

*Routine Proceedings*

lot of time and effort into this issue. I compliment the chairman and members of the committee, as well as those who also attended committee hearings and took part in it.

In the forward it states: "The purpose of the report is to share some of the understanding that we have accumulated". The report does not prescribe specific action other than to strongly suggest that Canadians, through their governments, have a lot of work to do in this decade. This is not a challenge facing only one government or only one minister. This is a challenge for all Canadians, a circumstance that has developed over a series of generations and one which will require concentrated commitment over many years.

I think that is an apt introduction to the report in that there is much to be done. There is also much that has been done. It is very unfortunate that the cloud of Oka this summer has obscured much of the work that has been done by the native leaders in this country and the activities they have been involved in to better the standard of living for their people and also their future.

I would like perhaps to take some of the points mentioned in the report and just review some of the things that have been happening in these particular areas.

I became Minister of State for Indian Affairs in February of this year. In the six months that I have been involved, as well as with the problems of which we are all aware, I have also had the opportunity to travel across this country to meet with many of our aboriginal people and their leaders. There are many more I would still like to have the opportunity to meet with.

One of the first things that was spoken about in the committee report was the self-government agenda of Canada. We have a program for community self-government for Indian peoples. Many bands are currently looking at this as an opportunity to move forward in rightfully taking over control of the decision making for Indian people.

One of the first opportunities I had was on March 9 of this year at Whitefish Bay, Ontario, where we signed the first self-government agreement with that group. Shortly after that I had the opportunity to sign a self-government agreement at New Credit, Ontario. It was rather a unique self-government agreement in that it was done with the Mississaugas and Chippawas of Ontario and it is

a two-level self-government agreement. The band council itself will take on certain responsibilities, and the nine band councils and chiefs will take on other responsibilities.

These two particular signings gave me the opportunity to see from our native people the need to make sure that the programs that we have are flexible, because what met the self-government needs at Whitefish Bay would not have met, if it had been a standard self-government agreement, the needs for the people of the Mississaugas and the Chippawas at New Credit. It is very important that we keep flexibility within self-government agreements.

As mentioned earlier, many bands are looking at it. We have agreements that are close to signing and others where bands are now exploring. The whole purpose of it is that the bands themselves must first want to enter into the agreement. They must have an idea of what they want, the type of self-government that they want. Then we will sit down and work along with them to bring about an agreement that meets their needs within the framework of Canada's Constitution.

Land claims is another issue about which there has been much discussion in the debates this week. On August 23 of this year I met with the Indian Chiefs of Ontario, the Indian Commissioner of Ontario, and members of the provincial government. We sat at that meeting and one of the important requests that came out of it was a request put to Mr. Harry Laforme, the Indian Commissioner of Ontario, to bring about a report on land claim process: what was wrong with it, why it was not working, and recommendations for change.

• (1250)

Mr. Laforme has done an excellent job. In fact his report was just tabled this morning. Here we are a month and a few days from that initial request to put the report together, and he has done it. I look forward to reviewing the report, when I have an opportunity to do so, and seeing what we can do to take his recommendations and put some of them into operation. He negotiated or discussed input with chiefs across Canada. Much of it came from his own experience in negotiating land claims in Ontario. I am really looking forward to working on the results of the report and seeing what can be done to implement it. Certainly we send our congrat-