

increase in funding for welfare but a decrease in funding for development?

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, I have been approached by many native leaders who would like us to convert welfare dollars into economic development dollars.

In the spirit of self-government I think there is now an opportunity if this Parliament is prepared to encourage these changes to allow chiefs, councils and tribal councils to have more control over the global funding, which is what we are already doing under alternative funding arrangements, and convert welfare dollars into economic development dollars.

What we are doing with the aboriginal economic development strategy is funding major kinds of programs and entrepreneurial initiatives with great success, but at the band level we cannot put money into having economic development officers to the same degree we could before if we have to keep the welfare payments up.

If the hon. member for the NDP says we should cut the welfare payments in order to encourage more economic development I am all for it.

Mr. Ray Funk (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to be able to participate in this debate both because of the substance of the motion before us and the very timely nature of its presentation.

I would like to compliment the member for Nunatsiag for having the foresight to bring this motion before us. From what I have heard so far, I think the hon. members are certainly making use of this opportunity to put some very important points on the record.

I also appreciate being here to listen to the speech of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in this debate because after all he is the individual who most bears the responsibility for giving reality to the goals and aspirations of this House and indeed the Canadian people with respect to the aboriginal people.

The debate which has just preceded this, the discussion between the minister and hon. members with respect to what has happened with economic development cuts, indicates that in fact there is a problem, not only with the minister but with many participants in these kinds of debates at squaring the rhetoric that goes

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with these kinds of issues with the realities which often accompany them. I would like to deal specifically with some of those aspects later on.

I agree with the minister that a new vision is needed in this country. Also I agree with the minister that the system as we have known it since the time of contact has led us down a blind alley. The system we know has led us to a situation where we have to deal with questions such as the epidemic of suicides in many Indian communities and certainly that is a trend we have to reverse.

At the outset of my remarks I want to pay tribute to the aboriginal families in this country. The motion before us says that this House condemns the government for abandonment of aboriginal families and children so this debate is really about aboriginal families and children.

In that context I would like to give credit and pay tribute to the aboriginal families that have touched my own life. I had the experience at the age of eight of coming into contact with people on the Beardy's Indian reserve, to get to know those families long before I knew anything about politics or issues or differences between people or the many kinds of dimensions to the whole question that one comes to later in life.

• (1905)

I very much value that childhood experience, the experience of Indian family life at its best.

In representing the constituency of Prince Albert—Churchill River, I come into contact with any number of Indian families in the course of my duties. There are 46 aboriginal communities in my constituency, including Métis communities, Dene communities, Cree communities and Dakota communities. I have had the experience of listening to the concerns of those families and of being able to experience their family life in a small way. To be able to have the opportunity of presenting the issues that arise from those contacts in this forum is certainly a rare privilege for any individual Canadian to have. Therefore I am grateful for that experience.

However when we are talking about what is happening to aboriginal families, it goes beyond simple issues of control, of funding, of parliamentary legislation and so on. It goes to questions of what is really happening to real families. Historically the record of what has hap-