

Government Orders

I understand that my time is nearly finished. I would conclude by saying that I would urge this House to unanimously support this legislation. It will show to Canadians that we understand that within Canada it is possible to recognize and respect our differences, our history and our traditions. I call on each member of this House to strike a voice tonight for that respect and for the future of our country.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that I will be sharing my time.

This is the first time I have had an opportunity to speak to this bill. When I first read the umbrella agreement on which this bill was based, I immediately had a number of concerns about the Yukon land claims agreements. I was concerned about the number, concerned about the fact that approximately 7,300 Yukon Indians out of a total Yukon population of 32,000 will receive collective ownership of 16,000 square miles which includes all the subsurface rights on 10,000 square miles and some subsurface rights on the other 6,000 square miles. I have to ask: What do the other residents of the Yukon think of these land claims agreements? What do they think?

In addition to a cash payment of almost \$250 million the Yukon First Nations will also receive rental revenues from surface leases and royalties from the development of non-renewable resources. Additionally, the Yukon First Nations will receive a preferential share in wildlife harvesting. What impact will these agreements have on access to settlement lands by non-native people? We are asking these questions. We have heard a lot of rhetoric today but we have heard very little about the details of this agreement and how it is going to impact on the residents of the Yukon.

• (2010)

Will the Yukon First Nations allow hunters, trappers and fishermen on settlement lands and their much larger traditional territories? What is going to happen in that regard?

Another concern that I had was that there was no financial balance sheet accompanying these agreements, none at all. I was concerned that the federal government will still be obligated to make the same payments to the Indian people in the Yukon. My understanding of settling the land claims and entering into self-government agreements was that the financial obligations of Canadian taxpayers would be reduced as a result of these revenues that would be replaced by royalties and resource revenues.

What is the rationale for continuing to make increased annual payments to the Indian people under that kind of an arrangement? What control will the Parliament of Canada have over payment of taxpayers' dollars to the Yukon First Nations? Canadian taxpayers are asking Reformers these questions and I have yet to hear the answers.

I was concerned that if we passed Bill C-33 that future land claim agreements with the 10 remaining bands in the Yukon will not have to come before Parliament for debate. That is a concern. They can be approved by cabinet through orders in council. That is the process written into this whole agreement. I have to ask why the government is trying to avoid the democratic right of the Canadian people to examine all aspects of each and every land agreement in the Yukon. Why are they being denied that right?

Under clause 6 of Bill C-33 the rights contained in these land agreements are "recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982". Does this mean that the Yukon land claim agreements will now be entrenched in the Constitution? Are they now part of our Constitution? If they are entrenched how will they be able to be amended?

If we want to change those agreements at any time, how will that happen? Clause 13 of Bill C-33 makes the provisions of the Yukon land claims paramount over all federal and territorial laws. Is this really what the government has intended? Is this really what the citizens of Canada want or do the people want the laws of Canada to apply equally to all its citizens regardless of where they live? Why is the government trying to ram these bills through without being as up front with the Canadian people as they have been with the Yukon Indians?

Finally, I am very concerned about the precedent we might be setting by entering into these land claim agreements. Will the precedent set here apply to my province of Saskatchewan? Will it apply to Manitoba? Will we be asking these same questions a year or so from now relating to land claim agreements in all the other parts of Canada?

Will future land claim deals contain all the same provisions, transferring the same powers and law making ability, a proportional amount of land, the same control over resources, similar royalty provisions and so on? The list can continue. Will this set a precedent for all of those things? Will the arguments made in future court cases refer to the precedent set in the Yukon land claims agreement? Have we thought through all of this? I have heard a lot of rhetoric but I have not heard anyone address that. This is why the amendments that we tried to make are so important. We were shut down.

• (2015)

The amendments that the Reform Party had proposed would have gone a long way to removing many of my concerns. The amendments proposed by our party would have answered many of the questions being asked not only by Reformers but all Canadians.

I was talking to some people from Halifax the other day and we were discussing the Yukon land claims and self-government agreements. The gentleman said that he had not heard anything about these agreements. The people of Canada know precious