

The Constitution

I conclude, by quoting the first speech ever given by Senator Louis J. Robichaud almost 40 years ago, at the beginning of his political career in the New Brunswick legislature. He said:

Our province is some kind of miniature Canada by the mix and the mentality of its ethnic elements. Let's try and profit from that situation by bringing the two groups and the two cultures to enrich one another. Let's be united forever.

[*English*]

I understand that we are allowed to table documents that are consistent with our presentation in the House. In that light, I would like to table this document that reflects many other views from the province of New Brunswick with respect to the propositions put forward by the federal government on the Constitution.

Mr. Walter Van De Walle (St. Albert): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this constitutional debate in the House of Commons this evening. It is an opportunity for me as member of Parliament for the federal constituency of St. Albert to communicate the opinions of the citizens of my riding.

I am grateful to all the constituents who communicated with me. It is obvious they are proud to live in a country that is free and peaceful. There is no doubt that my constituents are Canadians first. I am proud to represent the constituents of St. Albert.

A Canada united and strong is precious to me for what it is and what it will be. We are a young country, building on the northern half of this continent a society which is just and free, peaceful and prosperous, a society which cares for its people. I am proud to be part of this country.

My parents emigrated from Belgium. To them Canada was the land of opportunity and to me it remains so. I am the son of immigrants. I am proud to be a Canadian.

Many of my constituents are experiencing alienation, a feeling that our political system and our institutions have failed them. Many feel that the west must have a stronger voice in the decision-making process. Many hold strong views on constitutional reform. The Fathers of Confederation in 1867 united four provinces together into a federal system. Other provinces were to join later. Responsibilities were shared between the federal government and the provincial governments. The face of Canadian society has changed dramatically in the last 125

years yet the division of powers and responsibilities has remained the same.

It is evident that the people of St. Albert desire change. They want to be involved in the process. They want to see a more equitable balance between national objectives and regional aspirations. Many of my constituents are concerned about the future of Canada. They are frustrated with the apparent slow process or slow mechanism to bring about change. So many different voices are calling, requesting to be heard and understood, a consensus among Canadians must be found. I believe Canadians working together can find a way.

• (2020)

The Right Hon. Prime Minister has appointed, a native Albertan, but first and foremost a great Canadian, as Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs. My constituents say without hesitation that he is the best man for the task of ensuring that Canadians remain united.

Constitutional discussions by Canadians have been held from coast to coast to coast. The members of the all-party constitutional committee are listening and will be reporting to the House of Commons by the end of February. On behalf of the residents of my constituency, may I express our appreciation to the members of the committee. May the Lord bless its deliberations.

On the road to constitutional reform, there are many issues to address. In the limited time available to me, Mr. Speaker, I will touch on a number of key issues which my constituents consider important in the ongoing discussions. There is support in my riding for Senate reform. My constituents are of the opinion that the appointed Senate has failed to protect regional interests. The Triple-E Senate, elected, effective and equitable, along with proportional representation, received strong endorsement.

The distinct society is a Canadian historical reality. In the Quebec Act of 1774, the British Parliament recognized the distinct society by allowing Quebec to retain its French language, its cultural and civil law. In the British North America Act of 1867, it was restated by the Fathers of Confederation. Quebec has always been distinct. I know there are some people who have difficulty with the word distinct. In French, distinct means