

first ministers' conference at this time would be justified. That is why further discussions are taking place now among governments at both the political and the official level. As I have said, I do not believe that the first ministers are ready to be brought together. When they are ready, I have no doubt that the Prime Minister will convene such a conference.

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—RELATION TO SENATE REFORM—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Leader of the Opposition): Just one other point, honourable senators. I notice that the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Mazankowski, said on the weekend that it would be helpful if Premier Bourassa were a bit more flexible on the question of Senate reform; likewise Premier Peterson, but particularly Premier Bourassa. Would I be justified in believing that the Deputy Prime Minister is expressing the view of the government on this point and that some invitation is going forward from the Prime Minister and the government to the Premier of Quebec to indicate some flexibility on the Meech Lake Accord, particularly with respect to Senate reform?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, there was a discussion of Senate reform as an issue at the time that the first ministers met here last November, but the situation was canvassed without success. There is no reason to believe that the question of Senate reform would hold the key to the ratification of Meech Lake. The situation is far more complex than that, as the honourable senator knows. There are many issues related directly to Meech Lake which have been discussed by those provinces that have not yet ratified or, in the case of Newfoundland, that wish to rescind.

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN
FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS—ABSENCE OF
NEWFOUNDLAND

Hon. H.A. Olson: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question. The Leader of the Government and minister responsible for federal-provincial relations, including Meech Lake and all that, is reported to have said—in fact, I saw him on television saying it—that negotiations were ongoing.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Discussions!

Senator Olson: Whatever you want to call them. When that was put to Premier Wells he was surprised, and he said that, if there were any ongoing discussions or negotiations of any substance, he had not been called to any of them. I would like to know what the problem is. Are you having discussions and negotiations with some provinces and leaving Newfoundland out? If so, why?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, the discussions we have taken part in, at either the political or the official level, have been bilateral with various provinces, and I am aware that there have also been discussions among provinces in which the federal government has not taken part. I had a very brief

conversation with Premier Wells on Sunday night, in the course of which he spoke to me of contacts that he had made with other provinces and of contacts he hoped to make in the future. I, of course, encouraged him to continue.

Senator Olson: Perhaps I could ask the Leader of the Government if he could tell us what these discussions or negotiations are which he said are ongoing and about which Premier Wells was not informed. What were you talking about when you said there were ongoing negotiations and to which Premier Wells was not invited to attend or to send a representative?

Senator Murray: The honourable senator persists in using the term "negotiations". I have never referred to negotiations. I have spoken of discussions that are taking place and I could not, without breaching the confidentiality that the honourable senator understands, divulge at this time, and in this place, the nature of the discussions—all of them informal and without commitment on either side—that have taken place between the federal government and different provinces, or that have been reported to me by different provinces.

THE SENATE

ALBERTA VACANCY—PRIME MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO PREMIER
OF ALBERTA

Hon. Joyce Fairbairn: Honourable senators, on the subject of the Senate, I should like to pursue one of my regular questions with the Leader of the Government in the Senate concerning the status of the candidacy of Stan Waters to fill the Alberta vacancy in this place. We understand that Premier Getty has now received a response from the Prime Minister to letters that he has written seeking, I suppose, a clear idea of what the Prime Minister proposed to do with Mr. Waters and the vacancy in Alberta.

Could the government leader indicate to us whether the Prime Minister was able to give the Premier of Alberta any concrete information on the future of Mr. Waters and that vacancy?

● (1500)

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I have reason to believe that a copy of that letter will be made available to honourable senators and to the public very soon.

Senator Olson: Does it say that he will make the appointment after June 23?

THE CONSTITUTION

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—RELATION TO SENATE REFORM—
POSITION OF PREMIERS OF ONTARIO AND QUEBEC

Hon. Dan Hays: Honourable senators, I should like to ask a supplementary question to this line of questioning. My question is more closely related to Senator MacEachen's last question.