

The Constitution

Canadians want to be consulted on the issues of the economy and the Constitution.

In the spring of 1991 I mailed a questionnaire to every household in my riding, to 40,000 homes representing 80,000 constituents in Edmonton Northwest. I have in my hand a copy of this householder entitled "Constitutional Survey - Edmonton Northwest. What do Albertans want?" This householder provided background information and asked 26 detailed and sometimes lengthy questions.

The response from Edmonton Northwest was outstanding, in that 1,000 households replied. I want to publicly thank these good citizens and assure them that I am representing their views in the House of Commons to the best of my ability. At every opportunity I discussed the results of my polling with my caucus colleagues.

My constituents realize that the economy and the Constitution are inseparably linked. They realize that there are fundamental problems with the rules set in the Constitution that are impeding our economy.

Provincial trade barriers were seen as a major irritant. Measures to improve the underlying framework of our economic union are being favourably received by many more people than the media reports. They are adamant that the federal government maintain a strong role for the economic well-being of Canada. They said that the government should continue to develop policies that will assist in meeting the challenges of the international community.

My constituents told me that education and training are necessary services of governments needed by Canadians to create jobs in a competitive world. They repeatedly told me to accelerate the deficit reduction measures so that tax dollars could go into these services or to provide some tax relief.

My constituents are, quite rightly, angered when they are shown the books and realize that 36 cents of every tax dollar is lopped off the top for interest payments on the national debt. Thankfully when I had the opportunity to explain the situation and discuss the government's progress in cutting costs, they were usually satisfied that Parliament has been doing a good job.

To summarize the central themes from the 26 detailed questions, my constituents in Edmonton Northwest wanted to see first and foremost a mechanism for increasing regional representation in federal institutions. Senate reform was most frequently mentioned.

Also, my constituents wanted a change in the process that has been followed since Confederation of constitution-making by first ministers. Like other Canadians, my constituents wanted to be more involved in the public debate and to have more control over the adoption of constitutional amendments.

The actual instrument of control was not crucial. Many cited referendums as the only way to have democratic ratification. But others realized that there are many ways for society to come to consensus on major issues.

My constituents gave a high degree of importance to providing in the Constitution means for native populations to achieve self-government and self-reliance; to empower governments and individuals with the ability to protect the environment; to empower the federal government with the ability to provide economic leadership in the major policy areas, while bringing the administration of services to a more local level of government perceived to be more responsive and accountable.

Issues that were raised which were not directly related to the Constitution yet shaped the context of the constitutional debate dealt more with the efficiency of government and a distaste for the overlap of bureaucracies.

My constituents did not approve of a large scale decentralization of powers. However they did express a desire for more clearly identified roles and responsibilities.

In fact, when asked for their preferred model for a Constitution, 72 per cent favoured either the *status quo* or a modest re-alignment of powers between the two levels of government.

Madam Speaker, 64 per cent of the respondents to my poll said they would favour a re-alignment of tax laws so that the government that is responsible for a particular service be responsible for taxing us for that service. This is a very direct signal to policy makers. Constituents feel as if they are being taxed without representation.