

### Oral Questions

shopping because his own department had given prior warning.

He knew but did nothing. Worse, he continually told Canadians that cross-border shopping and GST were not related.

The behaviour has so incensed Canadians in the business community that today the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses called on the Prime Minister in the interests of decency and honesty to fire his minister. When will the Prime Minister act on the federation's advice?

**Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue):** Mr. Speaker, I guess John Bulloch has been in the dark the same way as the hon. member because the statistics speak for themselves.

*Canadian Economic Observer*, a publication of Statistics Canada which was released early this morning—I am sure the hon. member has not read that yet—concluded that in 1987, the increases of cross-border shopping was 20 per cent. In 1988, it was 17 per cent; in 1989, it was 20 per cent; in 1990, it was 20 per cent and in the first two quarters of 1991, after the introduction of the GST and the scrapping of the unfair manufacturers' sales tax, the increase in the first quarter was only 2.3 per cent and in the second quarter, it was lowered to 1.3 per cent. That is progress.

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### LAND CLAIMS

**Mr. Robert E. Skelly (Comox—Alberni):** Mr. Speaker, before the last election, the Prime Minister signed a land claims agreement in principle with the chiefs of the Dene nation.

He said he was building a lasting relationship with the Dene people and a more united Canada.

Three years later, the agreement has disintegrated, Dene funding has been slashed, the government refuses to discuss outstanding issues and the Prime Minister is too busy to meet with the leaders of the Dene people.

Will the Prime Minister commit himself to meet with Dene national chief, Bill Erasmus, who is in Ottawa this week to resume building what he called a lasting relationship and a unified Canada that includes the Dene people?

**Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

It gives me an opportunity to remind the House of the remarkable progress we have made in dealing with land claims, introducing new specific claims policies, preparing in conjunction with aboriginal leadership new alternatives to the Indian Act and all of the debilitating impact that act has had on Indian people and on the new constitutional initiatives which my colleague, the minister responsible for Canadian unity has brought forward.

I meet regularly with the leaders of all First Nations people and have met Mr. Erasmus on numerous occasions. I find it unfortunate that he chose to persuade his people to abandon what was perhaps the most global and significant land claim agreement in all of Canadian history.

I hope we will have a chance to revisit that agreement in the not to distant future.

**Mr. Robert E. Skelly (Comox—Alberni):** Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question for the Prime Minister.

Twenty-four of 27 Dene communities have rejected the land claims agreement which extinguishes their aboriginal rights. In fact, no other group in Canada is required to surrender its rights under the Constitution or the Charter as a precondition of reaching agreements with the government.

Will the Prime Minister remove the extinguishment of constitutionally protected aboriginal rights as a precondition to settling land claims in this country?

Will he get back to the bargaining table with the Dene without the precondition of extinguishment?

**Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that many First Nations people have defined aboriginal rights under treaty, including the Dene people of the Western Arctic.

Furthermore, where those rights have not entirely been respected by previous governments, this government has made tremendous progress, as we did in Saskatchewan just last Friday when we signed an historic cost-sharing agreement with the government of the province of Saskatchewan to settle treaty land entitlements with some 27 First Nations bands of Saskatche-