



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

1st SESSION

• 39th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 143

• NUMBER 82

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Implementation of Kelowna Accord

Question by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

THE SENATE

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

IMPLEMENTATION OF KELOWNA ACCORD

Hon. Larry W. Campbell: My question is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Can she explain to honourable senators how her government can justify their inaction on Aboriginal issues?

Do I need to remind the leader that there is a perfectly good plan, drafted by 10 premiers, which received the endorsement of all major Aboriginal groups in Canada? The full implementation of the Kelowna accord would be a major step forward for Aboriginal people. By not implementing the accord, the Conservative government has sent the message to premiers and everyone else involved with drafting the accord, that they were wrong and their input is meaningless.

The government's refusal to apologize for the atrocities committed in the residential school system, their unwillingness to listen to native leaders and their ineffective response to Aboriginal land claims is tantamount to condoning systemic racism. When will this minority government realize its repeated shortcomings and implement, as well as provide funding for, the Kelowna accord?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): I thank Senator Campbell for that question. I absolutely reject the statements that he attributed to our government. I think any serious individual watching the efforts and the work being done by Minister Prentice would vehemently disagree with the preamble to his question. As I have stated in this place in the past, we all understand that the Kelowna accord was a statement of good intentions without a fiscal framework attached. I have made it clear that the minister and the government support the principles of the Kelowna accord.

The work that Minister Prentice is doing and the money that was allocated in Budget 2006 and Budget 2007 will go a long way to addressing many of the serious issues that are faced in the various Aboriginal communities. I want to reiterate that this government is concerned and I do not, for one moment, accept your statement that we do not care about our First Peoples. It is offensive, frankly, to use the word "racism" when dealing with issues like this.

As Senator Sibbeston said, this issue is of concern to all Canadians, whether they be Liberals or Conservatives, and partisan statements like that one should not enter into the debate.

• (1500)

Senator Campbell: Quite frankly, I find the honourable senator's answers to be offensive. Which part of this statement would she like to call offensive — the refusal to apologize for residential schools?

Senator Stratton: Did your government?

Senator Campbell: If that was not part of it, why are all the leaders asking for it?

Would it be the part about the unwillingness to listen to native leaders? Is it the ineffective response to the Aboriginal claims? There is nothing partisan at all about what I am saying. This is simply what the First Nations and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are asking for.

I would ask the honourable senator to take this matter to Minister Prentice and find out who is truly being untruthful here. Is it the minister, or is it the native leaders who say that they were promised an apology for what took place within the residential schools?

Senator LeBreton: I will be happy to take the honourable senator's comments to Minister Prentice.

Again, I will respond in terms of the residential schools issue. Negotiations began under the previous government and were brought to finality by the present government. Throughout the negotiations, which were overseen by a pre-eminent judge and attended by the Aboriginal community and government representatives, the issue of an apology was not part of the final residential schools settlement.

Why the various people at the table, when they were negotiating this settlement, did not raise the issue is something that only they can answer. The fact is that now we have the good news that we can proceed with completing these settlements. The issue of an apology was not part of the agreement.

I will be happy to make the honourable senator's strong views known to the minister.