

Routine Proceedings

and services such as water and sewage facilities will be welcomed by our native people across this country.

It is something that is fundamentally needed in order to move on to some of the other kinds of programs that are so essential, but I think the point the Prime Minister made as well is something we should all reflect on when we talk about the essential of ensuring that our native people have a sense of dignity. Of course that sense of dignity can only come as their own self-esteem is developed and grown, and perhaps in no area more importantly than for aboriginal women. Of all the issues we talk about and the difficulties we face with respect to aboriginal people, aboriginal women are often and frequently more disadvantaged than perhaps others.

When I came to Parliament, the very first piece of legislation I was involved in—and I sat on the committee—was Bill C-31, a bill that this government brought forward to redress a basic inequality which many aboriginal women in this country had faced for decades and decades: the fact that if an aboriginal woman married a non-aboriginal male she was disenfranchised; she no longer had status and her children no longer had status. I think the hon. member who is sitting in the chair right now served on that committee with me.

An hon. member: Not aboriginal. Only Indian.

Mrs. Collins: Indian, I am sorry. He and the hon. member opposite will recall the many hearings we went through and the delegations that came to appear before that committee. There were diverse opinions. It was not something where there was unanimity.

However, this government had made the commitment and that legislation became law in June, 1985. I think we all recall Flora MacDonald, a previous colleague of ours, who provided a lot of leadership on this issue during the 1980s.

That bill has made a difference, that change in legislation. It has meant that Indian women who were disenfranchised have been able to come back to their bands and obtain membership and housing. However, we know that the implementation has not been universally equitable across this county. Indeed there are some difficulties with that.

One of the provisions was that this piece of legislation would come up for a five-year review. I must say that those colleagues of mine who served on that committee, and others, where these kinds of provisions were included were seeing how important they are and that automatic review of legislation after a period of time by parliamentary committees is very important, because we cannot know everything when we write these laws. Sometimes they work out a little differently. They certainly may need some changes or amendments.

Over the last five years, in order to implement this legislation the government has committed some \$859 million. Those funds have gone to bands. In this current year, 1990-1991, there will be about \$17 million in funds for secondary and elementary education. There will be another \$37 million for post-secondary education. There has been funds for housing and funds to support the reinstatement of these Indian women.

In the past little while a special committee has been established. I think it is an indication of the kind of collaboration and consultation to which this government and this Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is committed. The committee is chaired by Bill Monsieur, Chief of the Six Nations Reserves, and includes memberships from the AFM, from the Native Women's Association of Canada, and from the Saskatchewan Federation of Indian Nations.

We expect that the committee will make its report around the end of November and will be making recommendations for improvements in the legislation to deal with some of the difficulties that are still faced. I am certainly looking forward to that report and to improvements to ensure that Indian women do have true equality.

Another area that I think is very important—and my colleague, the Minister of State for Indian Affairs and Northern Development, mentioned it as well—is economic development programs which will enable native people to take control over their own destinies and their own economic activities. The CAEDS program was mentioned already, the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy which is under the jurisdiction of my colleague, the Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism. It has been an important component.