

The Constitution

There were many people in Northumberland who recognized that, although the economy is the major issue today in our country, they understand the linkage between us finding a resolution to our constitutional impasse and the well-being of our economy.

Before the present 28 proposals were put before the House of Commons and the Canadian public in general, last June in my householder, which all members of Parliament are able to send out to constituents, I included a questionnaire on providing the opportunity to respond to some questions which seemed likely to be the subject matter of proposals put forward to the Canadian nation with regard to constitutional issues.

By October, when I sent out another householder, I had a total of 941 responses.

At that time, before we had the government's 28 proposals, I had a sense of where people in my riding were coming from. For example, when asked about our attachment to two official languages in this country, our bilingual policy, I had 45 per cent of people respond in the affirmative and 46 respond in the negative as to whether our Constitution should recognize our attachment to two official languages. We had a situation in which there was almost an even split on that issue.

A larger percentage of people showed support for our multicultural characteristics as a nation, 56 in the affirmative versus 31 not supporting that.

The distinct character of Quebec did not have as much support. It was two to one against recognizing Quebec's distinct society, but certainly since that time and with the proposals that were put before the people of Canada and in my riding of Northumberland there has been increased support for recognition of the distinctive characteristics of Quebec.

The largest support expressed was by the people of Northumberland for the recognition of the historical role of aboriginal people within Canada.

There was overwhelming support for the notion that we must have unrestricted trade barriers among the provinces. There was overwhelming support for a reformed and elected Senate. There was also support for the idea of the Senate approving appointments to federal agencies and institutions. There was support for the idea

that the federal government and the population of Yukon and the Territories should decide when a new province is to be created.

Subsequent to the government having tabled its 28 proposals, I have had several meetings with constituents in the riding of Northumberland, a total of over 12 meetings. By the time I had presented a report to the joint House of Commons-Senate constitutional committee, I had 12 meetings. I have had additional meetings in my riding. I have had over 500 people attend these various meetings and discuss with me their views of the 28 proposals.

I would like to share this evening the response of my constituents to the government's 28 proposals. The meetings should be described as well.

• (2110)

I had advertised in my householder and in local newspapers that I would be holding four public forums throughout my riding. I held those forums in Hope township, Hamilton township, Warkworth and Trenton. Besides that, my other meetings have been held in private homes, in schools and in churches by different groups at their request throughout my riding. As I said, over 500 people have attended these various meetings and they have represented populations from across the whole of my riding, people in Port Hope, Hope township, Cobourg, Hamilton township, Brighton, Warkworth, Trenton, et cetera.

With the exception of one public forum held in Trenton, the general consensus at my meetings was that those present were very concerned about the uncertainty of Canada's future and wished, above all, to maintain a united Canada with a strong federal government.

However, all those who attended my forums did express the view that there were limits beyond which achieving the above desired result would not be worth while, and it is important to note that.

The one public forum I had that expressed a diverse opinion from the others expressed the view quite strongly that our present bilingual and multicultural policies should be scrapped in favour of an English only official language policy, and basically a commitment to Anglo-Saxon Christian values as the basis of the Canadian cultural identity.