

regions of this nation. Yet again our energy actions are attacked and cited as another example of Liberal government indifference to the west. I think it was unworthy of the honourable senator to cite these two examples.

**Senator Smith (Colchester):** It is easy to talk. What we want is some action.

**Senator Flynn:** You are very confused.

**Senator Perrault:** The prime motivation of most of us, when we enter public life, is a strong desire to accomplish something and to make a contribution to the welfare of our province, our region and our country. I am confident that this attitude is common to us all in the Senate, and to the members in the other place. I know that in this age of cynicism it is fashionable in some circles not to believe that parliamentarians are trying to do a good job, the very best job that they can, but it is true, and I hope the work of this Parliament will help to demonstrate our *bona fides* to those Canadians who may be sceptical about us still.

Surely all of us share a fundamental belief about our country and its people. Surely we share a conviction that we can trust each other, and that while our system of parliamentary democracy functions basically upon the will of the majority, that majority can always be trusted to respect and protect the rights of minorities. We all talk about the cultural and regional mosaic which makes up this country, and almost by definition Canada is a land of minorities. In a national sense those who speak the French language form our largest and most visible minority. In Quebec the anglophones are the minority. Canada's native peoples, once the sole inhabitants of this continent, are now one of this nation's most active minority groups. Regionally, Atlantic Canadians and western Canadians make up minority segments of the total national population. These facts are part of the nature of this country.

Things change from time to time; people move, minorities shift and grow; and our demography is a dynamic thing. As we look at our own personal situations we may find ourselves in the majority for certain purposes and from one point of view, and in a minority for other purposes and from another perspective. So respect for minority interests and the protection of minority rights is important to each and every one of us.

Speaking as a westerner and as a Liberal, honourable senators, you will understand that I have considerable familiarity with minority positions, including, I must say, political minority positions. I believe it to be unfortunate that too many of us in this country look at our vast collection of minorities, and at the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, regional and social diversity of Canada, and throw up their hands in dismay, as if this diversity were something negative, an impediment that we cannot overcome. Far from being an impediment, I believe it is one of our most endearing and, I hope, one of our most enduring assets. It should be regarded as one of our greatest national treasures, a national resource unique to Canada.

Looking at the situation with cold logic, this country of ours might seem to be a rather unlikely accomplishment. There are

[Senator Perrault.]

all sorts of factors naturally at work that tend to pull us apart. We have the difficult part of the North American continent to contend with. We have a vast, rugged geography and a very difficult climate. The natural physical lines on a topographical map of this continent seem to run north and south, while we are striving to build a country east and west. We have a small and complicated population beginning with the native peoples, and then the founding settlements of French and English, all of which have since been enriched by the addition of virtually every race, creed, colour and religion to be found anywhere on the face of the earth. All of this is spread out rather sparsely along some 5,000 miles of very vigorous American border.

● (1600)

You can hardly imagine a more difficult or illogical set of circumstances out of which to try to forge a country but, in fact, we have forged one, and I think the very best in the world. It proves that nation-building is more than a matter of mere logic; it is an accomplishment of the heart and spirit and it is a never-ending process.

The issue we face today with the separatist threat in the province of Quebec, and with the strong feelings of alienation in certain other regions, is whether we have in the 1980s an adequate measure of the kind of will and ingenuity demonstrated by our forefathers more than 100 years ago when they determined that they would begin the formal nation-building process of this country. How did they achieve it? Well, with a lot of hard work and goodwill and, no doubt, large measures of good fortune as well; but the most important factor was their willingness to listen to each other and to understand; their basic sense of fairness, justice and tolerance; and their preparedness to respond to each other and to take the kind of action needed in any given set of circumstances for a particular group or region within this country, not necessarily because that action was in the narrow self-interest of some comfortable majority, but because that action was right for the kind of Canada they wanted to build.

Our challenge today is whether we still have the will to make Canada work. I know that you worry about this, and I worry about it—all of us worry. Are we willing to listen and understand? Do we want to be fair and just and tolerant? Are we prepared to respond positively to each other and take steps required to build an even greater country for the future? Most of us believe Canadians want to answer these questions with a resounding yes. If the answer were otherwise, I wonder how we in this generation would be able to live with ourselves and with the judgment of history.

Here we had handed to us from a great heritage a wonderful country—young, vital, rich and diverse; challenging, yes, but so richly blessed among all the nations on the face of the earth. Surely we will not have to admit to the rest of the world, to our children and to history, that we just could not make it work with all of our resources, human and otherwise, with all of our advantages and good fortune; that with all that we have got going for us, we, of all nations, could not make it work.

Perhaps we have just had it too soft. Nation-building is not easy. Perhaps we have lost some of our perspective in terms of