

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): We might be pushing our luck.

Mr. Harper (Churchill): I will just say that I recommend this bill to the members of the House of Commons. I hope that the Reform Party will support it because it is about Canada. It is about living together in this country and not trying to alienate each other. That is what we want.

I want to say that I have been honoured to speak on this bill and I hope the motion is carried unanimously.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I always thought Indian time was on the longer side rather than on the shorter side. I thank the hon. member for Churchill.

[Translation]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois for their kindness in letting me speak on a subject that is very important to the Yukon and to the member for the Yukon, as well as for their support on these bills. I think that their support is very important and so was their contribution to this debate. We in the Yukon appreciate their support for these bills.

[English]

It is with pleasure that I rise today to speak on these bills that are so important to the Yukon and to the future of the Yukon. There has been much said in the House on this debate about giving something to Indian people. In fact these bills give a great degree of autonomy to the Yukon people, aboriginal and non-aboriginal. Certainly the land was never conquered when Europeans first came to the Yukon and elsewhere in Canada. The land was taken and assumed. It was never ceded.

What we are doing this evening is an extremely important historical event in that we as democratic members of Parliament in a democratic country are recognizing the importance of redressing those historical wrongs.

This legislation has been a long time coming, more than 20 years of frustrating negotiations. We have seen a couple of generations grow up during these negotiations and tonight, we have the fruit of that dedication and spirit. We have a living document, a testament to the will and the commitment of the Yukon people. This legislation not only rights the bitter wrongs of the past but holds the key to the future, a future to which all Yukoners both aboriginal and non-aboriginal can look with pride and with hope. This legislation is a celebration of the Yukon spirit, that determination to meet all challenges, to carry on despite all obstacles and to work together to achieve a common goal even when the way is not easy.

• (1955)

The legislation is not the product of winners and losers. It is the product of many years of give and take and negotiation. It did not come easily. Each side had to cede on some of its

objectives. Sometimes that was hard to explain both to aboriginal people and to non-aboriginal Yukoners.

As the previous speaker said the legislation represents a real definition, an attempt to work together in a co-operative way and to show that different cultures can live together in a harmonious and, even more important, respectful way, respectful of each other's languages and cultures.

While we say the legislation was 21 years in negotiation, it might be more accurate to say that it was 92 years to this day, June 22, 1994. It was in 1902 that Chief Jim Boss spoke simply to the government about the need to protect the land of his people. He said: "Tell the King we want something for our Indians because they take our land and our game". With those simple words began the stand which has led us to where we are today.

Chief Jim Boss' people were those who had for thousands of years hunted, fished and raised their families. They had a government system, a structural system, a cultural system, a justice system and an education system that they had devised as First Nations people in Yukon.

Anthropological evidence indicates that in fact there were aboriginal people in the Old Crow area of Yukon at least 20,000 years ago. With the coming of whalers to Herschel Island, the stampede to the gold fields of the Klondike and thousands of American army engineers building the Alaska highway, cultures, languages, land and traditions were lost or eroded. Children were taken away from their families to residential schools. Communities were weakened by disease. Clans were scattered. Wildlife populations decimated. Critical habitat destroyed or altered and sacred places forgotten. One wonders how any vestige of pride and dignity or any shred of heritage could have survived, but it has survived in the wisdom of the elders and in the hope for the future.

It was a little over 20 years ago that Elijah Smith, a Yukon Indian who had served his country in the second world war, came back to Yukon to fight for the rights of his people from within. It was Elijah Smith who 20 years ago travelled to Ottawa bearing a document entitled *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow*.

This evening is historic because this is the evening of tomorrow. I say that no one in Yukon expects this solves every problem that will ever arise in Yukon; but it is an attempt to build on that spirit of co-operativeness and of communalism that is part of the aboriginal tradition and part of Yukon history where people have learned that co-operation is necessary for survival.

There are many important details in the legislation, both the land claims legislation and the self-government legislation that I will not review. They have been very thoroughly reviewed in committee as well as in the House. However I will review some concerns that have been raised. One concern often raised