

goal. It was always our purpose. The media, for whatever reason, continued to attribute other motives to the Prime Minister, that he wanted a failure so that he could go ahead with some unilateral federal initiative and ask the Canadian people to ratify it.

Honourable senators, to anybody who understands anything about politics or the current state of politics in this country, that was an absurd suggestion on the part of the media. The strains that that scenario would place not only on our government and on our party but on all political parties in this house would be enormous. We fought. Mr. Clark and Mr. Mulroney, all of our advisers, worked unceasingly for an agreement. We have an agreement. The principles of that agreement or consensus, if one wants to call it that, are what we will be voting on in a referendum.

There has been discussion here about the consequences of the vote on October 26. I agree with those who say that we are far better to emphasize the positive consequences of a "yes" vote than to dwell on the negative consequences of a "no" vote because, no matter how carefully one phrases it, no matter how delicately one approaches the subject, one always runs the real risk of being accused of scaremongering if one speaks of the negative consequences of a "no" vote. I agree again with the Leader of the Opposition that the "no" side has some explaining to do, and should be called upon to make those explanations and to explain their alternatives.

I believe that the immediate effect of a "yes" vote will be a sense of achievement and unity rather than the sense of failure and division that have characterized the Constitutional debate in this country for so long. I believe that a "yes" vote to this consensus document, to these principles, will result in increased confidence among Canadians of our ability to resolve together other challenges, and the main challenges before us are primarily economic. I believe that a "yes" vote will result in an increased sense of security and stability in the relationships among Canadians, the relationships between Quebecers and other Canadians, the status and the security of linguistic minorities and the relationship of Aboriginal peoples with the rest of society. Even if what we have agreed on are the terms of a negotiation and the principles for negotiation, the parameters of a negotiation of self-government for Aboriginals, they see it as an enormous step forward and an enormous opportunity. I think we should see it that way, too.

• (1910)

Senator Pitfield can characterize it if he likes as the birth of a monster. I think there is a rebirth of opportunity for Canada and for Canadians in this Charlottetown agreement. I do not want to overstate it. As I have already said, there is so much work to be done to realize the promise of the Charlottetown agreement, but popular ratification and the referendum of the Charlottetown agreement will be a solid base for nation building in the future.

Honourable senators, a number of our colleagues have been pretty severe in their analysis of the proposed new Senate.

Senator Kirby saw it as a great weakness of the consensus document, as did Senator Everett, Senator Lawson, Senator Graham, Senator Perrault and Senator Sparrow. It is true, as a number of them have pointed out, that this new Senate would have less power than some of the models of the so-called equitable Senate that were on the table, including the proposals that the government brought in in September a year ago in the report of the Beaudoin-Dobbie committee. The proponents of the Triple-E Senate, Premier Getty and others, clearly attached greater importance to the symbolism and the reality of equal representation for each province. To them, that E, it appears, was the most important of the Three Es.

I agree with Senator Fairbairn and Senator Thériault that the proposed new Senate is certainly not necessarily a weak institution. It will have the power to defeat taxes on natural resources. It will have the power to defeat measures materially affecting the French language and culture. It will have the power to delay supply bills for 30 days. It will have the power to force reconciliation and joint sittings of the House of Commons and Senate by defeating other legislation.

As to the new senators themselves, whether they are elected by the voters at large, as it appears will be the case in nine provinces and territories or, as will apparently be the case in Quebec, by their elected National Assembly, they will enjoy a democratic legitimacy that the present Senate does not have. Because there will only be six per province, and here I take up a point that Senator Thériault has made very forcefully, they will have been either elected at large in the province or by constituencies that are vastly larger than the constituencies that elect members to the House of Commons. I believe this difference will give them a political status that is quite important. There will be no minister in the Senate. The government as such will not be there. The elements are present for considerable institutional independence.

Some see a Senate that will be swamped by the more numerous House of Commons. No one can tell how a particular parliamentary institution will evolve. It will evolve on its own. I believe it is as likely—and it is possible, certainly—that this institution will evolve in a different way, creating, as Senator Fairbairn and Senator Hays have suggested, its own procedures and using its powers to the full to influence government policy and legislation.

The Leader of the Opposition raised a question, as did Senator Kirby, Senator Austin, Senator Grafstein and Senator Graham, of the federal spending power. We went through this argument in the Meech Lake debate. I do not want to cover all that ground again.

[Translation]

For the federal government to hold an unlimited spending authority is inconsistent with a Constitution which gives some legislative powers to the provinces in certain areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

That is a distortion of Canadian federalism.