

*Private Members' Business*

status to native people is the only way to make progress in education, employment and health.

On a number of occasions the Prime Minister indicated that the government is quite prepared to call another First Ministers' Conference on native self-government and rights as soon as the chances of success are encouraging.

Hon. members are certainly aware that in the last Speech from the Throne the government did commit itself to give priority to native rights the moment the Meech Lake Accord has been ratified.

Our position is clear and unequivocal: we are trying to foster closer co-operation with native people, establish a consensus and turn the self-government concept into reality. This is why federal ministers recently met with leaders of national native organizations, and they are looking forward to other such meetings in the near future.

Anxious though we are to make progress at the constitutional level, Madam Speaker, we are not ignoring the issue of self-government at the community level. As a matter of fact, if we are going to deal with education, employment and health we must not lose sight of the fact that the priorities of native people may vary according to their political structure, their economic base and their culture.

Fully aware of these differences the federal government has taken a number of non-constitutional initiatives concerning self-government so as to follow up on propositions made by various groups seeking to set up self-government systems which go beyond the confines of the Indian Act provisions. We do have strong evidence which allows us to state that this flexible community-oriented approach is producing positive results.

For instance, over 200 Canadian bands have submitted 134 proposals to the Self-Government Negotiations Branch. Even though most of them are only at the initial stage, the Whitefish Bay band, the Mississauga and Chippewa Nations United Councils in Ontario, the Gitskan Wet'Suwet'en bands in British Columbia, the Alexander and Sawridge bands in Alberta and three First Nations in the Yukon are currently taking part in negotiations to establish new community systems of self-government. Many other communities have made

significant progress and are expected to initiate negotiations in the next few months.

The global claims settlement process is also designed to increase the Indian communities local autonomy.

Agreements in principle have been signed with the Council of Yukon Indians, the Dénés and Metis in the Northwest Territories and in Quebec. The government has also ratified an umbrella agreement with the Conseil Attikamek-Montagnais and the provincial government. An agreement in principle is currently under negotiation.

An umbrella agreement with the Labrador Inuit Association and the Newfoundland provincial government should be settled soon. Finally, in Eastern Arctic, the government hopes to sign an agreement in principle with the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut.

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The Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act, passed in 1986, is a prime example of the success of these negotiations. It allowed the British Columbia Sechelts to gain control not only over their own lands and resources but also over social, health and education services as well as local taxation.

Madam Speaker, all these efforts to ensure self-government are major accomplishments but they don't stop there. The government has also made alternative funding arrangements in response to the native communities' desire to increase their financial autonomy and self-sufficiency under the Indian Act. These alternative funding arrangements enable band governments and tribal councils to assume greater responsibilities and more financial authority for program delivery, while maintaining good quality of service and financial accountability.

The Government of Canada continues to work in close co-operation with the provinces to advance the negotiations on land claims and to define and implement self-government plans for native people living off reserves.

These examples show this government's commitment to achieve tangible, progressive change in the area of self-government. They also show that progress is possible. The benefits of these agreements go beyond the communities concerned. These agreements are a major step forward in improving relations between the government and Canada's native peoples. They reduce these peoples' economic and political dependence on the