

Inquiries of the Ministry

he has received a communication or resolution from the Alaska highway paving conference held in Whitehorse recently? If he has, does he intend to take any action in respect to it?

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, a copy of that resolution has come to my office. The question of the probability of paving the highway would be a matter of government policy. So far as I know it has not yet been placed on the agenda.

QUEBEC—ADMINISTRATION OF ESKIMO AFFAIRS

On the orders of the day:

[*Translation*]

Mr. L. J. Pigeon (Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources. Will the government finally transfer to the government of the province of Quebec jurisdiction over Eskimo affairs in New Quebec in accordance with the legitimate wishes of the province and those of his good friend, Mr. Rene Levesque?

[*Text*]

Hon. Arthur Laing (Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his courtesy in giving me some notice of this question. The question has been raised in the house several times, and at present I can tell him there have been a number of discussions, but there have been no negotiations of any kind. I think it is now suggested that this matter might become a subject of more discussion at the dominion-provincial conference in November. Meanwhile if the minister of natural resources of the province of Quebec should wish to discuss it we would be glad to hear from him.

I would like to assure the hon. member that we are proceeding in respect of capital expenditure and maintenance with the fullest discharge of our responsibility as a federal government, as set out for us in the decision of the supreme court in 1939, in respect to these people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pigeon: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell the house whether the hon. member for St. Lawrence-St. George was talking on behalf of the government when he made a statement recently before the Arctic institute at McGill University?

[Mr. Nielsen.]

[*Text*]

Mr. Laing: In response to that, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member that I have an extremely high regard for my parliamentary secretary, and I think this regard is shared in other parts of the house.

The hon. member may recall that my parliamentary secretary, in discussing this matter before the Arctic institute in Montreal recently, made it one of the conditions of his statement that he was representing only his own opinion and not that of the department or the government. However, I think it related to a suggestion that education in the area should be combined with a proposed Bill 60, and this proposal of his, which was his own suggestion, has since been commented on rather widely.

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister has stated that this matter might become one for discussion at the dominion-provincial conference, is it his intention to somehow obtain the wishes of the Eskimo people, who are most concerned in this matter, before any decision is made?

Mr. Laing: Mr. Speaker, during a recent visit to the area, when complaints were registered with me I did make the commitment to the Eskimo people that in respect of any changes we would keep them aware of the situation and advise them of prospective changes.

Hon. Paul Martineau (Pontiac-Temiscamingué): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Are any prospective changes contemplated at this time?

Mr. Laing: As of now, no. I think I made that very clear in my statement. We are conducting these affairs clearly under the responsibility given to us by the decision of 1939.

Mr. Nielsen: A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Rather than advising the Eskimo people of any changes to be made, is it the minister's intention to consult the Eskimo people before any decision as to change is made?

Mr. Laing: Mr. Speaker, let me say to the hon. member that I think it would be the opinion of all hon. members of this house, of the legislature of Quebec and all other provinces, that the sole consideration is the benefit to the primitive people concerned. When I have said that I think I have taken care of the situation as between advising people or seeking their consent. I think there is a wide opinion that the sole purpose in the discharge of this responsibility is the benefit to the people themselves.