

*The Constitution*

They do not want the country to break up. Canadians really love their country. They really do. They are not very flashy about it. They are not very demonstrative about it, but if you scratch them a little they will show they indeed love this country.

With respect to this constitutional crisis—and that is what it is when the future of the country hangs in the balance, we have a crisis—my constituents are telling me: “Let us get this thing settled. Let us get this work done. Let us get on with the job because it is dragging us down as a country. It is dragging us down as a people.” This wrangling, this constant talking about the Constitution is hurting all aspects of Canadian life. So they are saying: “Settle it. Settle it quickly and let us get on to other things, for example the economy”.

When I take a stroll down Portage Avenue, a major artery that goes through my constituency, I can assure you that if I am stopped by 20 constituents and those 20 constituents have some political issues on their minds, 19 out of the 20 will be talking about the economy. They see the unravelling of the economy. They do not like the direction it has taken in the last several years. They want us politicians, especially the politicians on the other side of the House belonging to the government, to seriously tackle the economic issues facing this country. That is the number one issue.

However, my constituents understand you can do wonders with the Canadian economy, but at the end of the day if you do not have a country, all is for naught. We have wasted our time.

So we do have to deal with the constitutional issue. Unfortunately, we have had this terrible convergence of two crises, a constitutional crisis on one side and an economic crisis on the other. Usually one crisis is enough for any country. Canada is in this terrible situation of having two crises coming together at the same time. It makes for an unbelievable burden.

I have faith in the country. I have faith in the people that somehow we will make it. It is going to be a close call, but we will make it. That is what I hear from my constituents.

One of the other things that my constituents tell me is that they see this as a top-down crisis. This is not a crisis in Canada that is percolating up from the masses, from the working people. This has been created largely by a

group of elite in this country, academics, politicians, media people, who have made an industry or a business out of the Constitution. I sometimes wonder whether any fiddling and any changes in the Constitution will satisfy these people.

A lot of people, especially in my constituency, are very frustrated with these people who constantly badger us about the Constitution. That does not in any way detract from some of the real problems. I am not advocating *status quo* insofar as the Constitution is concerned. There is a limit to what can be done with the Constitution.

• (1910)

My constituents in Winnipeg—St. James are saying that they do not expect all 28 elements in the current package to survive this current round of negotiations or debate. They expect a package with fewer elements, something in the line of four or five. Let me touch on these elements.

There is no doubt about it that from my end of the country they want Senate reform and that has to be in the package. They want Senate reform to give the west a larger voice at the centre. I do not think the people in the west are interested in building up their capitals. They want a strong central government, but they want to be a major player in that central government in this reshaped Parliament. That is why they want an elected Senate, that is why they want an effective Senate, that is why they want an equitable Senate. If we do not get Senate reform, I do not think we are going to get a deal.

The distinct society is so important to our friends in Quebec. There is no doubt that some time ago, particularly when the term distinct society came on the scene, there were a number of western Canadians and constituents in my riding who felt a little uncomfortable because they interpreted it as being a declaration that Quebec was special. With the focus now on distinct society, I think the people now realize that what it is in the main is a recognition of difference.

Quebec is different. It has its civil code, it has its culture and it has its language. There is a difference. That is what the distinct society more or less is all about; it is about recognizing that difference and helping Quebec to preserve that difference or distinctiveness.