

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

[English]

The constitutional Accord brings into reality one of the most essential elements of Canadian history and the Canadian dream, that is, a nation from coast to coast with Quebec officially a part of the Canadian family. The richness of that province and of its people will shine on all of us. The Canadian dream that was put into motion so many years ago by Sir John A. Macdonald and his contemporaries is a dream that does not end, because it is a dream of justice and fairness for every member of our society across Canada.

The Prime Minister and the ten Premiers were not alone when they put on paper the words that would make this country complete. They had with them the ideas, hopes, and aspirations of successive generations of Canadians. They listened to the voices of the present, but their eyes were on the future because the Constitution is not merely for today. It is a living document and it will encourage Canadians to continue their dream. There is a powerful momentum in this country of justice and equality for all Canadians. That momentum was captured at Meech Lake and will carry all of us, men and women, celebrating Canada into the future.

• (1610)

**Ms. Jewett:** Madam Speaker, the Minister said that she had met with representatives of several of the national women's organizations. I believe she said she had discussions with their constitutional advisers as well as with the Government's constitutional advisers.

I have talked to all the women's organizations and most of them do not feel there was adequate discussion of their concerns. Indeed, in many cases their briefs were only available in the last week or two because of the shortage of time, lack of financial support and so on.

Since there are differing points of view among the constitutional experts, would it not be an excellent idea for the Minister to seriously consider the proposal of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women that said yesterday there should be a national conference on the potential effects of the Accord on the equality rights of women and minorities?

I am sure the Minister has read many of the briefs and proceedings of the committee this summer. Does she not believe that there is indeed a great deal more ground to be covered by constitutional experts, including those in the Government and those who represent women's groups and universities, in examining the potential outcome of the Accord? If so, such a conference would be educational, desirable and should be facilitated.

Will she give that assurance to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women?

**Mrs. McDougall:** Madam Speaker, I received the resolutions of the Canadian Advisory Council yesterday. Of course, I am always prepared to take those resolutions under advisement.

Let me make two points to the Hon. Member. First, I agree with her assessment of the Charter which she made in the House, that sexual equality rights in the Charter are not threatened by the Meech Lake Accord.

Second, in terms of consultation, I wonder whether a large national gathering is the appropriate place to discuss what is really a legal interpretation issue. I believe the Charter as a whole is a very important issue and that is why I welcomed the recommendation of the committee that we look at the Charter over time and not just for now, so that a permanent part of the Government's role is to be vigilant in regard to the rights of women and other people whose rights are reflected in the Charter.

Having said that, I am always prepared to look at the resolutions and take them under advisement. I think it goes beyond a one afternoon event. Therefore, the process laid out by the committee is probably more appropriate.

However, I did read the briefs and the testimony before the committee very carefully. I have paid considerable attention to this issue because it is clearly one that is very important to women.

I think the appropriate conclusion is that we regard the Charter as an over-all part of the Constitution that we are prepared to review over time as a body of jurisprudence builds up in the courts. I am sure, based on the Hon. Member's comments in the Chamber, that she would probably agree that that is a wise procedure.

**Ms. Jewett:** Madam Speaker, the Minister knows that the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women is perfectly free to hold its own conference. I hope she was not suggesting for a moment that it needs her approval and she would regard their resolutions as ones that need her approval. I hope she would not repeat the experience of the Member of the Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy) when he was ultimately responsible for the advisory council and attempted to cancel the meeting.

**Mrs. McDougall:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Ms. Jewett:** I am simply asking a question. I hope she is not going to cancel a proposed conference of the advisory council. They are free to hold a conference on this matter.

Would the Minister be willing to facilitate the conference financially and in other ways?

**Mrs. McDougall:** Madam Speaker, I certainly recognize the council's right to be independent and to hold its own conferences. It has certainly done so before and I suppose I took it for granted that the Hon. Member and other Hon. Members would know that.

I said that I would take under advisement the resolutions and any role I would have to play. At the moment, I believe there is another process that is more appropriate.