

**Senator Murray:** I draw the Honourable Senator Thériault's attention to the agreements reached in recent months by the Secretary of State of Canada, Mr. Lucien Bouchard, with several provinces, including Quebec, and also with the Council of Ministers of Education of those provinces.

● (1440)

[English]

### THE CONSTITUTION

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—FIRST MINISTERS' MEETING—STATUS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF PREMIER OF MANITOBA—REQUEST FOR COPY OF GOVERNMENT'S REPLY

**Hon. Gildas L. Molgat:** Honourable senators, my question is to the Leader of the Government as the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations. Yesterday, when I asked him whether the federal government had responded to the letter written by Premier Filmon of Manitoba and, if so, whether I could have a copy of that response, the minister agreed that he would get a copy of the written reply, if one had been made. Has he been able to obtain a copy of that reply?

**Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government, Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations and Acting Minister of Communications):** Honourable senators, what I said yesterday was that Premier Filmon's attention had been drawn to the letter which the Prime Minister had sent to the premiers in October advising them that he would be calling an informal meeting of First Ministers early in his second mandate. I was not aware that a separate response to Premier Filmon's most recent letter had been sent. I am under the impression that such a letter has not been sent, but my commitment stands, and if I am wrong and a letter has gone out I shall obtain a copy of it and let the honourable senator have it.

**Senator Molgat:** Honourable senators, I am deeply disturbed if there has been no response to Premier Filmon's letter, because I have here a copy of his letter of December 19 addressed to the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada.

**Senator Lefebvre:** Read it!

**Senator Molgat:** It reads:

My dear Prime Minister:

I am writing to advise you of my Government's grave reservations following the response of the Government of Quebec to last week's Supreme Court decision concerning minority language rights in Quebec.

Unfortunately, that decision has placed us on the verge of a constitutional crisis and will seriously affect consideration in our province on the 1987 Constitutional Accord. In so doing, it runs directly counter to our efforts and yours to strengthen national unity.

Under these circumstances, my caucus and I consider it inadvisable to proceed with the Meech Lake Accord. As you know, I introduced the resolution in our Legislature on Friday and debate is now underway, with public hearings scheduled to begin next month. The Quebec Government's decision makes it clear that proceeding

with these hearings on the current schedule could cause deep dissension throughout our province. For this reason, I will approach the leaders of the other parties in our Legislature to pursue with them the withdrawal of the resolution.

Given the vital importance of these constitutional issues to the future of our country, I ask that you convene a meeting of First Ministers on an urgent basis. I am prepared to come to Ottawa as early as this week if such a meeting can be arranged.

Clearly, this is a time for strong federal leadership and Manitobans will look to you and your colleagues to play an active role in ensuring that a solution to this impasse can be found which is just to both English and French speaking Canadians and which builds bridges between the various provinces and regions in this country.

This letter has been copied to Premier Bourassa and the other Provincial Premiers.

I look forward to your immediate response.

Sincerely yours,  
Gary Filmon

With that kind of very specific request from the premier of a province, who, at this particular stage, has, as the minister tells us, an important role in the matter of the constitutional accord, is the minister telling me that the Prime Minister of Canada has not replied to that kind of letter?

**Senator Murray:** Honourable senators, the position of the premier and the Government of Manitoba were made public even before we received the letter. We replied publicly at once on the basis of a number of aspects of the letter. First, we do not agree with the analysis that there is a constitutional crisis in Confederation by reason of the events to which the premier refers. Second, we pointed out to him at the officials and ministerial levels, as we frequently do when there are communications of this kind, that the Prime Minister had already notified premiers of his intention to have them to an informal meeting early in his second mandate. Third, we do not think it is appropriate at this time to summon a full-fledged First Ministers' constitutional conference of the kind suggested by the premier on the basis of the events of which he speaks. The premier had his response within a couple of hours of having made his request.

**Senator Molgat:** Honourable senators, exactly how did the Premier of Manitoba get his response? The minister tells us that there has been no letter. The minister tells us that the Prime Minister has not written and that he, the minister, has not written. Yesterday Senator Guay asked whether the minister had phoned the premier, but he never answered that question.

**Senator Guay:** That's right!

**Senator Molgat:** The minister waffled around and said that he had talked to the premier on the telephone prior, but the minister never indicated that he had talked to him on the