

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The member for Richelieu on a point of order.

Mr. Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, I hardly accept my colleague's comment, as it was he who interrupted my colleague from Hull—Aylmer as he was just starting to speak. Had he not interrupted him, he would have had enough time to ask his question.

An hon. member: Of course.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I request the cooperation of members on both sides of the House. Messages have been exchanged from one side to the other. I recognize the hon. member for Nunatsiak.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiak): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut.*]

Mr. Speaker, the amending formula is a very important one for northerners. I want to use my time today to express the concerns of northerners with the current amending formula and recent and ongoing attempts to change it. I also want to touch on the issue of territorial attendance and participation at federal-provincial constitutional conferences and similar federal-provincial meetings.

I would hope that governments in this country have learned from the events of the past three years that constitutional changes cannot be made in this country without the full participation and involvement of all the people. I used the word "participation" deliberately. Asking people for their views with no intention of listening to them is a recipe for failure.

We have been left out, excluded and forgotten once too often. We will not allow it to happen again and we can take some comfort from the support ordinary Canadians have given to us during the last constitutional round.

We span four time zones, Mr. Speaker, and sit, if you look at a map, on top of six provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. The area of the territories is basically what was left after the other provinces were carved out.

The physical distances are enormous. The distance between Baffin Island, the most eastern part of my riding, and Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest

Territories, on a map is similar to the distance between Quebec City and Edmonton.

Greater than the physical distances within the territories are the psychological and political distances between the territories and the federal and provincial governments of the country. The Yukon and the Northwest Territories have a constitutional status which is unique in the country. Most of the time, because we are not provinces yet, the north is simply forgotten in major, national decision making.

We are very much part of the national psyche. Yes, everyone acknowledges that Canada is a northern country, but we are not allowed to participate in the constitutional development of the country.

There are 52,000 people in the Northwest Territories and 25,000 people in the Yukon. That is a small population, less than the population of the city of Ottawa, but in a democracy, size is not a determinant of political voice.

The fundamental principle of democracy is one person, one vote. But in constitutional negotiations, the most essential and primary discussions, the northern territories do not have a voice. We elect representatives to our territorial legislatures, just as provincial voters elect their representatives to their legislative assemblies. At the constitutional table, provincial voters are represented by their premiers who have a vote at that table. The voters of the territories do not have a voice at that constitutional table. Our elected leaders are not allowed to vote. We are told that the federal government is our voice and that the federal government will look after our concerns.

I want to make something clear to the House. The federal government does not and cannot speak for northerners at the constitutional table. We have seen the evidence of that in the last round of constitutional talks. During the last minute negotiations at Meech Lake, our territorial government leaders were allowed to speak for 10 minutes to the federal and provincial premiers and were then politely asked to leave. "Thank you for your time, but we do not have time for you." That is basically what they were told.

There is no accountability in such a situation. Another basic principle of democracy is the accountability of the elected representation of the people to the people who elected them. The federal government is simply not