

*Government Orders*

The government has tackled the treaty land entitlement issue with a renewed commitment and vigour. Although the matter appears to be simple on the surface, it is in fact an extremely complex and difficult issue that has repercussions not only for the governments and First Nations people, but for non-aboriginal residents of Saskatchewan, whether they be farmers or city dwellers, in terms of the changes that will evolve from this agreement.

In recognition of these complexities and of the need to address the entitlement issues once and for all, my immediate predecessor took the action to establish an office of Treaty Commissioner for Saskatchewan in June 1989. The idea was to insert into this confused and unsatisfactory situation an independent commissioner, the former mayor of the city of Saskatoon, Commissioner Cliff Wright. An office was established and he was appointed to work in consultation with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the two governments, federal and provincial, to find a solution to this problem.

The agreements that were signed in September, which I spoke of in my opening remarks, are a direct product of the excellent work of Commissioner Cliff Wright. Also, I want to pay a very important and generous compliment to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, in particular to Chief Roland Crowe, who headed up and pursued the successful resolution of this problem for several years and to his senior officers and officials, Vice-Chief Dan Bellegarde, Lester Henry and others. The FSIN played a fundamentally important role on behalf of the 27 entitlement nations in bringing us to this historic moment.

Treaty Commissioner Cliff Wright came to my office in Ottawa in May 1990, not long after he had received his mandate and presented a comprehensive and analytical report, in fact a formula for solving the treaty land entitlement problem in the province of Saskatchewan. He did this after extensive consultations with Indian people, interested parties and residents of the province.

• (1100)

We will not have the opportunity in the House today to examine the genius of his proposal. I could say that in a rather creative way he was able to account for the shortfall of something in excess of one million acres,

approaching a million and a half acres of land, to establish a value for those lands and, in agreement with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, moneys would be paid out appropriate to the value of those lands and to account for the increase in population and the appropriate equity that must be realized in dealing with the modern day populations of those communities, while maintaining fairness with other First Nations which had accepted their treaty land entitlement generations ago.

This was a horrendous and challenging task but it was one very well done and I want again to compliment the commissioner for his leadership there.

That led to a prolonged period of negotiation with the former government of the province of Saskatchewan under Premier Devine's leadership, leading to an agreement which was signed in September 1991 for cost sharing the cost of settling this treaty land entitlement matter.

The reason for Saskatchewan's involvement is quite clear. Since 1930 Saskatchewan has had an obligation under the natural resources transfer agreement to provide to Canada lands adequate to fulfil treaty land entitlement obligations and to provide for expanding aboriginal populations in terms of the reserve requirements.

We were able to negotiate with the previous Government of Saskatchewan a cost-sharing agreement where-by Saskatchewan would provide 49 per cent of the cost of purchasing lands which would be purchased by funds put in a special account, a special treaty land acquisition account, and those lands would be purchased by the respective bands to be held in trust on their behalf in perpetuity; 51 per cent of the funding to be provided by the federal government and 49 per cent by the province of Saskatchewan.

It took several more months to conclude the framework agreement which is attached as schedule II to Bill C-104. The framework agreement deals with a wide range of issues which I will take a few moments to elaborate upon. This framework agreement was finally concluded during the summer of 1992 and signed. I think it was a very rewarding and emotional moment for the 26 treaty land entitlement bands which participated in the signing ceremony at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park just north of Saskatoon on September 22, 1992.