

Supply

I am sure the Hon. Member has heard of the review of the claims policy and a specific mandate to examine alternatives to the demand that aboriginal people must extinguish their aboriginal rights, the cornerstone of the policy developed by the last Government which has been so thoroughly condemned and rejected by aboriginal people.

I might add that he has no doubt heard of the initiatives taken by this Government to protect the special relationship between the federal Government and Indian people. The Hon. Member may recall the recognition given by this Government a few months ago, after years and years of waiting, to Indian communities in the Treaty Nine area which extends into the Hon. Member's riding.

Whether it is the issue of twin-tracking in British Columbia, the renovation of Treaty Eight, I have honoured and this Government has honoured its fiduciary obligations to the people of this country of aboriginal origin, and will continue to do so.

There are many other recommendations in the Penner report which I intend to bring before the new Cabinet committee on aboriginal matters and on which there will be, of course, full participation with aboriginal people concerned. I think this list is a better statement, the one I have just gone through, measured by the Hon. Member's own standards of the intentions of my Ministry and the support of this Government, than any document that the Opposition may wish to wave in our face at camera time. I am quite content to be judged by the actions which the Government has taken. The record speaks for itself.

The second matter which will be before the Cabinet committee will be the study team report. That is the matter which I intend to place before the new committee. We will examine it carefully. I assure Hon. Members of this House with regard to the recommendations contained in the report, which was done by a group of outside consultants and officials, that some of those ideas were wise, some were unwise, some were acceptable and some were unacceptable. As the Prime Minister assured the House, all of those recommendations, no matter what their origin, will be subjected to public open discussion with aboriginal people before policy decisions are made. That is the key. That is what has been missing in previous Governments. That is not what will be missing from this Government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crombie: Not only the Penner report, not only the study team report, but suggestions from aboriginal peoples will be discussed at that Cabinet committee. In dozens and dozens of meetings that I have been involved in across this country, east, west, north and south, I have been impressed with the considered suggestions which have been given to me regarding changes in federal practice and federal policy. At all of these meetings, which now involves contact with every Indian community, the meetings have been held, the minutes sent out and recorded, and I have instructed officials after each of those meetings to prepare policy options on workable suggestions so

that consultations can be further extended and decisions made. That is how we build Indian policy in this Government.

I would like to mention the manner in which we moved on very positive suggestions we received from northerners, particularly northern aboriginal people, on the question of division of the Northwest Territories. I have been urged by northern peoples, particularly aboriginal peoples, to make sure that that debate is held first in the north and by northerners and not in the back rooms of Ottawa where it has been for so long.

When I opened the new legislative chambers in the Northwest Territories earlier this year, I promised on behalf of the Government to be fully responsive to the unique constitutional developments occurring in the north, developments which are important to all Canadians. At that time John Amagolik, president of the Inuit Tapirisat, was quoted in *The Edmonton Journal* as saying that it was "a very historic occasion for the Inuit people". In that same speech, I put on the public record that I accepted the suggestion that development and division should not prejudice land claims. No one can say that this Government has not been open and receptive to the long-standing, long-neglected positive ideas, aspirations and suggestions that aboriginal people have been pressing on the federal Government for generations.

● (1440)

Much more could be said, but I think the time has come when the Opposition should return to its responsibility of examining the actual actions and policies of this Government relating to aboriginal peoples. I welcome that challenge. The critical examination of real policies and real issues is what opposition and government are about. If the Government proposes and the Opposition opposes or criticizes real policies and recommendations, then the magic of the parliamentary system works and will work to the benefit of aboriginal people.

If I could put it in a nutshell, surely that responsible kind of debate is preferable to trying to examine the entrails of policies which have been found in the waste baskets of the bureaucracy. That responsible kind of debate is real discussion.

This Government will not give sympathy nor support to any policy which goes against its general objective of strengthening the communities and cultures of aboriginal people. The policies and principles upon which this Government will act were set out clearly at the constitutional conference and reiterated in this House by the Prime Minister on April 18. I am going to repeat those because they have not been heard. There are four very clear principles.

The first principle is that the special relationship between Canada and the aboriginal peoples will be strengthened. The Prime Minister said that the second principle was that the aboriginal rights and especially the right of self-government shall have constitutional protection. The third principle set out was that current funding levels of programs designed to correct the serious inequities which exist for native people and native communities will be maintained. Last, the Prime Minister set out on the public record the assurance that he would honour the principle that policies regarding aboriginal people