

The Constitution

Are we perfect on all of these? By no means. But we are so high on all that observers abroad can only shake their heads and ask: Do Canadians not realize what they are risking? What they could lose. If this Canada is not worth saving, what country is?

Well here is one Canadian, a son of Saskatchewan who cares passionately about keeping Canada together from British Columbia to Newfoundland, and Quebec is part of my Canada.

• (2030)

On a personal note, I would say with the brevity of a business leader he summarized exactly how I feel. As a third generation Albertan, I must say I agree with him 100 per cent.

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (York North): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to give this House a report of the discussions I have had with my constituents on the subject of the Constitution.

Throughout 1991 I was able to consult the residents of my riding on several occasions. The initial consultation involved a constitutional questionnaire which was distributed to each of the approximately 80,000 households in York North. I am pleased to table the results of that questionnaire in this House.

This was followed by town hall meetings held in Aurora, Richmond Hill, Oak Ridges, Maple, Woodbridge, Thornhill, Nobleton, Kleinburg and King City, all communities in my riding.

The Constitution was discussed during my visits to the homes of the constituents, and finally a special constitutional forum was held where the guest speaker was the Official Opposition constitutional critic, the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel. Throughout this process, whether it was in response to the questionnaire or at the different community meetings and town hall meetings, I found that the citizens of York North cared deeply about their nation and wanted to play a role in reforming their Constitution. The reaction at all levels was enthusiastic. If there is one fact that impressed me more than any other, it is that the people participated in such great numbers.

My constituents spoke out strongly on many different elements of the Constitution. Their views revealed a patriotic love for their country and a determination to preserve it for their children.

The picture painted by the results of my consultation with the people of Canada's most populous riding contains a number of striking characteristics, namely, a

strong endorsement of our bilingual, culturally diverse and aboriginal heritages; a reformed, elected Senate; free economic trade between provinces and territories; and the preservation of a strong national government with shared powers for the provinces.

In discussions I held people came forward with strong opinions but also with open minds. That openness gave many of my constituents the chance to better understand the special needs of Quebec, the western provinces, aboriginal Canadians and other groups. As a result we all have a greater understanding of our Canadian reality.

The need for communication is ever present in the current debate. As the government's regional conferences on the Constitution have indicated, face to face exchanges between people from different regions is the most effective remedy for the ills of parochialism and stereotyping.

Throughout the constitutional consultation process, the residents of York North demonstrated that they are understanding and generous people, that then are willing to compromise to advance their principles but will never compromise their principles. They are guided by a set of high moral standards. For them, the eventual constitutional package must fairly reflect and address the concerns and preoccupations of Canadians from coast to coast.

My constituents understand that to build a harmonious nation, we must all co-operate and subscribe to the politics of accommodation.

The residents of York North are excited by the possibility of a new constitutional contract and hope that we will be able to arrive at a meaningful and responsible accord in the very near future. I say in the very near future because there is no question in my mind that the people of York North, like most other Canadians, are suffering from constitutional fatigue. They want the constitutional issue resolved so that governments can turn their attention to other challenges which potentially threaten the long-term health of this nation.

The citizens of my riding realize that over the last decade the Constitution has occupied centre stage in this nation's political discourse. In that time our competitors around the world have been forging partnerships, developing markets for their goods, adopting visionary training policies, and investing in their infrastructure and the environment.