

## **MP Dennis Bevington's speech on Bill C-15 Northwest Territories Devolution Act**

**February 11, 2014**

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the bill, a bill that affects my life, the life of my children, the life of my grandchildren, and the lives of all my friends and relatives who live in the Northwest Territories. The bill is part of our life, and we are the only ones who really are affected by the bill. The bill is for us. Our point of view is very important.

I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for standing and speaking to the bill at what all have said in the House is a critical moment in the constitutional development of Canada. I am very pleased that he has taken the time to do that.

Devolution is well supported in the Northwest Territories. We do not have to argue about that. We do not have to work very hard on that section of the bill. We did get one or two amendments that help a little bit and make this bill more equitable throughout the three territories.

The contentious part is the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. There is a clear consensus that the one thing that is not appropriate is the change from the regional boards to a superboard. It is inappropriate, counterproductive, divisive, and destabilizing, all the things that we do not want to have happen in the Northwest Territories. These are things that go much beyond the addition of a few extra people sitting on boards that decide the future of the Northwest Territories. This has massive consequences to all.

Our amendment today to restore regional boards is a matter that will strengthen Bill C-15. It will strengthen devolution. It will ensure stability. It truly is representative of the wishes of the people in the Northwest Territories. I urge the government to support this amendment. This amendment can only help to create a bill that will heap praise on the government's shoulders. By supporting the amendment, the government will show its humanity and its desire to do the right thing.

I want to review how we got here, as presented in testimony.

The first step in that was with the McCrank report. When Mr. McCrank stood in front of the committee, he admitted that the idea of a superboard was his idea. There was no one in the Northwest Territories who had suggested that to him. That idea came from him, from an Alberta person who ran the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Of course he thought that the structure should be similar to the one in Alberta, but that is not what we have set out to do in the Northwest Territories. We have set out to have regional governments and aboriginal governments, whether they are Inuvialuit—who are keeping their regional boards, by the way—or the Sahtu, the Tlicho, and the Gwich'in, who have made agreements.

My colleague across talked about contemplation of a single board within the land claims. Contemplation does not mean agreement. Contemplation does not mean that the government can go ahead without full negotiation to change a land claim just because something is contemplated within an agreement.

After the McCrank report the government hired Mr. John Pollard to be its chief federal negotiator. It is interesting that the testimony from the Tlicho indicated that in 2011 they gave the

government a protocol framework for negotiating changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. They were willing to work with the government to do the right thing, to make changes, to make the system more efficient. They set out a protocol. That protocol was shelved. In testimony, Mr. Pollard admitted that it was just taken as information. Nothing was done with it.

As a result, governments and Mr. Pollard held many meetings, but they were not in any framework that had been agreed upon by the two elements of the land claims, the first nations who have treaty rights and treaty responsibilities to their citizens and the Government of Canada representing the crown. There was no agreement on how to negotiate changes to these land claims.

That is where the government falls flat on its face.

In the fall of this year, departmental officials then presented bills to the first nations. They presented a separate bill for devolution and a separate bill for the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. They were never taken together.

Bertha Rabesca Zoe, legal counsel for the Tlicho government, stated:

In that October session I asked the federal officials who were there doing the presentation whether those bills would be bundled as an omnibus bill, and we were never given a response....

Mr. Daryn Leas, legal counsel for the Sahtu, stated:

Never once were the federal devolution negotiators able to provide any substance or details about the Mackenzie Valley legislation in the proposed amendments.

That is the state of the consultation that was taking place on this act, Bill C-15.

The process on devolution has been going on for 20 years. The problem we had with devolution was getting first nations governments on side. Premier McLeod accomplished that for devolution. We have heard the testimony of Premier McLeod. He did not involve the first nations in discussions about the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. He said that was not their business. Once again those regulation issues were designed to be kept separate.

Today, we have put forward an amendment to bring peace to this issue. Regional boards are working fine today.

I quote Mr. Tom Hoefer, executive director of the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, who stated:

We recognize that the aboriginal community is validly concerned by the loss of the existing regional panels. You should know that a number of industry members, especially those who have developed close working relationships with the regional boards, have likewise expressed reservations.

Does that sound like industry is offside on the regional boards? It does not.

How does this uncertainty serve anyone's purpose? We are likely to be caught up in litigation. We are likely to have a new government in a year and a half. Would members not agree? We will have to fix these mistakes that have been made here, because the Conservatives' attitude of ignoring the wishes of the people will eventually catch up to them, and they will be thrown out of office.

I would say to the Conservatives that they should do their job, listen to people, hear what they have to say, and hear what the people in the Northwest Territories have to say about the laws that affect only us, the laws with respect to how we want to develop.

We are asking the Conservatives to listen to us and hear us. Then, perhaps, if they follow that lesson with us, they may follow it with others and they may find that their political careers can be extended.

The north is a great adventure. I have been part of it my whole life. In the end, we will do the right thing. In the end, we will create a territory with a unique and powerful system of government. The Conservatives should join us in doing that. This is a simple amendment that does not change much at all but represents so much to us.