

As far as actual treaty table talks, one of the items to be initially discussed during the readiness stage is the procedural document referred to as the openness protocol.

• (1545)

These openness protocols have been agreed upon by the three parties at the table, the federal and provincial governments and the First Nations. Many of the treaty table members of the public and third party advisory committees can, if they so desire, attend and observe main table negotiation sessions. So it is open and people are welcome to attend.

I know of one instance, the Sechelt treaty negotiations, where negotiation sessions are videotaped and replayed on the local cable station. I cannot imagine a more open process than that. I was in Sechelt in my previous incarnation, if I might, as the critic for the aboriginal portfolio for the Liberal Party. Their process on self-government, which is renowned throughout Canada and the world, has also been very open. The Sechelt people do not have anything to hide. They have a lot to be proud of and a lot to share, and they do.

I assure members the public has not been shut out of the process; rather, it has been invited in and encouraged to attend. We are well aware the treaty process cannot happen in a vacuum. The public and third parties need to know about and be involved in the process. We encourage their input and involvement.

This is a fairer process, much more acceptable than the kind of imposing process previously engaged in. Now it tends to be more of a partnership, one of equality. Maybe that is what is so objectionable to some.

There are many threads the negotiation teams need to weave together for the modern treaty process to work, including representing the Canadian public and federal government at the treaty table, balancing effective negotiations with openness, ensuring the consultation process is an accountable one, and providing the public and media with timely information. Under the B.C. Treaty Commission process all of these threads are coming together. We are only at the beginning of the process, but we are moving toward strengthening the social, economic, and legal fabric of British Columbia with regard to land claims.

In Canada the treaty process has a past that forms an integral part of our history. It has a present. Many of us here in the House of Commons have seen the passage of modern treaties, as in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. It has a future through the passage of legislation establishing the B.C. Treaty Commission and the negotiation and settlement of treaties under its auspices. That is why I am here today, to help usher in Bill C-107 and to ensure the job of treaty negotiations can continue in the province of B.C. so these negotiations can ultimately reach a successful conclusion.

Government Orders

Treaty making is a world known process. Treaty making is done between nations. Treaty making is done between various groups. It is an honourable process. It is not a process that begs criticism or any kind of misunderstanding. It is an honourable process. It is a process that will allow partnerships to develop. It is generally a process of honour that when you have made a treaty it will help to deal with some of the tougher questions governments have to deal with. It solidifies for governments, for communities, for peoples the programs and services. The arrangements that are made become clearer. They should, anyway.

In the myriad of claims and the whole conglomeration of land questions regarding title in British Columbia, with the whole issue of hunting and fishing, fishing rights and the Sparrow case, let us hope this process will lend some clarity, some definition, some partnership that will allow these groups to come to some conclusion and reach some of the results that have long been sought after and long wanted.

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I believe I have two questions for the hon. member. One is in relation to the time element here.

• (1550)

We know this process has been going on for a considerable amount of time. The only reference I noted concerning time, which I believe was in the agreement of September 22, which this bill is based on, was in relation to funding, where it said "the first five years". Does the hon. member foresee this as a long, ongoing process again, or do we have a five-year or ten-year objective here?

My second question relates to the bill. I think clause 3 says the commission will assess the readiness of the principals to participate in the negotiations. What kind of authority does the word assessment mean? Does it mean it will assess and advise the principals that they are ready or not ready, or that it will assess and tell the principals that they can or cannot negotiate?

Ms. Blondin-Andrew: Mr. Speaker, on the whole issue of time, the only answer I can give is what has been prescribed in the working documents of the bill. I believe the member mentioned five years. For instance, Treaty 11 goes back to 1921.

Each treaty has a life of its own. We should say that the B.C. Treaty Commission has been set up to facilitate the negotiation of modern treaties in B.C. Once the process is completed the B.C. Treaty Commission will no longer be required. The B.C. Treaty Commission agreement states that the principals, Canada, B.C., and First Nations Summit, "shall terminate the BCT upon completion of their duties under their agreement or where BCT is no longer performing its duties". It is based on whether it is able to complete its work or not. Once its mission is completed, then as a mechanism the commission will essentially be disbanded.