A number of comments were made previously about the composition of the board. If I recall, the previous speaker said: "it is a racially segregated board".

• (1645)

The previous speaker from the Reform Party is quite wrong. This is a board which attempts to reconcile and to bring together, not to divide as I believe the previous speaker would do, peoples in the territory.

The composition of this board as of many other boards under the land claims legislation passed last spring in this Parliament will include representation by First Nation's people.

Both in consultation on the land claims and self–government legislation and on this legislation, many groups have been consulted and approved of this legislation: the Yukon Chamber of Mines, the Klondike Placer Miners Association, the Mining Association of Canada, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, the Yukon Territorial Government, all political parties within the Yukon Territory, the Council for Yukon Indians and the Gwich'in Tribal Council.

There have been a number of consultations with a wide variety of business interests, private interests and with the aboriginal people of Yukon.

As with the self–government and land claims legislation, this piece of legislation, Bill C–55, is supported by a number of groups in Yukon that want to see us move forward, that want to see Yukon have the respect and dignity that we should be accorded and to do something very significant not just for Yukon but for Canada.

What we are showing can be done within Canada is that we can respect the languages, the cultures and the historic traditions of all peoples within a certain territory, and we can do it under the flag of Canada.

In this time when there is discussion about the future and integrity of this country surely it should be a source of pride to all members of this House to have participated in this historic piece of legislation, of which this forms the third piece, to resolve these differences, to accommodate, to respect—let me underline respect—all of these factors and do it within a united Canada. This is historic.

I must address an issue raised by the previous speaker I believe from Skeena who made the point and came to the defence of Chief Paul Birckel from the Champagne Aishihik Band. The Champagne Aishihik Band is one of the bands noted in the land claims and self–government legislation. I must assure the member for Skeena that I am aware of a number of meetings that have taken place between the Champagne Aishihik and the Government of British Columbia. He can rest assured that the Government of British Columbia is taking very seriously the issues raised by the band of the Champagne Aishihik.

Where was the member for Skeena when his colleague in the Reform Party stood in this House last spring and called the people of the Champagne Aishihik Band lazy children and called the people of Yukon and aboriginal people peoples who were living in the south sea islands and conditions similar to that? Where was the member from the Reform Party in defending Chief Paul Birckel and the people of that band at that time?

It really is ironic that the member stands in this House today supposedly defending the people of the Champagne Aishihik Band yet last spring stood in this House voting against this very legislation that would enable the people of the Champagne Aishihik Band and other First Nation bands in Yukon to become more self–sufficient and to recognize their historic and traditional rights.

This kind of double talk certainly does not foster the future of our country. We are talking here about how we as a country from diverse regions with diverse languages, cultures and traditions live together. The United Nations has said in the past that we are one of the best countries in the world in which to live. Some in this House would dispute that. Most would not.

• (1650)

This particular piece of legislation completing the land claims and self–government legislation for Yukon respects and fosters the future of Canada, a united Canada and one that respects all peoples.

Pursuant to this legislation there have been some concerns raised, I mentioned earlier the one by the member for Skeena, in implicating that this piece of legislation contains an area of bias. That illustrates the profound difference between the philosophy of the New Democratic Party and the philosophy of the Reform Party. We feel as New Democrats that it is our job as elected representatives in this House, representing Canada as well as our own ridings, to bring people together in a positive way rather than find ways to divide people.

If our country is to move forward in the 21st century the responsibility we as legislators hold in this crucial time leading up to that period we must find ways for provinces, territories, different groups in this country to come together. It is shocking to me that there are people in this House who would undermine that objective.

I believe that the consensus that has been developed in Yukon around this piece of legislation and the companion pieces, Bills C–33 and C–34, illustrates that it is possible to achieve great things in this country. It does not come easily. This has been 21 years in negotiation. There have been many changes. There have been many people from all parts of the community who have been involved, some sadly who are even no longer with us.