

Adjournment Debate

These conferences, in which aboriginal peoples would fully participate, would entirely be dedicated to aboriginal constitutional matters. They would be convened every three years.

Further, the Prime Minister informed Chief Fontaine that the Government of Canada is prepared immediately, after proclamation of the Meech Lake Accord, to sit down with the representatives of aboriginal people and to set the agenda for these conferences.

Further, the Government of Canada is prepared to accelerate the timing of such a conference, which could be held as early as 1991, next year.

The Prime Minister also stated that, in addition to the First Ministers' Conferences on aboriginal constitutional matters, he would intend to invite representatives of aboriginal peoples to participate in all First Ministers' Conferences where matters are being discussed that directly affect the aboriginal peoples. This would include such things as the future provincehood for Yukon and the Northwest Territories. This represents a very significant commitment to address the constitutional concerns of the aboriginal peoples in Canada, in a manner that involves their full participation.

Recognizing that aboriginal peoples have other serious concerns, the Prime Minister also stated today that the Government of Canada is prepared to establish a major royal commission—and that is something that has been requested by native people—on native affairs. This commission would undertake a thorough and fundamental review of the relationship of aboriginal peoples with other elements of Canadian society. The terms of reference of such a commission would be drawn up in consultation with aboriginal peoples. The Government of Canada would be prepared to consider significant

native participation on this body and the appointment of a mutually acceptable chairman.

The Prime Minister noted the government's expectation that the impact of such a commission would be as far-reaching and beneficial as that of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

Madam Speaker, I am sure that members are aware that in 1981-82 significant constitutional changes took place, which included the recognition of the existing aboriginal and treaty rights set out in section 35 of the Constitution Act, and that this is of capital importance. Recently it has led to the far-reaching judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada. It has sharply influenced the actions of the Government of Canada in matters as diverse as fisheries regulation, the appointment of the treaty commission in Saskatchewan, and the design of our taxation systems. This will affect Canada's approach to land and resource management for the future.

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting treaty rights and stands ready to join the representatives of the aboriginal peoples in a joint effort to define those rights.

Once the Meech Lake Accord is ratified, the Government of Canada will be enabled to, and stands ready to act on and provide financial resources for these six commitments.

[Translation]

Madam Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

The House adjourned at 7.48 p.m.