CANADA

Debates of the Senate

1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 143 • NUMBER 93

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Residential School Settlement—Apology

Question by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Thursday, May 3, 2007

THE SENATE

Thursday, May 3, 2007

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SETTLEMENT—APOLOGY

Hon. Larry W. Campbell: My question is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. I listened intently as Minister Prentice spoke of how he thought it would be more appropriate to wait another five years before apologizing for atrocities committed in the residential school system. I especially loved his reasoning with some vague attempt at a correlation between the residential school system in Canada and post-apartheid South Africa. Let us be clear: Just because South Africa decided to put off its responsibility to apologize to Black South Africans does not make it right. I never knew that South Africa was the model we were trying to imitate.

Mr. Prentice is trying to compare apples and oranges so he has time to ensure an apology will not cost his government any money. This is just another example of this Conservative government's policy of cash over compassion.

Ever since I have been involved in politics, it has always amazed me how difficult it is for politicians in government, in general, to say those words: "I am sorry."

When will Minister Prentice stop making excuses, listen to Canadians and apologize to the victims of the residential school system?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government and Secretary of State (Seniors)): I thank the honourable senator for his question. As we all know, this has been a long, drawn-out process to try to resolve the issues of the residential school settlements.

On May 10, 2006, Minister Prentice announced that the Government of Canada had reached a fair, lasting and historic agreement. We concluded the agreements and budgeted $2.2 billion in Budget 2006 to address the legacy of residential schools. We are firmly committed to implementing the agreement.

We are also working toward implementing in the agreement elements such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a common experience payment and funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The commission will be empowered to travel across Canada and report its findings. Part of the settlement was the inclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Minister Prentice has worked hard to resolve this issue. In addition, a few days ago, the members of the House of Commons unanimously voted to apologize.

Senator Campbell: I appreciate the answer of the leader. I do not dispute that Minister Prentice has worked hard. He has appeared before our committee and I am not saying that he does not work hard.

What I am saying is that the First Nations and Aboriginal peoples of this country have almost unanimously asked for an apology. This is not attached to any money. This is not attached to truth and reconciliation. This is not attached to any such payments. They are simply asking for recognition that what went on in the past was not right.

Again, I ask when this government will live up to the promises of the previous government, which did say they would make an apology, and when can we expect that?

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, it is not clear to me what the previous government had decided to do. We inherited this issue and have tried to resolve it since we formed the government. Minister Prentice has worked hard, he has reached an agreement, and then further added the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which will address all of these issues. It behooves all of us to let this commission work with the various groups and come to an appropriate resolution of this issue.