

Supply

Mr. Redway: Agreed.

Mr. Manly: Is that agreed, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Crosbie: No.

Mr. Manly: The Hon. Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie) is unwilling to have the New Democratic Party policy on aboriginal rights tabled, because he knows that our policy entrenches the right of aboriginal people to self-government.

With regard to the Coolican report indicating that there should be negotiations for self-government, I think the Hon. Member missed the point in what aboriginal people are saying. They are saying that they want the right recognized as an inherent right, not something given to them by the Government. They want it recognized as something which is inherent and theirs by virtue of being their aboriginal people. We would like to see the Government recognize that, and it has not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Charlesbourg (Mrs. Tardif).

Mrs. Monique Tardif (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question under debate today because it gives me an opportunity to highlight what the Government has done to improve the situation of aboriginal peoples.

Hon. Members now in the House know that the Government is committed to take measures designed to enable Canada's native peoples to regain control over their daily activities. I should think that everybody is aware that both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. McKnight) have stated that this is a priority.

As you undoubtedly know, Mr. Speaker, the federal Government has three ways to promote aboriginal self-determination: first, constitutional amendments; second, the adoption of new legislation; and third, changes to administrative procedures and policies within the structure of existing legislative statutes.

• (1740)

Constitutional amendments call for careful deliberations involving many participants and, in this respect, we have begun and are continuing discussions with aboriginal groups and the provincial governments. The First Ministers' Conference scheduled for next March 26 and 27 will deal with Indian self-government and all major participants will attend. Drafting new legislation also requires the active participation of various interests, yet we have managed to make significant progress in that field.

Last June the House passed the Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act. The proclamation of Bill C-93 attests to this Government's commitment to find local solutions to aboriginal problems.

The legislation recognizes the Sechelt band as a legal entity and provides for the transfer of the titles to all their lands. The specific powers of the Sechelt Government and the procedures for exercising those powers are being worked out.

My colleague, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. McKnight) is now looking at other self-government proposals submitted by other Indian groups.

Such long-term changes will provide native communities with durable benefits. We agree however that there is an urgent need for immediate action in various areas.

We are acting on this by bringing administrative amendments to the current program, which is the third way of facilitating self-government.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development traditionally has been responsible for providing Indians with a wide range of programs and services which outside the reserves are being provided for by provincial or municipal governments.

We believe that responsibility for those services must be transferred to local administrations. In that way, leaders of those communities will be more accountable to their members. That move also will help improve program implementation, and ultimately the quality of life of Indian communities.

One of this Government's main objectives, Mr. Speaker, is to make sure that Indians have as much control over their daily activities as non-native Canadians. That transfer of responsibilities or programs must take place in a way that is orderly and acceptable to all parties involved. Since they started exercising a certain measure of control over their local programs approximately 25 or 30 years ago, Indian bands have been competently providing such important programs as housing, education and social services. It would be worthwhile to recall today, Mr. Speaker, that 59 per cent of the Indian Affairs' budget is administered by the Indians bands. Since 16 per cent of services are provided for by the provincial Governments, this means that only 25 per cent of the budget is still administered by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to recall the progress made in some of those areas. Hon. Members will know that most Indian people live under conditions that are very dissimilar to those of non-native Canadians. The Indian economy is healthy, but unemployment is high compared to the national average. Therefore, many Indian communities are simply not in any position to provide their people with adequate housing at affordable prices.

In reserves generally, housing units have fewer rooms for a larger number of people as compared with non-native housing. A smaller but still significant number of Indian homes are not connected to water and sewer systems, facilities that most of us take for granted. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has seen first-hand those conditions during its numerous visits to Indian communities.