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MAANULTH FIRST NATIONS FINAL AGREEMENT BILL

Second Reading of Bill C-41

Speech by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

THE SENATE

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SECOND READING

Hon. Larry W. Campbell: Honourable senators, it is my pleasure to rise today and give my support for Bill C-41, which will give effect to the Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement. I want to assist Senator Grafstein, who said that the bill is small. I have in my hand one of two binders available to all senators to read. They contain a description of the treaty with respect to water. I urge the honourable senator to read it. We will address that issue in committee tonight if the bill is referred to committee today.

As honourable senators know, I was a proud supporter of the Tsawwassen First Nations Treaty, the first of its kind in Canada. The Tsawwassen First Nations have set a precedent for Canada's First Nations groups through self-governance, and have been exemplary in their efforts thus far. It is my hope that the Maa-nulth First Nations will be granted self-governance, further empowering them and giving them the opportunity to grow and thrive as a unique First Nations group.

This area is of special significance to me. I have spent many summers in the Broken Islands Group, fishing with members of this nation. It was probably the best salmon and halibut groundfishing I have had in the Broken Islands Group. More importantly, this area is of special significance to these First Nations. The villages that were there and their presence that you can feel when you are in that area is truly amazing. It is without a doubt to my mind one of the most beautiful places in the world, and these First Nations have respected that and grown on it.

These sorts of treaties are exactly the sort of efforts that Canada needs to encourage if we are serious about making good on Canada's reconciliation efforts based on last year's residential school apology.

The implementation of this agreement will mean democratic and accountable governments for the five Maa-nulth First Nations. Under the agreement, each First Nation will have the ability to levy direct taxes on their members, harvest wildlife on their lands for food, social or ceremonial purposes, and acquire commercial fishing licences. The Maa-nulth people will gain self-governance law-making powers with regard to their land, the resources on it, the dispensation of health services, adoption policies and education. They will have financial stability. Most importantly, they will have all these privileges knowing that they are constitutionally protected.

I am encouraged to see that the giant step toward self-governance taken by the Maa-nulth have been given great support. This treaty has been in process since 1992. The bill will not only foster stronger, more stable communities for the Maa-nulth peoples, but also will provide a framework for other First Nations across Canada and will promote positive relationships with the First Nations people nationwide.

Bill C-41 has support from local and provincial governments, from honourable senators in this place and our counterparts in the other place. Most importantly, the bill has the support of the Maa-nulth people. I thank the community members, elders and chiefs who have dedicated so much to bringing this treaty before us. I look forward to the rapid passage of this bill.
