

with a commitment that that kind of authorization will be sent to the Department to get cracking, particularly on surviving spouses' preferential share.

● (1300)

Once again, it is sad to see that what actually brought about the movement on Bill C-123 was the pressure of the 1984 Supreme Court ruling on fiduciary responsibility, and the 1985 and 1986 reports of the Auditor General which have forced the Government to move—rather than any kind of serious goodwill—jurisdiction and authority to First Nations. Perhaps the Minister could direct some of his remarks to the matter of trusts. What is the breakdown on those trusts? We have rather scanty information. We know that it is somewhere between \$900 million and \$1 billion. We know that around \$135 million of that is in minors' trusts, but if the Minister has the information, perhaps he could touch on how the rate of interest is paid on the trust funds, what the size of those trust funds are and what kinds of special efforts will be made to settle the surviving spouses' estates. Can he give the House some idea as to how quickly the proposal touched on by Mr. Goodwin in committee to actually establish those trusts under the control, administration and jurisdiction of First Nations will actually get under way? We might hear some kind of an announcement on that.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism) and Minister of State (Indian Affairs and Northern Development)): Mr. Speaker, I was going to suggest to the Hon. Member that I would be pleased to attend before the committee to answer all those questions, if we can find the chairman.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Valcourt: I think that would be the proper forum. I will be brief because we want this to be passed rapidly. I do not mind people disagreeing with my opinions. I believe in the right of every individual Member of Parliament and, indeed, of every Canadian to have the right to his own opinion. I do not like, however, having people put words in my mouth or imputing motives or other things to me. When I said that it would not be prudent, it was portrayed as if I consider aboriginal Canadians or Indians as people who cannot take care of their own business.

It is significant because I believe that the Department of Indian Affairs, or even matters affecting aboriginal Canadians should not be in the realm of politics, and we should try, as Members of Parliament, to address them without partisanship. It is significant in that regard that this Government is being accused of all sorts of things.

I listened to the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton) refer to the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada of 1984 that led to this. Obviously, the problem had surfaced before. I do not think that this Government was in office. So I do not think that assigning partisanship or motives to these important

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issues solves anything. When I said it was not prudent, it was because of the unsettled state of law and provincial and aboriginal opinions in the Department and in this Government on the issue of child welfare. I said it is not prudent—given the unsettled state of that—to allow a band council to refuse a minor or the guardian of that minor, because of the present state and the unsettled questions that are there. It would not be prudent for the kids. If I could be assured that by exercising that power I would have no responsibility left as a Minister of the Crown for those Indian children, I would not hesitate. But the law is not such. I guess in the end that both Members will acknowledge that this is not a major step but it is an important step and one which is welcomed by those Indians who are concerned by this.

The Government has moved. I want to thank both Members for their work in the committee. They have made a significant contribution. This being said, I invite my colleagues to give approval to this Bill at third reading.

Mr. Penner: We certainly will give approval. I just noted in the Minister's remarks that he did not comment on the question of compensation to those who were involved in the working group. The costs were large and it was the Minister's Department, of which he is the Minister of State, which encouraged this activity. Did he purposely neglect to comment on that or was it just an oversight?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner (Ottawa—Carleton)): The Minister may wish to respond.

Mr. Valcourt: Of course, Mr. Speaker, I always stay as far away as possible from making commitments that I cannot keep. I will look into the suggestions of the Hon. Member. I will want to know how the group was brought about and what kind of arrangements have been discussed, if this has been discussed at all, and I will get back to the Member on his question.

Motion agreed to and Bill read the third time and passed.

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CANADIAN CENTRE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare) moved that Bill C-143, an Act to establish the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, there have been prior consultations among the Parties. Our Projected Order of Business today included five Bills. The next one is Bill C-143. In the remaining three cases, the motion read: "Second reading and reference to a legislative committee". I think that we would find a general predisposition in the House, through unanimous consent, to change the wording of the motion to, "reference to