

Constitution Act, 1867

region in accordance with a coherent plan in order that the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada may be in accordance with its national significance. Adopting the words of the learned trial judge, it is my view that the Act deals with a single matter of national concern.

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in its report on the federal capital recommended that the federal Government should assume a direct role in promoting equal partnership between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians in the capital. The commission also made the following general statement about the significance of capital cities:

A capital is a symbol of the country as a whole. It should express, in the best way possible, the values of the country as a whole, its way of life, its cultural richness and diversity, its social outlook, its aspirations for the future. This symbolism has both an internal and an external dimension. Citizens from across the country who visit their capital should find in it a fuller understanding of their country's traditions and a pride in personal identification with it. Similarly, visitors from other countries should be able just as readily to find tangible expression of the values of a country with which they may be unfamiliar.

The question of a change in boundaries for the national capital raised in the Bill emphasizes that the capital of any country is more than a location for the seat of Government and its primary institutions. It probes the depths of a nation's conscience and provides a national focus for institutional and cultural values and aspirations for the future. It calls into question the best means of enhancing those national institutions and associated symbolic and ceremonial functions, activities and events which are unique to a national seat of Government in its widest sense.

The specific proposal to expand the limits of Canada's capital as recognized in a constitutional sense is a sound one. It expands the narrow geographic boundaries which were quite adequate in 1967 but may not necessarily represent the situation which exists today. It is most appropriate to recognize territory in both Ontario and Quebec within the boundaries of the national capital which in turn recognize the lands of the two founding cultures. To go beyond the city limits of Ottawa and Hull raises questions concerning just how much of the surrounding area should also be included. For this reason, the limits of the National Capital Region, as expressed by Parliament since 1958 through the National Capital Act, are most appropriate if we are to move in this direction.

In making reference to the National Capital Act, I should like to refer to the legislative mandate of the National Capital Commission which operates under the authority of the Act and is required "to prepare plans for and assist in the development, conservation and improvement of the National Capital Region in order that the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada may be in accordance with its national significance". The work of the National Capital Commission is recognized and well known to all of us who live in the local area.

● (1610)

It works hard to contribute to and enhance the capital as a national focus for Canada and to provide a truly national dimension to its planning and development. It works to create an inspiring urban and regional setting to instil a sense of pride

and attachment, particularly for visiting Canadians. Also, it works to maintain and improve the economic health and urban and rural vitality of the community.

I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to commend the National Capital Commission for its work on behalf of the people of Canada and, in particular, my friend, the vivacious, idea-oriented and hard working chairlady, Jean Pigott. The National Capital Commission is to be commended for its efforts in enhancing the quality of life and services to visitors within both the urban and rural areas of the National Capital Region. It is only the planning authority that carries out urban and regional planning and development from a federal perspective rather than considering primarily provincial and municipal interests. It is worth reminding the House that the commission is our agent in the planning, development and improvement of what we may call our national capital.

In the final analysis, the question facing the House is whether or not there is a need for a change at this time. I am sure many are in favour of a change to expand the boundaries, while many are opposed. It is an important question for all of us here and for all Canadians, and I am sure it will be resolved.

Mr. Pierre H. Cadieux (Vaudreuil): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on a Friday afternoon at this hour before a nearly full House and in particular, Sir, when you are in the Chair, as my colleague, the Hon. Member for Edmonton East (Mr. Lesick) said a few minutes ago.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in my contribution to the debate on the Bill before the House today, I intend to concentrate on two things: first of all, I would like to put the objective pursued by Bill C-207 into a realistic perspective and I would also like to shed some light on the tremendous and almost insurmountable problems that would result from the premature creation of a National Capital district. The reasoning underlying the Bill certainly contains a number of elements that are not entirely without merit, and these elements may in turn help us produce some valid concepts for developing and expanding a national capital that would be a genuine and proud symbol of this country beyond the year 2000.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that Bill C-207 faces a number of geopolitical and especially historical givens we cannot possibly ignore in the circumstances. I think it would be useful to go back in time so as to understand the constitutional ramifications of this matter.

At the time of Confederation, Mr. Speaker, in 1867, the tensions between Upper and Lower Canada had hardly subsided when Queen Victoria had to designate a city as the capital of her new Dominion. At the time, she had a choice between Montreal, Quebec City of course, Kingston in Ontario—I am very sorry for my colleague from Beauharnois-Salaberry (Mr. Hudon) but Valleyfield was not in the running—and the third option was a town that looked much like a construction site at