

Ontario ready for talks on native land claims

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TORONTO (CP) — The Ontario government will try to negotiate land claims and self-government arrangements simultaneously with First Nations in the province, Native Affairs Minister Bud Wildman said Tuesday.

"The government's native affairs agenda is an ambitious one — perhaps more ambitious than that of any other government in Canada," Wildman, who represents the Northern Ontario riding of Algoma, told the legislature.

The committee will also deal with questions of aboriginal hunting and fishing rights and enforcement of collecting cigarette taxes on reserves, he said.

Self-government can take different forms in different communities — anything from a municipal-style structure prac-

tised by the Sechelt First Nation in B.C. to the demand for absolute sovereignty expressed by Mohawk Warriors in Oka, Que.

But when answering questions from reporters, Wildman acknowledged the province cannot unilaterally grant self-government to Ontario First Nations.

That requires federal participation and perhaps constitutional change. But the province can negotiate a transfer of provincial powers, over, for example, child welfare or education, to First Nations that wish to deliver those services.

"We would prefer the federal government to be involved," Wildman said outside the house.

"However, if for whatever reason the federal government is unwilling or unable to enter into negotiations on self-government and the settlement of land claims, we are prepared to move on a bilateral basis."

Self-government cannot be

granted by anyone — it must be developed within a community, said Chief Councillor Bill Montour of the Six Nations reserve.

But he was pleased by the recognition in Wildman's speech of an inherent aboriginal right to self-government.

"That's considerable movement of a government to recognize that we still have and are practising a form of self-government since before first contact (with whites) through our traditional council," Montour said in an interview from Ohsweken, near Brantford.