

ment has been very active during the adjournment visiting the various capitals and speaking to provincial premiers. I wonder whether he can give us a report on what has happened and, particularly, can he enlighten us as to any new developments on the subject?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, as the Leader of the Opposition has indicated, I have now visited all of the provinces, except British Columbia, and have met with the leaders of the two territorial governments. I plan to meet with Premier Vander Zalm in Victoria on February 13. Perhaps at some future date I will be in a position to share with the Senate my conclusions from all this travel. By the way, I do not exclude the possibility either of further discussions personally with premiers or of further contact through staff or officials.

• (1430)

As I have indicated publicly in the course of my tour, we have on the table now four proposals. We have Premier Wells' letter; we have the reports of the Legislative Committee of New Brunswick and the Task Force of Manitoba, as well as a proposal put forward by Premier Vander Zalm. There are, as I have said, positive aspects in all of these reports. However, I do not see that there is very much common ground among them nor have I seen emerging an alternative to Meech Lake around which unanimity could be reconstructed, and unanimity will be needed.

As I have said, I plan to see Premier Vander Zalm on February 13. I do not exclude further consultations with the provinces. I shall be giving at least an interim report to the Prime Minister after I have seen Premier Vander Zalm. We will all have some decisions to make then.

Senator MacEachen: Honourable senators, in a press report I have seen a statement that was attributed to the Leader of the Government in the Senate that in his view the prospects for the successful outcome of Meech Lake were very dim at this point. I am not sure whether or not he was quoted correctly, but does the Leader of the Government have any evaluation at the moment or is he holding all his thoughts in suspense pending a visit to another capital?

The common feeling is that the minister is not making any progress, that positions are not coming together, and that it requires somewhat of a miracle to have a successful outcome. Does that reflect even approximately his views?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I do not underestimate for a moment the difficulties that are involved here. However, I do say that there is still a good political will on the part of the leaders of all the governments involved to try to find a way out of this impasse. I set a great deal of store by the existence or otherwise of political will among Canada's leaders.

Premier McKenna, for example, has put forward the concept of a parallel accord which would, in his words, add to but not subtract from Meech Lake. I have noted some interest in that concept everywhere in the country. However, in the case

of Manitoba, there are three central elements of the Meech Lake Accord which the Manitoba Task Force proposes to eliminate or change very materially. In the case of Newfoundland, the premier would rewrite just about every line in Meech Lake.

So there is still some considerable distance to go before we can achieve the consensus that will be necessary to close this chapter in our constitutional history and get on with further constitutional reforms. Neither I nor any of my provincial interlocutors, still less the federal government, have despaired of the process.

Senator MacEachen: We are comforted that despair has not set in, if that is any benefit at this stage.

The minister referred to the proposal of Premier McKenna for a parallel accord. His subsequent comment was that he found interest in this particular concept among provincial leaders. Could he amplify that somewhat? For example, are the premiers of Ontario and Quebec prepared to consider at this point a parallel accord, which presumably would imply the reaching of certain agreements prior to the June deadline, which agreements would be stipulated in a separate agreement?

Are the two major provinces interested in a parallel accord?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, on the basis of Premier McKenna's definition of a parallel accord as being something that would add to but not subtract from the present Meech Lake Accord, I detected on the part of both Premier Bourassa and Premier Peterson a willingness, an openness, to discuss this matter, yes.

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—PARALLEL ACCORD—SENATE REFORM

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Leader of the Opposition): One more point. Is there a serious intent anywhere to include the question of Senate reform in the parallel accord? Would this be one of the additions, or would Senate reform be put off until some subsequent discussion?

I know that, for example, Mr. Gordon Robertson, whom the Leader of the Government has quoted so favourably from time to time, has proposed that the inclusion of Senate reform as an item at this stage might be the new element that would facilitate constitutional progress.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, in his letter the Premier of Newfoundland presented a design for a reformed Senate which he described as a Three-E Senate, but which, I think it is fair to say, differs quite substantially from the Three-E model put forward by Alberta.

As for the other provinces, the New Brunswick report made no substantive reference to Senate reform. The Manitoba Task Force suggested that Manitoba should set up a legislative committee to hold hearings in that province on the question of Senate reform.