

Oral Questions

The Minister met with young students as well as other aboriginal leaders yesterday to discuss the situation. The consequence of the meeting was that the Minister told them that this program would still be put in place on September 1 and yet he contended that he was willing to have discussions.

Since the Minister's new program has been universally rejected by the aboriginal community, why does he not accept their reasonable position to hold off implementation of that program for the coming year and in the meantime, have discussions that will hopefully lead to an agreement between the aboriginal community and the Government of Canada? Surely that is reasonable.

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated on a number of occasions already, a year ago my predecessor announced that there would be a review of the E-12 guidelines that were in force at that time. There was a discussion paper circulated throughout Canada on this particular subject. There was a consultation process that was supposed to take place from July until October and was extended until December. Following the recommendations we received through that consultation process, important changes were brought to the discussion paper, as indicated in the policy that I announced on March 20, which came into force on April 1, but in fact will apply as of September 1 for school year 1989-90.

Notwithstanding that, I am prepared, as I have indicated from the outset, to sit down again with the leaders and chiefs of the native people and the students, if they wish, in order to review the possibility. Particularly, if there are inequities, we will look into them. However, over-all, the new guidelines are more generous, better and fairer than the ones that were in force at that time. If Hon. Members would look at the First Nations' document on education, they would find that it indicates that E-12 is inadequate and inappropriate.

REQUEST THAT NEW GUIDELINES BE SUSPENDED

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows that the aboriginal community had suggestions and criticisms to make about the old program, but as he also knows, by and large it was working and was acceptable to the aboriginal community. He knows as well that the new guidelines he is now talking about have been universally rejected from the West Coast of Canada right through to the East Coast by the aboriginal people.

Just for once, why will he not listen to them instead of his advisers here in Ottawa? That surely is the issue.

I appeal to the Minister, who has been reasonable in past portfolios and who has considered the constituency he is supposed to represent in Cabinet. Since the aboriginal people of all people in Canada at long last deserve justice, why will he not keep in place the existing program, suspend his new guidelines and hopefully negotiate a program that is acceptable to everyone?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, again, as I have indicated, the First Nations themselves found that the E-12 guidelines, the old guidelines, were inadequate and inappropriate. We have a program here that we feel is more generous and fairer for all native students across Canada. We are talking about a program that went from \$4.2 million at its start in 1975 to \$130 million today, for 15,000 students, representing an average of close to \$9,000 annually for each student. It covers tuition fees, books, accessories, travel assistance and allowance for cost of living including food and day care.

I believe that these new guidelines are better than the ones that were there before. I have already met with the leadership four times in the last two weeks and I am prepared to continue the process. If there is more that we can do, we will do it.

REJECTION OF NEW GUIDELINES BY ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister knows full well that the guidelines may be acceptable to him, but without exception, the aboriginal leadership from coast to coast has rejected the guidelines. Surely among those people who have rejected it are a great number of reasonable human beings, and they are the people affected by these guidelines. The Minister should be listening to them.

Since the Minister has now said to all of us in the House something about what has happened in terms of spending for aboriginal peoples, I would like to read to him and ask him for his response on an observation made last week, not ten years ago, by a Canadian Human Rights Commissioner who said: "An Indian youngster in Canada has a better chance of being sent to prison than of completing university". That is a national disgrace. In this context, why is the Minister even contemplating putting a ceiling on post-secondary educational spending? Is it not better to spend money on education than on welfare for aboriginal people?