

*Constitutional Accord*

business. I, therefore, have been given the opportunity to present this motion on his behalf.

It is timely that this debate commence this morning. As I said earlier, I am gratified by the co-operation and goodwill which has prevailed in this Chamber with regard to this very important proposal. I would like to acknowledge again the support shown by both Opposition Parties, both of which have agreed that this debate take place today. This co-operative action, indeed, underlines the great significance that Parties on both sides of the House can play and are playing in regard to this most historic Accord.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the 11 First Ministers of Canada signed the Constitutional Accord on June 3 and thereby committed the Government of Canada, and the 10 provincial Governments, to a course of action which will effect a set of constitutional amendments and bring Quebec back into the Canadian constitutional family. All Canadians view this as a very important step in the constitutional development of our nation, one which has captured the imagination of all Canadians and one which has received the support of all Parties in this House.

As you know, Sir, the House of Commons has already played a major role in the developments leading up to the signing of the constitutional Accord. On May 1, the day after the Meech Lake Agreement was reached, statements were made in the House by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) and the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent). I should say that at that time the Prime Minister made his position very clear in his response to questions about how we intended to proceed with regard to the process of this very important matter. I draw to Hon. Members' attention his statement which was made in response to the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) when seeking clarification about the process that would be established. The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said at page 5615 of *Hansard*, and I quote:

At all times the House will be fully advised and there will be full opportunity for participation and debate on all aspects of any proposal.

This debate today is evidence and proof positive that that commitment is being fulfilled.

Again, in response to a question from the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme), the Prime Minister said at page 5616 of *Hansard*:

We intend to consider any suggestions that will enable Hon. Members and the House to be as actively involved as possible and will also enable the House to provide moral leadership for the country and for the other Governments involved in the decision-making process.

I think those are very, very important commitments and those commitments are indeed being fulfilled.

On May 11 we debated the principles of the Meech Lake Accord. Again I would like to pay tribute to all those who engaged in that discussion and to acknowledge the important contribution made by Members on both sides of the House during the course of that debate. I should also remind Hon. Members here that at that time we were merely debating the

principles. The draft which we now have before us in the form of a proposed constitutional amendment is part and parcel of the drafting which took place with respect to the principles and, indeed, incorporated many of the ideas and suggestions which were raised during the course of the debate, both in this House and outside the House.

I wish to say to my colleagues that their respective expressions of support contributed to the cohesion which ultimately prevailed on June 3, 1987. It is therefore fitting and proper that Parliament now review the substance of the Constitutional Accord to ensure a broader understanding by all Canadians of this constitutional initiative. It is only appropriate that Parliament provide a forum where interested individuals have the opportunity to enter into the national discussion.

The Government accordingly proposed that a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons be appointed to consider and report on the 1987 Constitutional Accord signed in Ottawa on June 3, 1987, by the First Ministers of Canada. It is proposed that this Joint Committee be comprised of 12 Members of the House of Commons and five Members of the Senate, co-chaired by one Member of each Chamber. It is fitting that we consider the 1987 Constitutional Accord in a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons and fulfil our responsibilities in the spirit of co-operation which led the First Ministers to an agreement first at Meech Lake and finally here in Ottawa on June 3, and within the historic context of the constitutional discussions.

The committee would have the power to strike such subcommittees as are deemed advisable. The committee would have the opportunity to conduct hearings and receive written and oral submissions. It is proposed as well that the committee be authorized to conduct hearings unconstrained by any adjournments which may be called for during the summer months. Further, this joint committee would be empowered to authorize television and radio broadcasting as is considered appropriate.

We recall that in 1981 a successful contribution was made by a joint committee in relation to our constitutional endeavours at that time. We again want to establish a joint committee to continue this important work. Finally, it is proposed that this joint committee would submit its report not later than September 14, 1987.

The provisions of the constitutional Accord are wide-ranging and thus of fundamental importance to all Canadians. It is no surprise, therefore, that editorial commentary has been extensive and that a wide range of associations have spoken out and that public interest is high. That is as it should be in a democratic country such as ours.

A special joint committee, with representatives from both Houses of Parliament and all Parties, will provide, we believe, the most extensive and appropriate vehicle for this national dialogue on our further constitutional development. Representatives of organized interests and interested citizens alike will have the opportunity to express their views at one time and