

Supply

Northern Development and the Minister. A sort of confidence has built up.

The peculiar nature of the Minister's rule is sometimes described as being that of a trustee obligation which is constitutionally based. How that will change with constitutional development, no one knows. However, at the moment, whatever that means, it does include the advocacy role with other aspects of Government itself. When the Minister last appeared before the committee he indicated that he took that role seriously, ensuring that when programs are developed attention is given by other Ministries to the aboriginal aspect of the program.

I would like to ask the Minister two questions in that regard. He indicated that he was concerned about the change in the Jobs Strategy Program which now tends largely to exclude Indian communities and, therefore, labour dollars for housing are no longer available as they had been under the predecessor program, Canada Works.

My supplementary question, which I will ask now so that I will not have to rise again, is with regard to another program under the Minister of State responsible for small businesses. Many of us have wondered why moneys approved by Parliament for native economic development programs have been permitted to lapse in large amounts. Is the Minister concerned about this? Has he made inquiries and, if so, what has been the result of those inquiries?

• (1700)

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, we still have concerns about the job strategy. I have had discussions with my cabinet colleague and, hopefully, will have more in the near future.

One thing that we have agreed upon and promoted is the application for community futures funding which may be used for tribal councils if the bands are not large enough to qualify individually, so that there can be some economic development, job training and strategy. However, the additional component of the labour dollar change in the construction of homes on reserves, on top of the subsidy dollar that is provided per unit, is still a difficult problem. I hope to have it resolved for the new fiscal year into which we are entering because presently it is causing a hardship on reserves, even causing homes not to be completed. We all share that concern.

The Hon. Member asked about the native economic development program. Changes will be made and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has assisted in the past and has provided some 20 person-years to assist in going through the clearing house process so that it can be done more readily. My colleague, the Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism (Mr. Valcourt), is responsible for that program. We will be announcing some changes in that program in the near future. That is a responsibility of another Ministry. I believe my hon. friend will be pleased with the changes that will be announced.

Hopefully, the streamlining of the application process, the ability to make approvals by conference call, and limiting the money required for board meetings, will help speed up the program that we all want to work.

Mr. Parry: Mr. Speaker, I know the Hon. Minister will not take me wrong when I say that I am actually a little disappointed that I must ask him this question. I do not want to derogate from the Minister's standing or responsibility in saying that I believe the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) or the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) should have been speaking for the Government because of the importance of this question to the people of Canada.

However, on four occasions in the House during Question Period the Government has declined to clarify whether it accepts the concept that there is an inherent right to self-government. I refer to responses by the Hon. Minister of Justice on February 18, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) and the Prime Minister last week, and by the Minister of Justice earlier this afternoon. Since they have failed to clarify it and have declined the opportunity to do so, is the Minister willing to clarify for the House the Government's position as to whether the right to self-government is inherent or contingent?

Second, let me refer to this limited circulation background paper on the stationery of First Ministers' Conference entitled: "The Record of Aboriginal Constitutional Reform", which states on page 2, in reference to Section 35 of the Constitution: "The section did not revive or restore aboriginal and treaty rights that had already been lost by the date of proclamation of the Constitution Act, 1982". Will the Minister tell us how aboriginal or treaty rights have been "lost" in the view of the Government?

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, let me attempt to answer the last question first. The Hon. Member is aware that there is a contention put forward by aboriginal people that the traditional pursuits—hunting, gathering and fishing pursuits—have been superseded by other law, such as the Natural Resources Transfer Act in my part of Canada. One example often given by aboriginal people is the Migratory Birds Convention where some treaty rights may have been changed, transferred and superseded by another law.

I do not know how we change that. We do not go back. I am not familiar with the booklet from which the Hon. Member quoted but I suggest it is probably accurate that there are some matters that have been superseded by law and cannot be brought back.

The Hon. Member asked about the Government's stance. We put forward a draft that provided for a debate that we believed would have achieved the required support to entrench aboriginal self-government. It was a contingent right that was put forward in that proposal.

I suggest that it does not matter what right we put forward. We are now debating the Nova Scotia rolling draft proposal.