

## MP Dennis Bevington speech on the Mackenzie Gas Project Impacts Act in the House of Commons on October 29, 2013.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to debate this particular bill, another omnibus bill coming from the Conservative Party, which contains a number of very significant issues.

One of those issues deals with an act that is really only directed toward the constituency I represent, the Northwest Territories. It is called the amendments to the Mackenzie Gas Project Impacts Act, and the bill changes the conditions of a particular fund that was set up through the work of the previous Liberal government and then through the work of the Conservative government in 2006 to deal with potential impacts from the Mackenzie gas project, a project that was put forward by Imperial Oil and, throughout the last decade, went through environment assessment.

Support of most first nations groups along the Mackenzie Valley was achieved for this 1,200-kilometre-long pipeline with a collector field in the Mackenzie Delta. The Inuvialuit of that region also supported the project. We did go through a process by which this project achieved support.

Part of that support came because of the decision by the federal government, both Liberals and Conservatives at the time, to provide socio-economic impact fund to the communities. This fund, which was established as a trust fund of \$500 million, was to be divided among the communities, the regions, the aboriginal organizations that represented the regions down the Mackenzie Valley and in the Mackenzie Delta. The Dehcho region was to receive \$150 million; the Gwich'in region, \$82 million; the Tulita-Deline region, \$61 million; the Inuvialuit \$150 million; and the Kasho Gotine-Colville region, \$57 million.

These sums were to be distributed over 10 years once the project had been approved and we had seen work going forward with the project, once the companies had initiated efforts to start the project. This money was clearly identified for socio-economic impacts over 10 years, so that the sums of money were to be used for projects designed and developed by the communities.

These communities up and down the Mackenzie Valley, in the Mackenzie Delta, went through an extensive process to identify what they saw were their concerns in developing this pipeline: how it would affect their communities, how their communities could alleviate some of the impacts of such a major project, a \$16 billion project, being conducted in an area where there were mostly traditional communities in very much pristine wilderness.

We had a situation where these communities had gone into a two-year planning process and came up with detailed plans of how these dollars were to be spent. The government at the time, through an act of Parliament, set up an independent corporation that would manage these funds and ensure that the corporation would only provide contributions to regional organizations in respect of a project if the project mitigated the existing or anticipated socio-economic impacts on the communities in the Northwest Territories arising from the Mackenzie gas project. Quite clearly, this was designed solely for that purpose.

There was an independent body set up by the Conservative government through an act of Parliament to manage this money and ensure that it was managed in a correct and careful fashion, following the procedures that had been set up and the planning that had taken place in these communities over a period of two years, from 2006 to 2008. All of this work was accomplished and it was put in place.

That is the basic history of what has happened with it. Now, the Conservatives are talking about changing this project and the act to one where a minister, who is not designated in the act, will have the sole responsibility for issuing the funds for this rather large amount of money. We have a situation where the minister is not known. One of the significant differences in the bill is that in the previous bill, a corporation may only deal with this particular aspect when it is dealing with money, but now the new minister may designate the funds.

There is a subtle change in the way the legislation is put out, which I have some concerns about, because I represent the people who went through the two-year planning process to come up with the ideas that would be initiated. Those ideas were ones that spoke to culture, language, young people, the significant and important social impacts that the communities recognized would exist after taking on a major industrial project. It would forever change the landscape in their regions. It would forever change the economics and would put enormous social pressure on these communities.

What we have now is a move to a system that would have a Conservative minister handing out cheques for particular projects as he or she deems appropriate. This is a concern that I have. When we had the corporation in place, the corporation would have followed the directions that the communities had struck. It would have been an impartial body. We would have taken it away from the potential political interference that goes on with funds that are not clearly and carefully delegated to the right areas.

Did the government not learn anything from the Muskoka minister's gazebo scandal? Did it not learn anything about the importance of dealing with funds in a non-partial, careful fashion so that the precise purpose of what these funds are developed for is implemented?

We went through the process in the Northwest Territories. We established what these funds were to be used for in agreement with the Government of the Northwest Territories and the federal government. These plans are in place. Where is the protection now for the work that people have done?

It is changing. Why is the government changing this? Where was the consultation with anyone in the Northwest Territories about this process? When did the government actually talk to people and say it wanted to take it out of the hands of an impartial corporation, which is very carefully configured to ensure that the dollars are spent in the way that the communities want, and put it into the hands of a minister who may or may decide to support projects, based on political considerations? Where was that consultation? How did that work? Where is the success of that?

What we have is a \$500-million fund that has now been cut loose by the Government of Canada, by the Conservative Government of Canada, into the hands of a minister. It may or may not work in the way that it was designed to work.

This is a pattern that we can follow with the Conservative government. It started off with good intentions. It felt accountability was important when it started off. It recognized that it did not want to follow the Liberal pattern. Now it is back. What pattern is it following? It is back to the way the Liberals used to govern. It is back there now. This is just another indication. I really am sorry that this has happened.