

These petitions come mainly from Nutsford, Kamloops and Cachecreek.

● (1430)

[English]

In these petitions, then, a total of 2,173 Canadian citizens are opposed to the GST and will not have forgotten on election day.

QUESTION PERIOD

THE CONSTITUTION

CONSENSUS REPORT—OFFICIAL LANGUAGES—DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ENGLISH AND FRENCH TEXTS

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I have a number of questions for the Leader of the Government, but because of the importance of the debate that we are engaged in I will leave those aside except for one which has to do specifically with the matter before us. That is the reason I ask it.

I am referring to the document given to us, the Charlottetown Consensus Report on the Constitution, and my question concerns problems in respect of official language groups across the country, minority groups.

According to the English text, under the Canada clause, the statement is quite precise. It says:

The Constitution . . . shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the following fundamental characteristics:

...

(d) Canadians and their government are committed to the vitality and development of official-language minority communities throughout Canada;

[Translation]

However, when you look at the French text, as my friend knows very well since we talked about it, it says:

Toute interprétation de la Constitution . . . doit concorder avec les caractéristiques fondamentales suivantes:

d) l'attachement des Canadiens et de leurs gouvernements à l'épanouissement et au développement des communautés minoritaires de langue officielle dans tout le pays;

The French text is a lot weaker than the English text. I know there was some discussion about that, but I would like to know precisely what the position of the government is on that. Is it going to change the wording to reconcile the two versions so that they have the same meaning, what is going to happen?

[Senator Hébert.]

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government in the Senate): Honourable senators, it is not up to the federal government to decide, unilaterally, to reconcile or to change anything in the wording of the Charlottetown agreement.

[English]

I understand the point that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is making about the apparent difference between the French and English texts. This has been the subject of some commentary in the public media and by various interested parties. I have no doubt that we will be hearing more about this matter as the referendum campaign proceeds.

[Translation]

Senator Molgat: Is the minister saying that the government will keep this version and not try to make both texts identical—which they are not at this point. In the English version it is clear that governments have an obligation to develop, while in the French version it comes across as a vague statement of good intentions or whatever, but not as an obligation.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, the difference is between the word commitment in English and *attachement* in French. Frankly, I am not well informed on current discussions between federal and provincial, territorial and aboriginal officials.

I do not know whether this provision of the Canada clause is actually being discussed by the parties concerned. I will ask my colleague about this later on, and I will try to give the Senate further information in due time.

REQUEST FOR TABLING OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PREMIER OF QUEBEC

Hon. Pierre de Bané: The Leader of the government in the Senate knows, I imagine, that according to section 56, both versions are valid. On the other hand, although the Leader of the government is not a legal expert, I am sure he will agree that, if our various constitutional acts all translate committed by *s'engager*, with the exception of the Charlottetown agreement where, for the first time, committed is translated by *attachement*, it is clear that the Supreme Court would rule that the constituent authority had a reason for not using the time-honoured translation of committed, which is *engagé*. If, for the first, time another word was used instead, it is pretty obvious, as was said just now by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, that they do not want to give the same protection to official language minorities.

That being said, I would now like to ask the Leader of the Government the following question. On the first page of today's *La Presse*, there is a reference to an exchange of letters between the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec during the days following the Charlottetown agreement. May I ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate to table this correspondence so that we could read it?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government in the Senate): Honourable senators, my friend must realize that the