

Also this motion mentions uncertainty, distrust, cynicism and outrage among native people. In my opinion—and I think it was amply noted by two previous speakers—that outrage, cynicism, distrust and uncertainty is the product of more than a century of bad policies by all Governments and Parties in this country. I hope the action of the past week and a half has not been so scary to Indian people as to make that fragile relationship even worse, when there has been no need to do so. The Hon. Member knows that while I cannot comment on Cabinet matters, I am able as the Minister to state what the Government's policies and directions are and will be. I thank him for his motion, for giving me that opportunity.

During the eight months of this Government, its policy for Indian, Inuit and Métis people has been made as clear as a bell. There are some more things we can do, and more will be done, but after eight months the Government can feel great pride in the manner in which the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), all Members of Cabinet and the caucus have worked hard to make strides and to push forward aboriginal policies which support aboriginal people. Those policies are a matter of public record.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crombie: There was a First Ministers' Conference in which the federal position—and I say this especially to the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton)—was known in advance and discussed in three meetings prior to it. In that process the Prime Minister stated clearly the policies and attitudes of his Government, aspirations the aboriginal people have waited long to hear. The conference is a matter of public record; it was on television for two days.

Another ministerial meeting is scheduled for the first week of June to have another try at an accord and to discuss a work plan for the next two years which will result in some real accomplishment, in my opinion. It was a privilege to have assisted in this process, along with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie), and to have the Prime Minister reaffirm the significant initiatives which I have taken on behalf of the Ministry and on behalf of the Government.

The attempt at reaching consensus with the Premiers was done with the consensus and the participation of aboriginal groups. When it was obvious that the best possible agreement still fell short of the mark set by aboriginal groups, the Prime Minister suggested a time for reflection, a space of time to allow for exploration on how to proceed. What Canadians saw from the Prime Minister was a magnificent effort at conciliation and diplomacy which cannot by any stretch of anyone's imagination be termed a public relations exercise. As the Hon. Member's motion indicates, certainly there was a sense of disappointment that a compromise did not emerge at that time. However, none of the aboriginal representatives can doubt, nor do they doubt, the sincerity, energy, effort and intentions of this Government to do so. Indeed, Hon. Members know that I could walk in here and read for an hour the comments made by independent third parties, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, as testimony to the way in which the confer-

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ence went so well. But I will only bother the House with four lines from the Ottawa *Citizen*. Right after the conference this was said:

● (1430)

For the first time, the chairman of a conference was a man who knows how to negotiate. Prime Minister Mulroney's efforts to find consensus were a refreshing departure from Pierre Trudeau's confrontationalism.

The motion also says that I as the Minister have been engaged in creating goodwill amongst aboriginal peoples while the Government is preparing policies which would be prejudicial to aboriginal interests or to the special relationships which exist between them and the federal Government. Yes, ample goodwill has been created and more, I hope, will be created, not by any ambassadorial abilities which might be mine, but rather by the policies which this Government has begun to strengthen aboriginal communities, to remove obstacles which prevent them from controlling their lives and their destinies and to finally end colonial conditions which have resulted for them, the aboriginal people, in poverty and dependency.

As was announced in this House, the Prime Minister has shown the interest and priority which he attaches to the aboriginal peoples by asking me to chair a Cabinet committee on all aboriginal programs and policies. This committee will begin its work soon. I am sure there will be many items in the work plan, but there are three items on that work plan which I would like to make mention of in the House today and which I can mention specifically.

First on the work plan for the new Cabinet committee will be the Penner report. The Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior was the author and chairman of the committee that submitted that report. I also note Members in the House today from all Parties who formed the core of that parliamentary task force. The report of that parliamentary task force was tabled in this House in November, 1983. It was carried unanimously by all three political Parties. I am sure the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior has recognized many recommendations in that report which bears his name in the actions which have already been taken by this Government. The all-Party report recommended that the federal Government establish a new relationship which would have as a central element a recognition of self-government. He no doubt saw that as the central theme of the First Ministers' Conference.

The Hon. Member heard the Prime Minister mention pursuit of many processes leading to self-government, including developing the bilateral process which the Prime Minister committed his Government to at that conference. I am sure he has heard from his Indian constituents and others about long awaited policy changes which would enhance their community control. He has seen the introduction of legislation which asserts as a basic principle the right of Indian peoples to determine the membership of their own communities according to their own criteria. He has heard about new fiscal arrangements which are being developed leading to block multi-year funding for Indian governmental services so that Indian people can determine their own policies, set their own priorities and hold their own councils accountable.