

## Historic treaty gets royal assent

**Jeff Rud**

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Lt.-Gov. Steven Point added some levity to a historic moment yesterday in the B.C. legislature.

The province's first aboriginal vice-regal arrived in the chamber to give royal assent to the Maa-nulth First Nations treaty as the fall session of the legislature came to a close.

After granting assent to the treaty as well as three other bills -- a process that took less than a minute -- the unassuming Point joked with MLAs. "Tough job, eh?" he said before departing the house.

Nevertheless, it was an important moment in B.C. history as Point formalized the bill that spells out Vancouver Island's first modern-day treaty and the first multi-nation deal reached under the B.C. Treaty Commission.

The Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement Act, which will see five First Nations on the Island's west coast receive more than \$100 million in cash and nearly 25,000 hectares of land, was Point's second treaty. Last week, he gave royal assent to the Tsawwassen First Nations deal.

"We came into the session with a specific agenda, one that was focused on ratifying treaties," said Liberal house leader Mike de Jong, who is also minister for aboriginal relations and reconciliation.

"We ratified [two] treaties involving six First Nations. ... So along with them and the rest of the province, we're celebrating that fact."

Both treaties will now go to Ottawa for approval. De Jong said the Tsawwassen deal may begin that process as early as next week and could still receive federal approval before Christmas.

The Maa-nulth treaty will not be considered until next year. One reason for the delay is that treaties have to be translated into French, de Jong said.

The B.C. government's first significant piece of climate-change legislation -- the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act -- also received royal assent.

The bill commits government to reducing B.C.'s emissions by 33 per cent by 2020 and is the first such legislation by a provincial government.

But the Liberals had to force the end of debate and a vote on a more controversial piece of legislation yesterday -- the Greater Vancouver Transportation Amendment Act, which remakes that area's public-transit governance.

"The bill has been before the Opposition and in the public domain for almost seven months now," de Jong said. "The Opposition spent days and days in debate. It was obvious that they were intent on trying to frustrate its passage."

"Oppositions are allowed to do that. ... What they are not allowed to do is veto. So it was appropriate today -- there had been extensive debate -- for the vote to take place and to get on with developing a transit board and a transit strategy that works."

Despite that result, Opposition leader Carole James proclaimed it a successful session for the NDP, which scored question-period points on several fronts, including tree-farm-license land removal, the always controversial Ministry of Children and Family Development and even the distribution of publicly funded booster seats through B.C. Liberal constituency offices.

"It isn't about winning and losing," James said. "It's about who stood up for the people of British Columbia. This session has been pretty clear. It's pointed out that the government is completely out of touch with British Columbians, whether it's the sell-off of our forest lands, whether it's their complete disregard for the abuse of seniors, or for the lack of progress on children and families."

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