

First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education in British Columbia Act

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Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC)

moved that Bill C-34, *An Act to provide for jurisdiction over education on First Nation lands in British Columbia*, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my enthusiastic support for Bill C-34, the first nations jurisdiction over education in British Columbia act. This is legislation that will give effect to future agreements in respect of first nations education in British Columbia. As I do so, I would like to acknowledge the support of the other parties in the House of Commons for this legislation. I know they will be speaking. My hope this afternoon is that through a display of cooperation and good faith on the part of all the parties in this honourable House that this legislation will clear the House this afternoon.

I note as well that the Chalo School of Fort Nelson First Nation, the Okanagan Indian Band school which is called Snc'c'mala?tn, and the Bella Bella Community School are with us today as the students watch the passage of this legislation.

Three parties signed an agreement earlier this year: Canada, the province of British Columbia and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, also known as FNEESC, in the province of B.C. The agreement enables first nations in British Columbia to assume meaningful control over education on reserve at both the elementary and the secondary school levels. Bill C-34 is the legislation that will give effect to these kinds of agreements.

This legislation is extremely important. In terms of the framework for self-governing first nations in this country, education is extremely important. Legislation such as this will provide the framework for a modern legislated school system driven by first nations in Canada. I would describe this legislation as the most important bill that I will have brought forward as Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It is something that I am quite passionate about. I have spoken for some time about this subject.

Essentially, at the present time--and I make this comment in a non-partisan way; I attribute responsibility to successive governments--we have not had a system of education for primary and secondary education in this country for first nation children. First nation children, frankly, have been the only children in Canada who have lacked an education system. Instead they have had the mere legislative authority of the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs expending a budget of approximately \$1.2 billion per year, with really a framework of only 30 employees in the department. What those departmental employees do is they basically administer one-off grants to individual schools.

What we have lacked is a school system. What we have lacked is a first nation driven school system that will provide first nations with authority over their own education which will inculcate a sense of possession on the part of the community, a sense of pride in the school system. What we have also lacked is working relationships between the respective provincial government and the first nation authorities working hand in glove to make sure that the system of education works properly and to make sure that there is provincial compatibility. That is very much at the heart of this particular legislation.

[Translation]

When the first nations take responsibility for developing curricula, defining educational standards and certifying teachers, I am convinced that the quality of on reserve

education will only improve and that this education will also be more pertinent for the students.

 (1600)

[English]

Over the years, dozens of studies have demonstrated that the quality of education that young people receive is one of the most accurate predictors of the standard of living that they will experience in adulthood. I was reading a report that was published not long ago and I was struck by the fact that an aboriginal woman who graduates from high school has the same opportunities throughout life that any other Canadian would. In fact, aboriginal children who graduate from high school carry on to succeed, whether it is as lawyers, doctors, engineers, tradespeople. They carry on and succeed at rates that exceed those of the Canadian population at large.

The challenge is high school. I was struck by the fact that an aboriginal woman who gets through high school has the capacity in her life to have a normal lifetime earning span, but an aboriginal child who does not graduate from high school will make over the course of his or her lifetime less than \$100,000 of private sector income in total. The longer one thinks about these numbers, the more disturbing they become.

The studies and pilot projects that have been done have demonstrated quite clearly that this sort of an approach encapsulated by the FNESC education system is one that will work. The pilot projects have been enormously successful. Well-educated young people will be the predictors of the increases in standard of living for those first nations that adopt this sort of report.

Recent reports by groups such as the Fraser and the C.D. Howe institutes reconfirm the disheartening truth about the majority of on reserve schools in this country and the educational outcomes of their learners. That is what we are all trying to cure, aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians alike.

Students who attend on reserve schools have in the past been much less likely to complete high school and to study at the post-secondary level than students who have attended provincial and private schools. I resolved and made it very clear when I became the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development that this was an issue that we were going to do something about, this was an issue that I would attack personally as a minister. It was with considerable pride in June of this year with Premier Campbell at my side and other representatives of FNESC that we signed the agreement that brought into place FNESC and prepared the way for this legislation here today.

 (1605)

[Translation]

This discrepancy in the quality of education has serious repercussions, not only on students in reserve schools, but on all Canadians as well. For example, it is likely that students who have attended a reserve school will one day experience long periods of unemployment.

That means that society can expect an increase in the demand for social programs as well as in associated costs. Given the rapid increase in the native population in Canada, the expectation is that these problems will become more serious.

[English]

Currently, approximately 120,000 first nations students attend on reserve elementary and secondary schools throughout Canada. This figure represents about 60% of all first nations students. The other 40% attend provincial or private schools either by choice or because their community does not have a school on the reserve. At present, band operated schools suffer from several significant disadvantages. They do not benefit from aggregated systems of service delivery, nor do they enjoy the legislated protection afforded to provincial schools.

[*Translation*]

Basically, education of the first nations remains in a kind of legal limbo and the Government of Canada serves as the main department of education for reserve schools.

[*English*]

Given the remote location of many first nation schools and communities, there is necessarily a large disconnect between many on reserve schools and the authorities that are supposed to manage them; that is, there is not a strong link, as is required, between the federal government which is technically responsible for education on reserve and the communities that manage the system on a day to day basis.

Bill C-34 proposes to eliminate these disadvantages for on reserve schools in British Columbia. I am convinced that the legislation will lead to significant improvements in the education outcomes for first nations students in the province by providing communities with the tools to improve the quality of education and to build on current success. As I will speak in a moment, my conviction is founded on a remarkable story of a first nation school in northeastern B.C., which I will come to in just a moment.

Bill C-34 is well drafted. It is not a lengthy piece of legislation. It establishes in clause 11 the first nations education authority to be managed by a board of directors in British Columbia.

The purpose of the legislation, as expressed in clause 4 is to allow individual agreements to be entered into between participating first nations.

I would emphasize that the first nations that decide to participate in this legislation are doing so voluntarily. They are doing so because of the strength, the wisdom and the compassion in their communities and their willingness to work toward the education of their children. They are voluntarily participating first nations.

It allows the first nations to enter into an agreement with respect to jurisdiction over education. The agreements that this legislation contemplates are agreements between Canada, the first nation and the province of British Columbia.

The fundamental concept underlying the legislation is really expressed in subclause 9(2), and it is referred to as transferability. I am going to quote this subclause, for the record:

A participating First Nation shall provide, or make provision for, education so as to allow students to transfer without academic penalty to an equivalent level in another school within the school system of British Columbia.

The underlying concept of this and the wisdom behind it is that we are trying to ensure transferability or compatibility between this first nation driven school system and the provincial system of education. The consequence is that students, upon graduation from high school, will have the same ability to qualify as other students in British Columbia for entrance whether it is into the trades, apprenticeships, technical colleges or universities. There will be full transferability. Likewise, the wisdom behind this is that the students, over the course of their high school education, for example, would be able to transfer back and forth from one school to another, maintaining the quality of education.

That is obviously not to say that there would not be unique aspects of the first nation education schools that would benefit the students. I have said myself over many years that what we need in the building of this remarkable country is strong first nation

partners. We need strong first nation children who know who they are, who know their history, who celebrate their language, who celebrate their traditions and who will assist all of us in building this remarkable country. They are part of the enduring strength of Canada. This school system as envisioned will celebrate that and allow a thousand flowers to flourish and bloom across this magnificent country.

The legislation itself allows for the school authorities to deal with matters which are pretty crucial to a system of education. It allows them, as expressed in clause 19, to establish standards that are applicable to education for curriculum, for examinations. It allows them to provide for a teacher certification process for those teachers who will teach in the primary and secondary schools. It provides, as well, for a teaching certification process for teachers who will participate in teaching language and culture to first nation students. It also allows for a process, among other things, of certifying schools.

 (1610)

The long and short of it, as set out in clause 23, is that the Indian Act ceases to apply. This is in a sense sectoral self-government legislation. It is legislation that allows first nations to assume full control over the education of their bright, young people. It does so in a way that is compatible and jurisdictionally integrated with the adjoining public school system.

We can see in all of this something that is quite remarkable and that really holds the keys for the future of our country.

I mentioned earlier that there is a remarkable story about a first nations school in northeastern B.C., and I will share it with my colleagues in the House. It is the Chalo School operated by the Fort Nelson First Nation. It was inspired by a hopeful yet potent idea that when a community took control over the education of its children, it built a stronger future for itself, a deeper sense of community and a stronger sense of place.

For generations, the only educational option available to the children of the Chalo School was the provincially operated school system. Attending schools in town, navigated a very different world for first nation students. They were following a curriculum that was completely disconnected from their lives on the reserve. Not surprisingly, very few first nation children performed well academically.

In 1981 the Chalo School took its first humble steps toward changing these outcomes with a single teacher, a small portable classroom and a handful of elementary students.

[*Translation*]

Today, almost 200 primary and secondary students attend this school, which has become the dynamic and flourishing centre of life on the reserve.

Earlier this year, 15 students passed 24 of the 27 provincial secondary exams in basic subjects such as mathematics and English.

The bill being studied will enable communities such as the one in Fort Nelson to achieve even better results. Even though the legislation targets only students in British Columbia, the proposed approach could be duplicated by other regions of the country.

 (1615)

[*English*]

I can advise the House that in the time since June, when this agreement was executed with the representatives of FNEC and the Premier of British Columbia, I and my department have had discussions with virtually every province in the country regarding

what I refer to as the model for the future of education for first nations in Canada. I acknowledge the hard work in British Columbia.

FNESC did not come into existence accidentally. It cannot be described as something that was created instantaneously. Very hard-working people have worked for many years to give birth to FNESC and to put British Columbia in a circumstance where there is the capacity on the ground to have a first nation driven education authority for the province of British Columbia. This has taken a lot of work by a lot of very fine and decent people, and we as Canadians are indebted to them.

I salute as well Premier Campbell, who has shown leadership on this. He has ensured that we are working together in British Columbia with our first nation partners. I celebrate and salute his efforts as a Canadian in shepherding this legislation through in British Columbia and for the commitment that B.C. has shown. At the end of the day, this does not work if governments retreat to their jurisdictional compartments. It works based on cooperation and an honestly held sense of the way forward.

A similar agreement in a different form has now been signed in a tentative way in Quebec. I can assure the House that I have had discussions with virtually all other provinces to implement this across Canada.

Today members of the House have an opportunity to show support for first nations across Canada. We have an opportunity to provide first nations in British Columbia with the means to deliver a high quality, meaningful education. We have before us legislation that will inspire hope in all first nations. It is a bill that speaks to the future of Canada.

I know this if I know nothing else about my term as the [Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development](#). If we can make the education system work and if we can graduate bright, young, capable, articulate, dynamic children from high school, then everything else will take care of itself and our country will be a brighter place.

I urge my colleagues to support Bill C-34.



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Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the minister for introducing the bill. I also applaud the B.C. first nations for all the outstanding work they have done over the last number of years. I know they are going to enjoy tremendous success as they move forward.

I also see success happening in other parts of the country as well. For example, in northern Saskatchewan on reserve graduation rates have gone through the roof. In 1998 the graduation rate was 34%. In 2004 the graduation rate of students in grade 12 was 92%. It is great to see that kind of success across the country. I can envision different models being implemented across the country as we move into the future.

What kind of resources is the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development committing to the First Nations Education Council and how is it going to help them to support and build their capacity as we move forward?



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Hon. Jim Prentice:

Mr. Speaker, on the resources, this is the part of the agreement that has been struck. The resources have been well defined at this point and we will continue to work with FNESC to ensure there are adequate resources applied to make this work.

I spoke of the wonderful people at FNESC, and I will really emphasize this because it warrants attention. It speaks to possession of education and possession of an education system about which people feel strongly.

The wonderful people at FNESC have really achieved remarkable things with very little support from government over a long period of time, and I applaud them for that. They have achieved a level of capacity which we see in some places elsewhere in Canada, but not as consistently as we see in British Columbia. They have achieved that on their own. They have not achieved that with the assistance of the Government of Canada or anyone else. We have all worked with them. We have tried to provide resources where possible, but it really has been volunteer-driven, driven by hard-working people in the

communities who are passionate about their children and passionate about education. We can all learn a lot from that.

I respect what the member has said and I appreciate that we need to apply adequate resources to make this work elsewhere. One of the challenges will be to try in some of the other provinces to get an organization like FNEC up to the adequate level of capacity quickly enough to do this. We will monitor the resourcing situation very closely.

 (1620)

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Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): 

Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I too want to say unequivocally that I will be recommending to my colleagues that we support this important legislation. I am pleased to be part of a process that will facilitate the rapid passage of the bill so we can move forward.

We have all heard that the framework agreement was signed by the federal government. It is important to reiterate the fact that it was signed by the federal government in cooperation with the provincial government and the first nations in British Columbia. I too want to acknowledge that it is an important step for first nations to control first nations education in British Columbia.

The legislation outlines the process of transferring jurisdictional responsibilities to those first nations that are interested in on reserve education for children in kindergarten up to grade 12, as underlined by the minister.

As we have heard, the proposed legislation will allow first nations to design and deliver the educational programs that are culturally relevant for their communities. It is an important first step because, as the minister indicated, it comes from the community.

As we talk about aboriginal learning and in keeping with the comments above, I will put on the record the words of our newly elected leader on this side of the House. He said:

As a university professor I know as well as anybody the difference that education makes in peoples' lives. I have seen young people discover new things about themselves and the world around them, become passionate about learning, gain the confidence to take on the challenges of the world around them. We can, and we must, make sure that more aboriginal people have these opportunities and experiences.

I put that on the record to underline the importance that we on this side of the House apply to education and that all young people have access to education. Many aboriginal young people live in significant poverty and they should not have to in a country as rich as ours. For many who live in these circumstances, education is the way to a fuller and more fulsome life. The importance of education cannot be underestimated.

The standing committee indicated its priority on education by undertaking a study on post-secondary education. The Kelowna accord, agreed to by the previous government, also outlined and funded a plan to improve education. This plan was developed by the communities themselves and appropriate for their jurisdictions.

The plan included: \$100 million over five years for urban, Métis and northern aboriginal initiatives that already existed to better prepare children for school; over \$1 billion over five years to promote education innovation on reserve; \$150 million over the next five years for off reserve initiatives, including \$50 million to improve education in the north; and \$500 million over the next five years in the form of bursaries, scholarships and apprenticeships to help fulfill target graduation rates of over 14,000 aboriginal graduates in five years and 37,000 graduates in 10 years.

Clearly, everyone on all sides of the House recognize the importance of education and the need to improve educational opportunities for young people who live on reserves.

 (1625)

Much like other communities, the first nations of Canada want the ability to educate their children in the three Rs while ensuring their children learn about their own rich cultural heritage. The passing of this bill will ensure that individual first nations that so choose will have the ability to set their own curriculum, a curriculum that combines the learning that occurs in all schools across the province with their own culturally specific learning. I emphasize that because it is very important.

The act would enable individual reserves to educate their students about their own cultural traditions and heritage. This is an important aspect for first nations to have in the education of their children. Perhaps we may seize at some point some augmentation of dollars going to these communities for the aboriginal languages and the aboriginal culture that was mentioned by the minister. This is an important aspect of the education.

The act is an important guideline for the development of future negotiations with first nations regarding education: collaborative, cooperative, and with much consultation for the grassroots. It is the people who are on the ground who know the kind of education that is important for their children. This has been done in a very meaningful way in British Columbia and I commend all parties to the process.

The bill provides a new opportunity to the first nations in British Columbia and as I said earlier, those first nations that so choose to take advantage of the opportunity will be able to control the development and delivery of education in their communities, in all aspects of education from teacher certification, to school certification, and to the establishment of curriculum and examination standards. They will deliver the program.

This is important, but I do want to raise one or two precautionary concerns about the bill and I want to go on record in that regard. It is important to recognize and understand that what works in British Columbia may not work in Labrador, and may not work in Manitoba and may not work in Quebec or any other part of the country or any other jurisdiction. This is made in British Columbia for British Columbia first nations. What works in one part of the country or in one community may not be what is needed elsewhere.

The same steps that went into developing this act in British Columbia must be taken in other parts of the country to implement appropriate framework agreements for those jurisdictions: consultation, local input, local needs assessment, consideration of local governance models, diverse languages, diverse cultures, and socio-economic factors. It is not a one size fits all. I want to emphasize our concern that this not be regarded as the template for across the country.

My colleague previously asked the question about financial considerations and the minister responded how well the communities in British Columbia managed without any additional government intervention. I am concerned that there are no specific dollars identified for this initiative. The minister says what resources will be needed will be there, but I need further clarification. I need some understanding of what that means, what kind of support will be available for the communities there, and ultimately when education initiatives are developed across the country for others.

The other issue I want to focus on very briefly is the importance of capacity building in the communities. Capacity building may refer to bricks and mortar and supplies in the hard issues. However, even more importantly, capacity building entails the investment in individuals so that they have the resources to deliver the kind of education system required, they have the opportunities for teacher training, they have the opportunities for education in management, they have the opportunities for scientific studies, and they have the opportunities for the kind of development of leadership in educational authorities to provide the necessity for young people.

 (1630)

I had the pleasure to meet with the members of the community who have been involved in developing this plan. I know their passion. I know their commitment. I promised them at the time that we would do nothing to delay the implementation of what

I view as an important piece of legislation. I stand by my word to them today. I throw the weight, I hope, of my entire caucus and certainly of my leader behind this initiative that strives to improve the education of first nations school children in British Columbia.

In doing so, I want to reiterate my concern to the minority Conservative government about not using this as a template for the rest of the country. It must ensure that there are adequate resources available so that this will not flounder, so that it will be a success and to ensure that there is the opportunity for capacity building, as I said, bricks and mortar and human beings.

I am someone who has had an up close and somewhat intimate experience in the establishment of aboriginal schools in an urban setting. I know the importance of community commitment. I know the importance of a meaningful investment in curriculum adaptation, in curriculum implementation, and the investment in the people themselves. Therefore, I urge the minister to take these into consideration as the bill moves forward.

We all know, as we have heard, that the current delivery system of education for first nations children on reserves has many challenges. I commit personally, and I commit on behalf of my party, a willingness to work with anyone who is interested in improving the educational opportunities to make a better life for aboriginal children.

Therefore, I reiterate my support for the bill.

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Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): 

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend my colleague for her careful analysis of the bill and her support in meeting with the aboriginal leaders. I commend the government as well for bringing it forward. I commend the chiefs and councils, and first nations people in B.C. for all their work to make this possible.

I want to reiterate the member's concern to ensure that resources are available. The minister talked about this. We want to ensure that the message is clear. In the past when schools have failed, it was because they were getting less funding per capita than schools in the public system. We want to ensure that this new system has a fair start and has a chance to succeed by having the funding at least equivalent to other schools at those levels in Canada.

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Hon. Anita Neville: 

I was not sure that warrants a response, Mr. Speaker, but I share my colleague's concerns. We all want this to be successful. I think that, speaking for this side of the House and I am sure for others, we want to ensure that all of the ingredients are in place and the ingredients include financial resources to ensure that this bill and this educational initiative is a success.

 (1635)

[Translation]

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Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that we have visitors who will be learning another language because they have to listen to me in French, which is a good thing. I would like to welcome them to this House to witness a debate that is not really a debate.

It is rare for all of the parties to support moving a bill through all of the stages as quickly as possible. That is what is happening with Bill C-34. When political parties, including the Bloc Québécois, recognize the fundamental value of a bill, they ensure that it is passed as soon as possible and encounters as few obstacles as possible so that it can be implemented for those who need it most.

Who are the people who need this bill the most? It might seem that the Bloc Québécois has no business talking about Bill C-34, which is about first nations education in British Columbia. However, when we read the bill, we saw clearly that the department had finally done its homework, as it should. We received mountains of documentation and I took the time to look at all of the work that had been done prior to the bill coming before us. A lot of work was done, work that took much longer than two months. So we must not take two months to study this bill, which fulfills all of the conditions set by the first nations of British Columbia.

Who will benefit from this bill? Six thousand students in British Columbia—6,000 first nations students attending schools on reserves, and possibly 11,000 others attending schools under the jurisdiction of the Province of British Columbia.

What should be emphasized in this bill, what I think is the most important aspect, is that it is going to grant jurisdiction to participating first nations. That word is important. In this House—I will probably not be alone—I am going to invite the first nations of British Columbia to come together under the authority that will be established to carry out the program developed by the first nations. This program will be concerned with education on the reserves, from kindergarten to grade 12. It should be respectful of first nation customs and first nation languages. This is one of the things most painfully explained to the committee.

Let me explain. We are studying—and we are soon going to submit a report on this subject—first nations education at the post-secondary level. Before we can support the post-secondary level, however, we have to begin by taking care of the elementary level. We have been told that what is happening now, not only among the first nations, but also among the Inuit, is that they are at risk of losing their culture. Every effort must be made to avoid that. That is why the Bloc Québécois will support this bill, so that it can be passed as quickly as possible, because we must prevent the first nations from losing their cultures and their languages. We are well placed, we of the Quebec nation, to know that we risk losing our culture and our language if we do not take every means available to defend them. What we can do—quickly—to defend the cultures and languages of the aboriginal peoples is to pass this bill quickly.

This bill also provides for the creation of an education authority, hence an agreement between Canada and the first nations.

 (1640)

There will be a transfer.

My colleague from the Liberal Party and the members of the Bloc Québécois—and I am almost certain that my colleague from the NDP as well—agree with the transfer of jurisdiction over education with respect to the first nations. However, when we say “a transfer of jurisdiction” we also mean a transfer of the funding that goes with the jurisdiction that will now be delegated to the first nations.

In the coming months, in order to speed up the vote to implement this bill, we will make sure that this government includes in its next budget the money required to put Bill C-34 into effect.

This is essential and very important because it is all well and good to transfer jurisdiction to the first nations, but if we do not transfer the necessary funding, this has little meaning and we are talking in a vacuum. It is especially important to do this because this bill is very important.

As the minister was saying earlier—and allow me to underscore this because it is in the legislation and the government will now have to respect it—clause 9 states:

A participating First Nation has, to the extent provided by an individual agreement, the power

- (a) to enact laws respecting education on First Nation land; and
- (b) to delegate to the Authority its power to make laws under paragraph (a).

As the saying goes, the legislator does not speak in vain; so, what this very important section says is that once the participating first nations have signed an agreement, the government will transfer to them the authority to enact laws respecting education.

I believe, as does the Bloc Québécois, that this is the proof that we want and desire that the first nations will not only have complete control over their education—from kindergarten to grade 12—but that such an education will be adapted to their skills, their culture and their language.

How will this culture and language be protected within this program? Clause 9(2) states the following:

(2) A participating First Nation shall provide, or make provision for, education so as to allow students to transfer without academic penalty to an equivalent level in another school within the school system of British Columbia.

Unfortunately, we know that when first nations students arrive at another secondary school, they often have to take remedial courses. Under clause 9(2) that will no longer be the case. The school authority will be responsible for all education and will do its utmost to ensure that these students take the time they need to succeed. If there is one thing that is important and vital, it is the success of first nations students.

We have seen the statistics. They can succeed, they are capable of succeeding, they are able to take their rightful places not only within their own community, but also within Canadian, Albertan, British Columbian and Quebec society. We will support this bill.

  (1645)

We have also seen that everything has been done so that the first nations in British Columbia can establish a competent education authority capable of administering education in British Columbia for the first nations.

This bill is vital to the future of the first nations. I believe that it gives them and will give them what they want most: autonomy. It is a first step toward autonomy.

Allow me to explain. Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.

Autonomy begins with education. With this bill, we think and we believe that the first nations are taking their first step toward autonomy.

We are going to support this bill, but we want to ask the minister and the departmental officials whether such an agreement could be signed by other provinces and especially by other aboriginal, first nations and Inuit communities across Canada. I am thinking specifically of the first nations in Quebec.

We believe that such a bill could be extremely worthwhile, and I invite the leaders of the first nations in Quebec who are watching today to look carefully at this bill and consider whether it could apply to the first nations and Inuit in Quebec.

We firmly believe that this bill is an important step toward aboriginal self-determination.

I will conclude, as I do not want to go on any longer because, unfortunately, I am suffering from the flu, but also because this is one of those rare bills that will receive the unanimous support of this House.

We therefore ask that this bill be passed as quickly as possible. We will support this bill.

[English]

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Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): 

Mr. Speaker, as the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and being from British Columbia, I am pleased to speak in support of this bill. New Democrats fully support this bill and are

pleased to see that all parties in the House have come together to fast-track this important initiative.

I think it is important to put it in context about why this is such an important bill. The department's own materials show that first nations' education in British Columbia has lagged behind provincial norms and standards, not in terms of the quality of the education but in terms of results. It talks about the fact that there are currently 125 schools operating on reserve in British Columbia and the fact that the graduation rate was only 43% for grade 12 students living on reserve and 48% for aboriginal students living off reserve. This compares to statistics overall in the province where 79% of non-aboriginal students graduate from high school. I think it is important to emphasize that there is not a significant difference between on reserve and off reserve schools for first nations, Métis and Inuit students. I think it is important to talk about what needs to be done to address that gap both on and off reserve.

In addition, the 2004 Auditor General's report on elementary and secondary education talked about the fact that this gap was so serious that at the current rate of initiatives that were underway that it would take 28 years to close that gap, which is clearly not acceptable.

It has been a long-standing contention of first nations peoples that they need to take control of their education. In fact this goes back to a 1972 research paper called control of Indian education. We are talking about decades that the first nations peoples have been talking about the fact that they need to the right and the ability to assert jurisdiction over first nations education.

As a result of that document in 1972, the first nations education steering committee was established in 1992, 20 years later I might add but it did happen. From thereon in, first nations across British Columbia have been stepping in and asserting their right to control first nations education in B.C. To their credit, I must mention that the elders, the first nations' chiefs and their councillors, the community members, the students in school and their teachers, all came together to talk about how important this was and to put initiatives in place.

One of the things that people have been talking about is the importance of asserting control, not only over the schools but also around the curriculum and the delivery methodologies, and around a wide variety of tools and mechanisms that first nations know will work in increasing their success rates.

* * *

  (1650)

Business of the House

[Business of the House]

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Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): 

Mr. Speaker, I rise on point of order. I extend my apologies to the hon. member for interrupting her but I have spoken with the House leader of the New Democrat Party about this particular point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I think that you would find unanimous consent in the House for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, the House shall proceed with Government Business No. 12 as follows:

when the motion is called on Wednesday, December 6, private members' business shall be held as usual and the House shall sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering

Government Business Motion No. 12;

after the first round of speakers, no member shall speak for more than 10 minutes and that following each speech a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses thereto; the Speaker shall not receive any amendments, dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent during debate;

at midnight, or when no member rises to speak, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day; and that on Thursday, December 7, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions, every question necessary for the disposal of Government Business Motion No. 12 shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):  

Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

* * *

[English]

First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education In British Columbia Act

[Government Orders]

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-34, *An Act to provide for jurisdiction over education on First Nation lands in British Columbia*, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):  

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has 15 minutes remaining in her speech.

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Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):  

Mr. Speaker, I know that for people observing the proceedings there are sometimes important matters that need to come before the House and be dealt with expeditiously. We all try to cooperate in order to have those kinds of things happen.

I was starting to talk about the process. In this context, I think it is important to reiterate comments that have already been made. This is a made in B.C. solution. This is a solution that works for first nations peoples across British Columbia. It was done through an extensive consultation process. I would argue that each and every province and territory in this country must come up with its own solutions. The process must be driven by first nations communities. It cannot be a top down process.

To that end, extensive consultations took place in British Columbia. From 2003 to 2006, the first nations education steering committee held a variety of regional and

community meetings. This was all part of the process to talk about what an agreement like this should look like, what a tripartite agreement should look like, what the important elements were, what needed to be included, and how the community needed to be involved. As a result, we have ended up with a piece of legislation that truly reflects a consultation in British Columbia and has ended with an agreement that is going to work for British Columbia.

Part of that agreement includes things like jurisdiction over data collection and school certification. Although that is going to meet provincial standards so that there is a seamlessness between the provincial education system and the on reserve education system, there is a recognition that some things need to be under the control of the first nations. In addition, in case people think this is something that was pulled out of the air, for seven years there was a first nations school assessment project that talked about the successes, the best practices, what was working well and what did not work.

This is a critical opportunity to integrate culture and language into the first nations school systems in order to ensure the survival of the language, which is essential for the survival of the culture.

One of the things that people are expecting as an outcome is the fact that we fully expect from assessments that have been done in British Columbia that there will be better outcomes. I know that students have travelled to Ottawa for this very important occasion. There are students from Chalo, Bella Bella and the Kamloops Indian Band who came here to observe the process.

Chalo was named one of the 10 exemplary programs for aboriginal learners in western Canada and the Yukon, based on student achievement data. Clearly when there is Indian control over Indian education we can end up with results that say these students can be successful by any criteria that is put before them. The evidence is before the House. I fully expect that we will see more students like the ones from Chalo graduating and meeting those achievement tests.

One of the things we have talked about in the House is how critical it is to make sure that there are resources and funding available, not only to provide for the per capita per student basis, but also to talk about infrastructure, teacher education and curriculum development. It just will not be good enough if the House passes this bill, as it will, but fails to provide the resources and the funding to make sure that first nations students can be the very best they want to be.

I am going to step outside of the province for just one moment and talk about a school called the Mosakahiken school. This school burned down on February 12, 2005. The fire destroyed the Frontier School Division's Rod Martin School and left 381 students without education facilities. Now we are in 2006 and a submission will not even go to Treasury Board until 2007 to rebuild this school. There are 381 students in that community who are farmed out across the community in portables and basements. It is not an ideal situation for education.



We do not want to see that kind of situation in British Columbia, so I would urge all members of the House and certainly the government to ensure that appropriate resources are put into making sure that state of the art schools are available for students.

The projections for this particular school, based on student population growth, show a need for a school that will house 650 students and an allowable growth area of 5,110 square metres on a site of eight hectares. It is a significant need. I would hope that there would be a way to fast track that request through Treasury Board so that students are not treated as second class citizens in their own community.

One of the things we have been talking about in regard to the importance of first nations education is around language. We know that British Columbia has two-thirds of the first nations languages in Canada but currently receives only 10% of the national

funding. If B.C. has two-thirds of the languages in Canada, surely there should be an equitable amount of funding that would support those language initiatives. I would argue that in the K to 12 system it is absolutely critical to make sure funding is there for language initiatives in a way that looks at state of the art language labs, curriculum for the teachers, teaching assistants and whatever it takes to make sure that the language stays vital and alive, because it is essential to the culture.

As we are talking about language, I want to take it up to an international context just for a second. In the preamble of the 2005 declaration on the protection of indigenous languages--and I think this is why it is so important to talk about languages in the context of the K to 12 system--it is stated that:

We, the Indigenous People of the Americas, consider our Languages to be a sacred and inalienable gift, for it is through our languages that our world view is defined.

We, the Indigenous peoples of the Americas as a collective have experienced both isolationist and assimilationist government policies which have, with the participation of all levels of government, significantly encroached on the fundamental right of Indigenous nations' languages.

I think that says it all.

Recently we have seen some funding cuts to language programs through the heritage department, cuts that will significantly impact on first nations people, Métis people and Inuit people from coast to coast to coast in regard to making sure their languages stay vital and alive. We know the elders are passing and we must make sure that the transmission of that language from the elders to their grandchildren happens. Without some support to capture their words, we are going to lose those words.

In my own riding of [Nanaimo—Cowichan](#) right now, Halkomelem is the language of the Cowichan people, and there is a dictionary project under way. This project is happening in collaboration with the Cowichan people and the non-first nations people in the community. They are working together to make sure that they build a record of the Halkomelem language, that they have the words written down so the young people have a way to learn when the elders are not with them any more. They are recording the elders' speeches so that the young people have a way to hear the elders speaking to them, because they know that without that language they are going to lose their culture.

When we are talking about first nations education, I would urge hon. members not to lose sight of the fact that an essential part of first nations education is the language, which then helps the survival of the culture.

I will wind up here, but I want to talk about the fact that this is an example of how the House has been able to work together to support a very important initiative in British Columbia. I commend the House for its willingness to do this. It is an example of how we might look at some other very important issues like language, housing and water. I would hope that we could find some solutions that work, just as this very successful example before the House right now has worked.

 (1700)

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Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): 

Mr. Speaker, I have been wanting to ask this question for a long time. The member just alluded to it. It is about the linkage between language and culture and how important that is. We have heard that statement very often in this place with regard to many issues that have come before this place and that I am sure will come before this place in the future.

I know the member is very knowledgeable in this area. Would she give us a little more of her knowledge about the circumstances as they have evolved and about what is happening within the aboriginal communities to try to retain and to bring back or to renew the aboriginal languages so that the cultures can revive themselves?

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Ms. Jean Crowder: 

Mr. Speaker, what we have had happening from coast to coast to coast is a number of very good practices, but there has been no way to actually pull those best practices together and share them.

For example, in Nanaimo--Cowichan, the Cowichan people have a language lab that is set up for children under the age of six. It is a wonderful lab that has computer stations and learning tools for those kids. The problem, of course, is continuing to fund it. I also have talked about the dictionary project in the riding.

In other parts of the country, there are web based tools whereby people can log online to their language. Not only can they see the verbal parts of it, but they can also see the written parts of the language. There has been a real effort, because many of these traditions are oral. There have been many efforts to actually put these oral traditions in writing so a written legacy is left behind, because again, as I have said, the elders are passing.

Those are just a couple of examples. One of the ways in which we can encourage and support the retention of first nations languages across the country is having that repository of best practices so that people can share the tools that have worked well in some of their communities.

  (1705)

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):  

Pursuant to order made on Monday, December 4, Bill C-34 is deemed read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed.

(Bill deemed read the second time, considered in committee, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)