

*Government Orders*

Recently the commission released its second annual report to the principals detailing the progress of the negotiations. I have encouraged the new commissioners to play a larger role in informing the public on treaty negotiation issues.

In addition, a number of other steps have been taken to ensure that the treaty negotiation process is accessible and open to all British Columbians. These steps would include establishment of regionally based advisory committees, public forums, regional information meetings, a toll free phone number and brochures.

**Mr. Stan Dromisky (Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the last few years the public information programs developed around the treaty negotiation process have expanded from public forums and open houses to include a wide range of different activities covering the province. It is a fantastic positive model, one that reaches into every home, every community, every institution within each and every one of the communities in question.

• (1325)

I commend the government for introducing a model of that nature. All parties to treaty negotiations in British Columbia place a high priority on effective public information. That is the key to success.

Without information we operate in darkness, in ignorance. Decisions are made without the proper facts, without the proper support systems, without the proper introduction of the major parties concerned in helping to bring about the most effective decision that will cater to the needs of all parties concerned.

There are many opportunities for the public to learn about treaty negotiations and the treaty making process. These opportunities are being provided through activities undertaken provincially, regionally and locally. To date this government and the other governments involved are doing a fantastic job in notifying all parties concerned of the process and where, when and why activities must take place.

At the provincial level the tripartite public education committee or TPEC takes the lead. The committee consists of members representing the three principals who are representatives of the Canadian government, representatives of the province of British Columbia and the First Nations Summit.

For clarification purposes I would like to read from the act what we mean by the summit:

Summit means the body that is established to represent the First Nations in British Columbia that agree to participate in the process provided for in the agreement to facilitate the negotiations of treaties among First Nations, Her Majesty in right of Canada and Her Majesty in right of British Columbia.

At the provincial level TPEC's primary objective is to plan, organize and implement province-wide public education programs on treaty negotiations.

I digress. Later in my presentation I will discuss the value of the process introduced in the province of British Columbia.

At the outset of the treaty negotiation process in 1994 the strategy developed by TPEC focused on holding public forums in communities around the province. Between June 1994 and today a total of fourteen forums have been held in British Columbia; five on Vancouver Island in Port Hardy, Nanaimo, Campbell River, Port Alberni and Victoria; three in the north in Prince Rupert, Smithers and Prince George; one in Cariboo—Chilcotin in Williams Lake; one in the Kootenays in Cranbrook; one in the interior in Kelowna; one on the sunshine coast in Powell River; and two in the lower mainland in Chilliwack and Vancouver. Two more forums will be held within the next few weeks in the lower mainland, one in Richmond and one in Delta.

The fact that so many have already taken place shows that the model is a dynamic one. We are reaching the people we should be reaching.

These community events begin with an informal open house in which the public is able to view displays and videos, pick up information and speak one on one with negotiators. The open house is followed by a forum, a formal panel discussion involving not only the principles of negotiation but also the B.C. Treaty Commission and the local first nation. After the presentations the floor is open to questions from the audience. The forums are moderated by a high profile member of the community. This is a dynamic community interacting model.

• (1330)

The critical and most crucial facets are where the individual who has a concern can come to the public meeting, identify with one of the leaders or one of the representatives of TPEC and discuss on a personal basis problems, issues or concerns relating to problem that will be discussed in the general meeting.

Then follows information. The information giving process is critical. It is absolutely essential that information at this stage be given in a very objective manner; clean, precise, not nebulous, not sweeping generalizations. The facts must be given as we know them in the real world.

Because three parties are involved in this process and because community representatives and community leaders are there from all facets of the community, the chances of success of giving a very accurate, true picture of whatever the scenario might be is far greater than having a bureaucrat come in from Ottawa or from Victoria to make a presentation on behalf of the governments in question or even a First Nations representative