

Inasmuch as it has greatly improved relations with the provinces over the past two years, the Mulroney government has set the course towards an active quest for national reconciliation.

Mr. Bourassa's government formulated five conditions for Quebec to become a signatory to the constitutional agreement. In mid-July, the Prime Minister invited all provincial premiers to take part in preliminary talks, to be followed by formal negotiations based on those five conditions.

At their meeting in Edmonton last August, the First Ministers made a positive announcement. They agreed to make reaching an agreement with Quebec their constitutional priority. They agreed to pursue the process proposed by the Prime Minister, a two-stage process which would first consider Quebec's full participation and, second, the constitutional question as a whole.

Honourable senators, for the first time in nearly 20 years, Ottawa has a truly national government, both through its membership and its perspective or vision. All provinces expressed a desire to finish the task that had been left undone in 1982. We can only hope that progress made in recent months will continue and that all partners will maintain the political will to act quickly.

As for the commitment to native peoples, the 1982 agreement provided for a new round of negotiations between native representatives and those of the federal and provincial governments. These talks will mainly concern the issue of self-government.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Mulroney, the 1985 First Ministers' Conference came very close to an agreement on an amendment that would have resulted in this right to self-government. In 1987, in a few months, a new meeting will be held on the same subject, still on the basis of the mandate given in 1982.

We can only hope that all partners will approach the issue with the firm resolve to succeed and with the genuine will to understand the legitimate concerns of the other parties, and so pave the way to an agreement. Quebec's approval of the constitutional accord and our commitment to native people have a number of things in common. These issues go back further than 1982 and are rooted in our common history on Canadian soil.

These are truly major issues, and we who take part in Canadian public life may have the rare distinction and privilege not only to consider them but to deal with them once and for all in the course of this new parliamentary session.

● (1530)

[English]

Honourable senators, I doubt that the views I have just expressed on the Speech from the Throne will be shared in their totality on both sides of the house.

Senator Frith: A well-founded doubt!

Senator Murray: Don't let that bother you.

[Senator Cogger.]

Senator Cogger: However, the legislation that will be brought before us will be the object of thorough study, for which this chamber and its committees are so justly reputed. More particularly, on this all important matter of national reconciliation, I believe that the efforts of the government are deserving of all the support this chamber can offer, and I know that the Prime Minister and his colleagues can count on it. I thank you very much for your kind attention.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Efstathios William Barootes: Honourable senators, as I was entering this chamber, one of my senatorial friends asked me if I would be short. I must point out to him that I am about five feet eight inches and the mover of the resolution is only five feet six and a half inches. Today is a triumph for the "shorts".

It is with a sense of profound pride that I exercise a special privilege, that of seconding the motion for the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne opening the Second Session of the Thirty-third Parliament. Witnessing yesterday's solemn ceremony, with all the symbols and traditions that represent the foundations and the very roots of our democratic parliamentary system, was a very moving experience. I was touched by the dignity of the occasion and the inspiring presentation of Her Excellency, our Governor General. Perhaps some honourable senators are not aware of the fact that Madame Sauvé is a native of my province, having been born in Prud'homme, Saskatchewan. About three weeks ago she spent the best part of a week visiting in our province, and gave generously of her time to many public events and in many areas. Included in these was the opening of our new Regina airport and, subsequently, in a very impressive ceremony, she formally delivered the coat of arms to our province by Royal Warrant. Her Excellency's charm and grace, her beautiful dignity and quiet humour delighted and captured the hearts of everyone who met her.

● (1540)

The following week another native son was given homage and recognition. I refer to the celebrations at the unveiling of the bronze statue of the late Right Honourable John George Diefenbaker. Mr. Diefenbaker was thrice Prime Minister of Canada and his career and contribution to Canadian life will remain in reverent memory as long as this country and my province exist.

It is a particular privilege for me to follow and support the motion of my old friend, Senator Cogger, who spoke so eloquently in moving the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, and I heartily congratulate him. When one thinks of that recent visit of Her Excellency, coupled with the Diefenbaker unveiling in Ottawa, there is some sort of appropriate symbolism in having a senator from Quebec and myself from Saskatchewan join in supporting the Speech from the Throne. Such events and actions help to bind our two provinces even closer together in this confederation.

The occasion also allows me to be among the first to record officially my congratulations and best wishes to the Honourable John Fraser, the first elected Speaker of the other place.