

Private Members' Business

However, I would like to remind my hon. colleagues that the federal government developed this new program not only to help native people gain access to post-secondary education, but above all to make it easier for them to acquire a degree or a diploma. Post-secondary education is essential in order to enable aboriginal people to achieve their objectives of political autonomy and economic self-sufficiency.

The approach adopted by the current government is already showing encouraging results. I agree, Mr. Speaker, that there is still room for improvement.

However, I am convinced that with the increased participation and decision-making of native bands and councils, the current educational system will have a significant impact on the entire aboriginal community.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Nunatsiak again for making us aware of the importance of native people in our country and I hope that our government will have the opportunity in the coming months and years to devote more financial and human resources all the time so that native people, who are full members of Canada, enjoy a better, more abundant life that will not only be a credit to each and every one of us here in the House but also to the whole country to which I am proud to belong. Mr. Speaker, I know that all my colleagues here, and in particular those on the government side, fully support me in this and in the measures that we are putting forward to improve this situation.

[*English*]

Ms. Ethel Blondin (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank my hon. colleague from Nunatsiak for the opportunity to speak to the motion that he has brought forward dealing with aboriginal youth. The motion clearly states that what the government should consider is the development of special initiatives, in consultation with aboriginal peoples, to respond to the serious employment, education and health needs of aboriginal youth.

These are areas to which we can all truly relate and understand in light of many of the concerns that we face these days with our aboriginal youth across Canada. These concerns are not isolated to various regions. They are pervasive concerns. They go from coast to coast to

coast and from community to community, from family to family and from individual to individual.

The right hon. Leader of the Opposition, the leader of our party, stated that one of the key elements of success for any society is to make an investment in education. In the aboriginal communities we have come a long way since the early 1950s and the early parts of this century. My leader said: "Education is the best investment we can give to start to combat unemployment."

Our Prime Minister has said from time to time that the best social policy is a job. These two go hand in hand. We need to pool our resources and our efforts.

I consider this to be a non-partisan issue in that it concerns the future of Canada. If we were able to deliver from the onset a series of programs and initiatives that would help the aboriginal communities, a large portion of the costs of social services and programs would not necessarily be needed.

I want to refer to a number of experiences I have had. In the last week I was in Washington, D.C., when the President of the United States gave a state of the union address. In this address President Bush made a commitment to the youth of the United States to go forward with resources and initiatives that would help them train for a technological age which would better equip them.

What we have to do with the aboriginal community and the aboriginal youth is not to marginalize them to various sectors of training. We have to throw open the doors and make available education of every sort and every type. Aboriginal people may want to train for a particular career or a particular job, and that should be available to them.

I had the opportunity in December to tour my constituency and to visit a number of residential schools where I met at least 50 teenagers who were in their high school years. These are the future leaders of my particular area. I am sure that across Canada there are many such youths. These people are not people who are ridden with social malaise. These are not youth who are ridden with social problems. These are youth who have an optimistic future and who, given the opportunity, given the resources, given every bit of effort that we can muster, will be able to make it, not just through high school but to post-secondary education. I had the opportunity to speak