

Government Orders

northern perspective, very little of what has been done to date seems to have been done for the benefit of the people who live in the north.

Lately, environmental concerns have prompted renewed interest in northern research and science. Toxic contaminants from outside Canada's borders have permeated the northern food chain.

This country needs a Polar Commission. There seems to be a widespread consensus on this fact, and increasingly southern Canadians have come to realize what we, Inuit, have always known. Canada is an Arctic nation. Seventy-five per cent of Canada lies within the Arctic or sub-Arctic. Canada's northern border forms along the longest ocean shoreline in the world. Canada is a circumpolar nation. We have much to contribute to the world in terms of increasing the world's knowledge about our environment.

We have consulted with interested groups on this legislation. All are supportive of the establishment of a Polar Commission. Again, there are some concerns. The purpose of the commission should be strengthened. The commission should be given a role in establishing goals and priorities. The imperative is missing.

In addition to canvassing the state of knowledge, the commission should advise the government on national goals, objectives, and priorities. It should provide direction. The commission should have the freedom to advise the government on any matter relating to the polar regions, at any time.

I am pleased that the language used in this bill refers to knowledge rather than the term "science". It seems that the government is assuming, within the scope of the word "knowledge", aboriginal knowledge. Perhaps the government could specify that aboriginal knowledge is included. Also, the government may wish to make clear that social science, as well as physical science, is covered by this commission.

Earlier, the minister gave the location of the head office. We have some concerns about the location of the head office of this commission. The government proposes to locate its head office in Ottawa, with regional offices in the north. We suggest that the head office should be in the north, with regional offices in the south.

We have some questions about the commission's budget. We want to ensure that sufficient financial resources are given to the commission to enable it to do a credible job. Again, the minister stated, earlier, that there are going to be about 12 commissioners, including a chairperson. I would suggest that a majority of these commissioners come from the north and have a very good knowledge—and I emphasize knowledge—of the north. I think it is very important that the commission, in its deliberations, should know exactly what it is talking about and who it should call on, whether it is in terms of animals, climate, or geography. Who better than the people of the north would know these things?

• (1250)

All these issues we will discuss in greater detail in the committee. For the moment, as I said earlier, we express our support in principle.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the previous two speakers and have enjoyed their comments. I am delighted to have an opportunity to add a few comments to those already made.

This particular piece of legislation to create an arctic commission is long overdue. If my memory serves me, I believe that we are the only polar nation that does not have a commission in place. I must say that, on behalf of the New Democrats in the House, we are pleased with this initiative coming out of the study made public at the end of May, 1988, and now we are taking action on this legislation.

I want to say from the outset that we are a northern nation. As a matter of fact, I think the global perception of Canada is just that, we are a northern people. The fact that the overwhelming majority of our land mass is Arctic or sub-Arctic only emphasizes the need for such a commission. The fact that our Arctic coastline is, by far, our longest coastline, brings home the fact that much needs to be done.

I recall, not long ago, being with the parliamentary delegation visiting the U.S.S.R. and meeting with the Arctic Institute of the U.S.S.R. We heard about all the Arctic and sub-Arctic research going on, in not only the hard sciences, but the social sciences and in all aspects of the northern environment, both in terms of physical aspects, as well as the human and cultural aspects. They