

The hon. member, as you will know, Mr. Speaker, coming from your home province, is not a lawyer but he has consistently taken an interest in bills in the justice area. He has made a very positive contribution because of his belief that we can change federal laws and make a positive contribution to people's lives in this country.

This is an example. I am very thankful to him, as I am to the hon. member for St. Catharines, the hon. member for Montmorency—Orleans, and all other hon. members.

There was some discussion at the committee level as to what effect this might have on aboriginal rights, treaties, and obligations of the federal and provincial governments. For the record, I would like to point out that clause 20 of the bill reads:

Nothing in this act shall be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any existing aboriginal or treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

The responsibilities and rights of our aboriginal peoples are made very clear in the Constitution Act. I want to put that on the record to assure them that there is nothing in this bill which threatens their rights.

At second reading I was very pleased to set out and talk about many of the details of this bill. This is a positive step forward. It is consistent with international law, with the agreements that we as a nation have taken. It will clear up some of the ambiguities that exist in the offshore area of Canada and fill in some of the gaps. As a result, for all individuals who take an interest in and use Canada's offshore area, this piece of legislation will certainly be welcomed.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be here for third reading on behalf of my colleagues who participated in the work of the legislative committee, the hon. member for Moncton and the hon. member from a vast part of the Northwest Territories whose constituents probably more directly than any other Canadians are affected by the provisions of this bill.

It appears to be a very technical piece of legislation. It is full of technicalities. The bottom line is clear. It is a gesture made toward the increasingly important part of our country, the part that lies to the north, the part that is offshore, the part that is becoming significant because of scientific and technological possibilities and because

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of the economic resources which are now close to being available to exploitation for the benefit of the people in the region and for the benefit of all Canada.

I could not help but stop, as I looked quickly through the bill, at clause 4 which provides:

For greater certainty, it is hereby declared that

(a) the internal waters and territorial sea (as defined in the act) form part of Canada;

It is a clear reminder to the international community that this territory and these waters are Canadian. They have been since the establishment of our country. We are prepared to exercise our responsibility and to assert a legislative regime as is being done in this legislation over that important part of our country.

I know that the bill has been brought forward before as Bill C-109 which because of prorogation never became law. I want to commend the Minister of Justice and the parliamentary secretary to the minister for the way in which the bill has been handled and for the fact that we are in the House today to give third reading to a very important piece of legislation.

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I too want to start my comments by thanking my colleagues who assisted me in working on this bill in the legislative committee.

Because of conflicting committee work and because of conflicting riding responsibilities, I was not able to participate as fully as I had intended and would have liked. I thank my colleagues for supporting me in this regard. Once again I thank the parliamentary secretary, the justice critic for the Liberal Party, and the House for their facilitation in allowing me to move my amendments albeit unsuccessfully.

This is an important bill. There is no question. We will be supporting it on third reading because we believe it is important to do the things that we are doing in this legislation finally. We had hoped to see some additional improvements because as is our job we look for the holes, the gaps, and the questionable bits of wording that while not intended to allow certain things to occur could facilitate them. I hope I am wrong. I hope our fears about using this as a tool to transfer jurisdiction to a province or to undermine federal labour or environmental law do not come about. You can be assured that if it does we will be back in this House saying we told you so