

Private Members' Business

aboriginal rights and title which have not been dealt with by the treaties and other legal means. These agreements define the ways in which aboriginal people assert rights over land and natural resources.

Currently the Government of Canada, the provinces and territories and the First Nations are considering 11 of these comprehensive claims. Benefits of economic development which is most important will be part of these negotiations. We are moving forward on these claims with the goal of helping aboriginal people forge a path of self-sufficiency, a path that is an essential component of the inherent right of self-government.

At the same time however, there are some real obstacles. I am referring specifically to the Indian Act. The act gives the federal government the authority to strictly regulate First Nations and their lives. This includes reserve lands, elections, education, amusement centres, and so on. The act prevents the First Nations from managing their own affairs.

That is why the hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development recently announced the willingness of the government to amend the act if First Nations want these amendments. This of course would be an interim measure. The goal of the federal government and aboriginal peoples is to make self-government a reality. Under that reality there would be no need for the Indian Act.

Clearly, all this means redefining the role of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. What it really means is that the department's responsibilities will gradually be turned over to First Nations and the department will not be needed.

December 7, 1994 was a historic day for the Manitoba First Nations. The government along with Grand Chief Phil Fontaine of the Association of Manitoba Chiefs signed the first dismantling agreement for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. This agreement will give full control of program administration to the First Nations people of Manitoba.

Moreover, it sets the stage for real change for both the federal government and First Nations. Dismantling will eliminate the federal government's role in decision making affecting the daily lives of aboriginal people, a role dating back to 1876. It will go a long way toward resolving and restoring dignity, honour, self-reliance and self-government to the First Nations.

It is important to remember though that dismantling will not occur overnight. We agreed in the red book to wind down the department at a pace determined by the aboriginal people. This is significant given that our objective is to create real and meaningful partnerships with the aboriginal people.

This cannot be done by simply unilaterally imposing our will and our impressions of what should be changed and how things should change. We take our lead from those aboriginal leaders

and communities who have their own ideas, time frames and goals. Dismantling will be achieved based on negotiated agreements, reasonable action plans and realistic timetables, all of which will be established jointly by the federal and aboriginal governments.

Most important, dismantling will assist First Nations in implementing their inherent right to self-government. Ultimately this means gradually shutting down the department's regional office in Manitoba.

Our government is seeking to refurbish our relationship and rebuild its nature on a government to government basis. We can change the way we carry out our responsibilities. We can try to correct our past wrongs. We are creating a process by which aboriginal people will control their own lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): It is my duty to advise the House that pursuant to Standing Order 44, the original speaker, the member for Kamloops, will automatically close the debate.

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP): Madam Speaker, my comments will be very short.

This is one of those moments when the House of Commons works incredibly well on an issue in that all sides see merit in it. It is appropriate to recognize that all those who have spoken have done so in a sense as co-sponsors of this initiative. The positive aspect of Private Members' Business is that it is not a party event or initiative; it is simply an initiative that individual members take and it is supported in that fashion.

In light of what has been said and some concerns my hon. colleague raised regarding the term solidarity and whether that was appropriate or necessary, on second thought I tend to agree that mention of the term solidarity is not absolutely necessary. It is something that could be examined quickly in committee.

For clarification, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the members of the House to send this off to committee for further consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Is there unanimous consent?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I want the record to show it was a Liberal member at least—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): That is not a point of order; it is a point of debate.

Mr. Rideout: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, is it a request that this matter go off to committee or is it a request for a vote?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): The motion in effect would be to adopt it at second reading and send it to committee. We do not have unanimous consent.