

The Constitution

the country and that our children hope to see, the country we love wish to continue to love.

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity given me this evening to participate, be it briefly, in this very important debate. Let me first say that my presentation will center mostly on the views of my constituents on this constitutional package and on the process in which we are all involved, that is the renewal of our Constitution and of our country.

I understand that this debate is mainly supposed to give us, members of Parliament, an opportunity to bear witness to the diversity of feelings expressed throughout the country on the constitutional issue. However, I hope that I will soon have the possibility to express my own ideas on that issue and on what is at stake in this case. Evidently, my thoughts will reflect not only my own concerns, but also the conversations I have had since my election with many constituents of Cape Breton Highlands—Canso.

• (2100)

Yesterday I was in Pomquet, an Acadian village of my riding, for the opening of their winter carnival. Pomquet, which was founded in 1761, is a community located about ten kilometres east of the village of Antigonish and surrounded by various cultures, including Scottish, English, Micmac and other cultures established there for many generations and which have been increased by immigrants in the eastern part of Nova Scotia.

Looking at people taking part in the carnival, it was very clear that Pomquet is a community which is very proud of its origins and very proud of its culture, of how they could maintain their French language. In addition, it is a community where people get along well together.

[*English*]

Pomquet is like many other communities in Highlands—Canso, populated by people who are steeped in tradition and people with a proud and deep knowledge of their heritage, whether they be Acadians, Scots, English, or United Empire Loyalists who have come and settled in the county of Guysborough, or even the descendants of the southern slaves from the United States who lived in communities such as Lincolntonville and Sunnydale.

They are people who are proud of their heritage, whatever it may be, and who have grown together to live in harmony with each other in the areas of eastern Nova Scotia.

The important fact about these communities is that we get along. We are able to recognize and accept and rejoice in the differences we have as a result of our cultural heritage. Perhaps one of the best expressions of this is in the music, particularly the Scottish highland music, which has been developed mostly in Inverness County and has spread across the constituency. It has been passed down from generation to generation and exported beyond our borders and around the world. It has been borrowed and enriched by the Acadians, by the Micmacs, and by other groups who have found such pleasure in it.

The point of this is that the people in my constituency of Highlands—Canso want Canada to work like their communities work. They are not preoccupied with the fine points of constitutional reform for the most part. They are more preoccupied with the mundane business of making a living, of feeding their families, of finding a job and keeping a job, and of growing and preserving their community and their culture. They believe fundamentally that is what is possible within this wonderful country called Canada. They want Canada to work and to reflect the kind of mutual respect that is so present in the communities of Highlands—Canso.

Although my constituents are somewhat perplexed that we as politicians and as experts in the constitutional field have had such difficulty in resolving these seemingly intractable differences, they have joined in this collective search for constitutional resolution and have responded. For example, last summer I sent out a survey to my constituents in the form of a householder, and they responded.

I would like to give you a brief synopsis of some of the salient points that I received from my constituents on some of the constitutional elements.

First, regarding official languages, two-thirds of the respondents want to include some recognition of our official languages in a Canada clause.

Second, regarding cultural diversity, 83 per cent want to include a statement on cultural diversity in the Canada clause such as what I have just spoken about in