

I believe that when the people of Canada listen to opposition Members, they have to realize that there is a credibility gap between what they say and believe and what actually happens.

● (1600)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. It being four o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1867

AMENDMENT TO INCLUDE HULL IN NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

The House resumed from Tuesday, January 29, 1985, consideration of the motion of Mr. Isabelle that Bill C-207, an Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (national capital of Canada), be now read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs; and the amendment of Mr. Gauthier (p. 1801).

Mr. Ron Stewart (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter the debate on Bill C-207, aimed at changing the boundaries of the national capital of our country to conform with the limits of the National Capital Region. Such a step would clearly extend the boundaries beyond the geographic limits of the City of Ottawa to embrace the City of Hull and other cities, town and municipalities in the area immediately surrounding Parliament Hill. While this is a substantial area, it is not unreasonable in a country the size of Canada, and it would include parts of two provinces which in turn reflect the bilingual and bicultural nature of the country.

It is not entirely clear in the Bill just how the area surrounding the Cities of Ottawa and Hull would be defined. However, the present limits of the National Capital Region are specified in the schedule to the National Capital Act, 1958. It is assumed that this area of 1,800 square miles, or some 4,600 square kilometres more or less, is intended as the basis until such time as Parliament may decide otherwise.

The question of the boundaries of the capital city of Canada has never been in doubt to the extent that Ottawa has been legislated as the national capital since the British North America Act became the constitutional foundation of the country in 1867. However, there has been an ongoing discussion of possible change since 1969, when the Constitutional Conference of Canadian First Ministers, in its conclusions concerning the reform of institutions linked with federalism, agreed to the following:

The cities of Ottawa and Hull and their surrounding areas shall be the Canadian capital area.

Constitution Act, 1867

It continued:

Steps must be taken so that the two official languages and the cultural values common to all Canadians are recognized by all Governments concerned in these two cities and in the capital region in general, so that all Canadians may have a feeling of pride and participation in, and attachment to, their capital.

There have been a number of statements over the years dealing with the emphasis on the national significance of the National Capital Region as a symbol of identity for all Canadians. The more clearly the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada is established, the clearer it will be to establish its national significance for Canadians and for those looking at Canada from elsewhere in the world. Many attempts have been made to find inspiring words to describe the national significance of the capital. Jacques Greber, for example, had the following comment in his 1950 report:

A capital is also a legislative and administrative meeting place for legislators from every constituency in the country. It is important that a capital offer a satisfactory working environment within which the business of Government may be conducted; to the extent that it does not, the results will be a loss of efficiency and morale.

In 1972, the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada made the following statement in its final report:

A country's capital is an essential instrument of national pride. In a federal, bilingual and multicultural country, it must also be an essential instrument of national unity. It must reflect equitably all aspects of the country's character, and each citizen should have a true sense of ownership in the capital of his country regardless of the distance which separates him from the seat of Government.

Statements such as these on the nature and character of Canada's capital, and other similar commentaries, reflect generally on and elaborate further upon the essential functions or building blocks of the capital. The status of our capital is of vital importance to all of us as Canadians, and it is most appropriate to consider for a few minutes its role as a symbol of identity and unity and as a source of pride and inspiration for all Canadians.

A capital is the reflection, the symbol of the whole nation. The capital of Canada, as in all federal states, has special importance—it is the city which, to every Canadian and to all foreigners, must be representative of all 10 confederated provinces without, however, prejudicing the attributes and prerogatives of their respective capitals.

In 1965, in his landmark judgment on the Munro case which confirmed that the federal Government had the power to plan for the national capital region and to expropriate land for its purposes, Mr. Justice Gibson of the Exchequer Court quoted Greber and concluded as follows:

In the result, therefore, I am of the opinion that the words "national significance" are meaningful and are apt in describing the goal sought to be attained for the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada.

In 1966, in upholding the decision of the Exchequer Court, Mr. Justice Cartwright of the Supreme Court of Canada made the following statement:

I find it difficult to suggest a subject matter of legislation which more clearly goes beyond local or provincial interests and is the concern of Canada as a whole than the development, conservation and improvement of the national capital