their organizations as the critic for co-operative and community development in my party. The co-operative model of development where people work together, pool their resources, work in the self-help and democratic kind of way, has been developed by the Inuit people to a larger extent than virtually any other people in this country. Many of the economic, social and artistic successes that that community enjoys are because of being able to work co-operatively. I hope this provides a model for the way the new government of Nunavut and the people of Nunavut will conduct their business in the future. That would be part of the model which all of the rest of us could learn from.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Inuit leadership which is here in the gallery today. I have not had the opportunity to get to know enough Inuit people over the years—I have met a few—to know whether they are representative of the community in general, but I suspect they are. It has been a real pleasure to get to know these people and to deal with them. To have the government of Nunavut represented by people like that I think will add a positive new dimension to our national life.

• (1430)

I would be remiss if I did not comment on some of the other people who have been involved in this debate, particularly the Dene people. They are the Denesuline of Saskatchewan who I represent and those of Manitoba and the territories.

The Dene people are among the most isolated people in Canada geographically. Through no fault or decision of their own they are divided by geography as well as political boundaries. There are no roads between their communities. There are no scheduled airline services between their communities. There are hardly even telecommunications services between their communities.

At the same time, they are divided politically by the boundaries of other people that place them in the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. All of that has made it very difficult for the Dene people to coalesce as a people and to participate in many of the discussions and developments which directly affect them. Certainly the negotiations around the creation of Nunavut are a prime example of that.

In large part due to their isolation, the Dene people are also among the most traditional people in Canada. There are many people in those communities for whom English is a second language. Many people in their forties, fifties and certainly the elders do not know the English language at all. That has created another barrier

toward active participation in the discussions that so profoundly shape their lives.

The Dene people can and do point with pride to the fact that they too have had use and occupancy over one corner of the Nunavut territory for a long period of time.

Certainly when Samuel Hearne led the first fur traders into that territory it was Dene people who were there and who helped facilitate the contact between the fur traders and the Inuit people. That is a historical fact that is well known.

As a result of the discussions and negotiations that have proceeded and the Dene concern about what might be happening to their treaty and aboriginal rights there have been land use and occupancy studies done that indicate to this day the Dene do use and occupy one corner of the Nunavut territory for hunting, fishing, trapping and other traditional pursuits that are so much a part of their lives.

In fact the Dene are often described in other aboriginal languages as the caribou eaters. Their historical way of life has been to follow the caribou herds back and forth across boundaries that certainly do not exist for caribou and never did exist for Dene people either.

I must say that I am pleased that this agreement came about. It looked, as the minister said a few days ago, as though the overlapping claims, particularly with the Dene people in Saskatchewan, might well stand in the way of this historic event. This is something that we all would have profoundly regretted. We worked very hard to avoid this.

The reason that happens I am sad to say is that the role of the Government of Canada, although positive in the sense that it wanted to achieve an agreement and committed time and resources to it, has had an element to it that I describe as moving from negligence to intransigence to virtually blackmail.

Certainly no individual can be held accountable for that litany. However if you look at the record there are elements of that in the way the Government of Canada has approached this whole situation.

When I first got elected in 1988 this was an issue that was just coming to prominence among the Dene people. In February 1989 I attended a meeting with people who had been working on these negotiations for at least a dozen years on behalf of the federal government. I found to my amazement that these people who represented the Government of Canada were not aware that Dene people cross 60th parallel to hunt, fish and trap let alone have some treaty interests in that area.