[*Translation*]

THE CONSTITUTION

PROPOSAL THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF MINORITIES ATTEND CONFERENCE

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister. On Friday, November 6 of this year, the Prime Minister told the House he had asked for a federal-provincial meeting to discuss entrenchment of aboriginal rights in the Constitution. The purpose of the meeting would be to enable native peoples to express their grievances regarding the present draft. As the rights of francophones outside Quebec might also be recognized in the new Constitution by acknowledging their right to have access to the legislature and the courts of their province in their own language, across Canada, I wish to ask the Prime Minister, first of all, if he is willing and if so, on what conditions, to have, as is planned with the native peoples, a federal-provincial meeting to enable francophone groups outside Quebec to air their grievances as well? Secondly, if such a meeting is held, would it not be appropriate to invite Quebec's anglophone minority to the conference in order to dispel once and for all the preconceived ideas and misconceptions held in Canada on the constitutional rights granted this anglophone minority and to demonstrate how they compare with the absence of constitutional rights—education being the exception—facing francophone minorities?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, before giving a direct answer to the hon. member's question, I should like to remind him that the new Constitution, if and when it comes into being, does more for francophones outside Quebec than any other document ever considered or enacted in this country for 114 years. At the federal level, it recognizes official bilingualism and the equality of both language groups. It does this in all areas, at all levels executive, legislative and judicial. It does the same in the province of New Brunswick, for the Acadians of that province. It also acknowledges the right of all francophone language minorities in other provinces to be educated in their own language. I admit that there is a qualifying clause "when numbers are sufficient to justify", but I may remind the hon. member that Quebec itself insisted on this clause in the St. Andrews and Montreal accord in 1978. So I think that to start with, francophones outside Quebec should take time out to celebrate, but not too long, to recognize the fact that the rights for which they have been fighting for 114 years have been broadly recognized, entirely as far as education is concerned, and in any case at the federal level from "un Atlantique à l'autre" to quote Mr. Caouette, in all federal institutions. As far as the future is concerned, I have never objected and never will to meeting delegates from associations of francophones outside Quebec, in order to find out whether the conference suggested by the hon. member would be worth while, but I should like to point out to him that, at this stage, it is no longer

a matter of obtaining something from the federal government, since we have officially recognized language equality at all levels of federal jurisdiction. At this stage, it will be necessary to convince provincial governments to go a little further along the lines of Section 133 and other administrative provisions, as New Brunswick has done. So, a conference as suggested by the hon. member could only be worth while if the provinces agree to participate. This is more or less the answer I gave the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East, when I talked about a similar federal-provincial conference on native peoples. There is no need to convince the federal government—we have been fighting for this for the last 12 or 15 years—but to convince some of the provinces, and if the conference referred to by the hon. member could be instrumental in doing so, I shall certainly give it serious consideration.

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• (1500)

[*English*]

POINT OF ORDER

MR. WENMAN—APPLICATION OF RULE OF URGENCY IN READING OF PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: A question relating to the process of how public petitions presented to the House and reported upon by the Clerk of Petitions may be thereafter dealt with was raised in the House, notably by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman) and the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans). Last Wednesday I said I would look into the question and rule on it. I am prepared to do that today.

I shall not read the Standing Order to hon. members because I am sure they are well aware of it; it is Standing Order 67(8).

An examination of the history respecting petitions shows that long before Canada was settled the petition in the United Kingdom Parliament was an early form of the legislative instrument that became a statute when passed. This is to say, it was a document embodying a number of requests as articles and which became a statute by the simple process of combining a petition with its response.

What is referred to as the modern form of petitions grew up in the United Kingdom in the seventeenth century when Parliament had come to be regarded as a political and legislative body rather than as the highest court of justice. Petitions would ask for an alteration of the general law and an individual could, by petition to Parliament, pray for a redress of wrongs and expect an alleviation of difficulties. But the increased jurisdiction of the courts has permitted persons to institute proceedings in the courts to remedy wrongs and therefore the petition has fallen into disuse.

As Erskine May points out, the modern practice in the United Kingdom of the proceedings relating to petitions arose