

*Government Orders*

Nunavut will generate significant employment opportunities, but Inuit must be qualified to fill these jobs. If we are not, the majority of these jobs will simply go to outsiders as they have in the past. We cannot permit this to happen. All of us must work together to ensure that the people in the communities of Nunavut benefit from the establishment of Nunavut.

We are embarked upon a long journey. Today is but a milestone along the way. We are far yet from our destination.

Passing this bill today does not change the world for us tomorrow. The lives of the people of Nunavut will not be suddenly different tomorrow or the day after or even a year from now.

[English]

The bill before us sets out a path to follow. It sets out a transition process, the importance of which cannot be overemphasized. Major mistakes during the transition process could prove to be serious impediments for the new government of Nunavut.

The work of the Nunavut implementation commission, as I mentioned earlier, is the key to the smooth and equitable establishment of Nunavut. I have already noted the complex and heavy mandate of this commission. The representatives of Nunavut will have to be cautious, vigilant and forward looking.

We know that when the Government of Canada transfers powers to other jurisdictions it usually does so without handing over enough resources to carry out the tasks.

A prime example that comes to mind is the health transfer agreement between the federal government and the existing Government of the Northwest Territories. The Government of the Northwest Territories is presently suing the federal government for non-payment of health bills.

Another funding problem involves housing. For the past several years the federal government has chipped away at the social housing funds it transfers to the provinces and territories. In the case of the Northwest Territories, cutbacks have been imposed over the past couple of years and recently Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation decided to altogether eliminate its cost sharing program for new social housing starting in 1994.

• (1415 )

[Translation]

Yet there is a housing crisis in the Northwest Territories as 25 per cent of NWT households are in need and this need is growing as the population growth rate is twice the national average. Some 41 per cent of NWT children under the age of 12 are living in overcrowded housing. There is a backlog of almost 3,600 units. About half this backlog is in Nunavut.

Health and housing are major areas of concern within Nunavut. If adequate funding is not provided to deal with these needs, Nunavut will be starting out with a serious handicap.

[English]

In other areas, the federal government has broken financial commitments. I am thinking here of the formula financing agreement that the federal government had with the existing Government of the Northwest Territories. Several years ago the federal government unilaterally changed the formula and the Government of the Northwest Territories has received less than it should have for the past several years.

Another example involves grants in lieu of taxes. Last December the Minister of Finance announced that he was freezing these payments to municipalities. Municipal budgets had already been prepared on the assumption that the federal government would be contributing its expected share. This freeze has affected the municipality of Iqaluit.

I want the federal government to realize that when it comes to funding Nunavut, Nunavut is not like an already developed province with its own large and stable source of revenues. We are just starting out, our population is small and our people do not earn much income. Unemployment reaches 80 per cent in most communities. Nevertheless we pay taxes.

Our economy is underdeveloped. Distances between communities and from major centres in southern Canada are vast. There are no roads. Transportation costs drive up the cost of everything. Our cost of living is several times higher than the southern Canadian average, as was pointed out by my colleague from Davenport. We lack the community infrastructure and services that other Canadians take for granted. We do not have control over our resources and the Nunavut bill does not give us that control.