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NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Statement by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

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THE SENATE

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NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Hon. Larry W. Campbell: Honourable senators, I rise today to add my voice to those of thousands of Canadians from sea to sea who are celebrating National Aboriginal Day. The achievements of Canada's Aboriginal peoples are astounding. After dealing with decades of institutional oppression and government-sponsored attempts at assimilation, it is simply miraculous that Aboriginal culture has remained intact and that contributions such as environmental philosophy, sustainable agricultural systems and various economic practices have endured.

Canadians have been blessed with countless cultural benefits, such as Aboriginal art, music, dance and oral histories, all of which become hallmarks of the Canadian image and are internationally celebrated.

I cannot understand why it is so difficult for governments of all political stripes to once and for all solve the issue of Aboriginal claims and to help to raise the Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities out of poverty. Canada has the tendency to rest on its laurels of assumed multiculturalism, but recent reports such as those from Amnesty International and the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples have pointed out how far we need to go as a country before we can claim that our Aboriginal population enjoys the same quality of life as non-Aboriginal Canadians.

As all honourable senators know, the Aboriginal community faces struggles in terms of health, education, economic opportunities, housing and infrastructure. In my humble opinion, it is a travesty that any segment of our population should be in dire straits. I sincerely feel that intergovernmental agreements and consultative approaches, such as the Kelowna accord, will make a huge difference in the lives of Canadian Aboriginals.

• (1350)

I have the honour and the privilege to work with a great group of senators on the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, under the dedicated leadership of Senator St. Germain.

I hope we will be dealing with the Kelowna accord shortly so that we may begin to create a mutually beneficial dialogue between Aboriginals and all levels of government.

I ask all honourable senators on this day of the summer solstice to celebrate National Aboriginal Day and to join me in offering our best wishes for the celebrations of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Canadians. No one government can take responsibility for the position in which the Aboriginal peoples of Canada find themselves. It is our collective that has caused this and it will be our collective that gets us out of it.

As parliamentarians, we control the dialogue and, ultimately, the success of any dialogue. I call on all of us to take this responsibility very seriously.
