

weeks ago, more than 800 courageous Canadian soldiers under the command of Major General Lewis MacKenzie wore the maple-leaf on their shoulders when, on behalf of the United Nations, they risked their lives to try to bring peace and hope, along with food and medical supplies, to the people of Sarajevo.

We are all the beneficiaries of the heroism and courage of generations and generations of Canadians who wanted only to leave a better, more humane and more prosperous country to their children.

The world has come to know that peace, understanding, conciliation, decency, are words that in many ways speak of Canada. We are not free from imperfections, but as citizens of Canada we have built an impressive heritage. That is what we must protect and nurture. If we are true to this heritage and faithful to our fundamental values, we too can build an even better Canada by ensuring its durability on a foundation that is true to the principles we share.

[English]

What Canada's leaders have produced is a series of constitutional reforms that strengthen the bonds which brought us together in 1867. These reforms renew the concepts that are at the core of Confederation. They provide a strong framework, a solid foundation to let us move confidently into the future together.

At one point in the 1960s, historian Frank Underhill reviewed the state of the nation and lamented that Canada seemed to have lost "that conviction of positive national purpose which inspired our forefathers in 1867. We are fumbling for that lost sense of impending greatness which once buoyed us up," he said.

Well, we now have as a generation a unique chance to capture and to recapture that sense of impending greatness in moving beyond the risk of division to the promise of cohesion and all of the opportunity that flows from such a vital decision.

On February 6, 1865, John A. Macdonald, then the young Attorney General of Canada West, urged members to put aside sectional and regional loyalties and vote in the best interests of the new nation about to be born. "I would again implore the House not to let this opportunity pass. It may never recur. If we do not take advantage of the time, if we show ourselves unequal to the occasion, we shall hereafter bitterly and unavailingly

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regret having failed to embrace the opportunity of founding a great nation." In some important ways these words, too, find an echo in this Chamber today. They are as real and gripping as when they were first uttered.

Resolving our outstanding constitutional issues will send a message to the world about the determination of Canadians to work together to achieve this country's full economic and social potential.

Just a few days ago, a keen observer of Canada, Martin Woollacott, wrote in the Manchester *Guardian*: "In a world in which the boundaries between self-determination and self-indulgence seem to be disappearing, one country at least is swimming against the tide. If the agreement reached last month by the federal Government of Canada and all of the provinces is ratified, that ought to be cause for celebration inside and outside North America. This is not a parochial matter," he said. "Giving adequate representation to people in diverse and geographically widespread societies, reconciling minorities and dividing up powers between various levels and centres of government in a workable way has a fair claim to be the single, most important political problem of our time."

I think he is right and I think the work that the premiers, the territorial leaders, the aboriginal leaders and members of this House have done has responded to the great call for reform in 1992.

Therefore, in the great sweep of world affairs, what happens here matters. How we vote in the coming referendum will matter as well.

One of our greatest authors, Bruce Hutchison, once wrote prophetically: "Our time has come and if not grasped, it will be lost forever". Indeed our time has come. Canada's time has come. The question that will be tabled tomorrow will be a proxy for a series of profound questions about who we are, what we care about, and how we choose fully to live together.

[Translation]

The agreement goes a long way toward making possible a new kind of Canada. It is not perfect, but it resolves most of the pressing concerns that have dominated the national debate for many years. There may be improvements brought to it as the decades unfold, given the constant desire of Canadians to make this country a finer place in which to live. This agreement provides the direction necessary—I would say absolutely necessary,