

federal government. They give Indians the power to take charge of their own communities, their own lives and their own future.

[English]

**Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing):** Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak today on the motion of my colleague from Nunatsiq regarding aboriginal youth. The problem facing these young Canadians is serious and a thoughtful discussion is necessary in order to begin eliminating the problems that affect them. It is no secret to anyone that the aboriginal people of this country are living below the living standards that most Canadians enjoy.

The way we treat our minorities and our young people is a good way of judging our society. The aboriginal people of this country need the help of the Canadian government to develop policies and programs that will enable them to mature and become self-confident in their culture and their language.

The problems they face are enormous and there are some alarming statistics to demonstrate that. The life expectancy of an aboriginal person is 10 years less than a non-aboriginal. The mortality rate of Indian infants is twice as high as the Canadian average. The rate of infant mortality among the Inuit is three times as high. The rate of suicide among Inuit of the Northwest Territories is four times that of the national average. In the Northwest Territories 63 per cent of the population have less than a grade 9 education. Of Indians living in urban areas 66 per cent attain a grade 9 education and of Indians living in rural areas, 51 per cent attain a grade 9 education. Among the general Canadian population 80 per cent have attained a grade 9 education. The difference is enormous.

I think many Canadians would be surprised to hear that half of the aboriginal population in this country is under the age of 25. The socio-economic disparities between aboriginal youth and non-aboriginals is unacceptable. Their health level is lower. Unemployment is much higher. The education level is much lower and substance abuse, of course, is more prevalent.

### *Private Members' Business*

As a government we have to develop programs and services that will cater to the needs of aboriginal youth. Obviously the programs we have now are either not effective or not as extensive as they should be.

The motion of my hon. friend from Nunatsiq calls for the development of policies in consultation with the aboriginal people. It is imperative that we increase consultation with the aboriginal people and include them in the decision-making process in order to develop policies and programs that better serve their needs. They are in an advantageous position to understand the socio-economic problems facing the aboriginal people.

The state of health among the aboriginal is well below that of the Canadian average. I know that this problem was identified many, many years ago. Maybe Canadians will have to think twice before saying that we have the best health care system in the world, because our health care system is not reaching the aboriginal population.

There are numerous examples of the poor health level within the aboriginal population. The infant mortality rate is twice that of the Canadian average and the rate of tuberculosis among aboriginals is seven to ten times that of the national average.

Chris McCormick of the Native Council of Canada has said that perhaps the most urgent message voiced by our youth is their alcohol and drug abuse which causes 70 per cent of their deaths.

This is alarming. The problem is grave. Most of the substance abuse cases are due to the erosion of traditional values and the stress due to cultural transition.

Before I go further, I want to address the effects of the last budget on native programs and demonstrate this government's lack of understanding of the aboriginal people. One of the hardest hit programs will be the 99 Native Friendship Centres across the country. These centres, based in urban areas, assist aboriginal people with information such as housing availability, education, substance abuse and employment. This is exactly the type of program that helps young aboriginals to adapt and to cope with a new environment. It is administered by natives and it is for natives. It is a service that the federal government does not provide and it addresses problems of cultural transition and alienation.