

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, since Friday morning, when I moved this motion and the Leader of the Opposition replied for his side, 31 honourable senators, if I have counted correctly, have followed us in the debate. There have been, as Senator Carney mentioned a moment ago, some excellent speeches. Much as I would like to, I cannot do justice to all or even some of them in closing this debate.

I disagree profoundly with some of the things that have been said, but honourable senators have raised important issues. Almost all of these issues are of long standing in this country, hardy perennials that have been discussed in the greatest detail for many years. Contrary to what Senator Kenny has indicated, these are not issues, nor are the solutions material that has been sprung on the Canadian people by the first ministers a few weeks ago. In constitutional discussions and debate in this country, as in many other matters, there is truly very little that is new under the sun.

● (1840)

Honourable senators, I believe that the Charlottetown agreement gets us on the way to resolving these issues; but of course they do need, and will need, what I hope will be a final airing in the course of this debate, in the course of the referendum debate, and in the legislative ratification process that will follow. In this context, I agree that we have many months of debate on the proposed constitutional resolutions still ahead of us, and no one that I know in the federal government or the provinces has tried to pretend otherwise. What the referendum will decide is whether the principles arrived at in the Charlottetown agreement provide an acceptable basis to proceed to amend and renew the Constitution.

There is very little to which I would take exception in the speech that was made on Friday morning by the Leader of the Opposition. Indeed, I intend to return to some of his comments because they provide the most effective rebuttal to some of the criticisms that I heard from Liberal senators who followed him in the debate. However, I cannot let pass, and I am sure he does not expect me to let pass, his characterization of the past eight years as "... heedless and needless constitutional wrangling..." for which he blames the Prime Minister, "... and the resultant time pressures which were an important driving force in the process." En passant, I should say that it is the 1982 amending formula with the provision for three years permitted for ratification of most constitutional amendments that resulted in the time pressures which operated during that period.

However, when the Honourable Senator Frith proceeded to speak in French later in his speech, he gave a much more objective and indeed more accurate description of the background to the current constitutional discussions.

[Translation]

On page 1977 of the *Debates of the Senate*, the Hon. Senator Frith said:

The long review process which went on for more than six years and which is now coming to a conclusion was

set into motion as a result of the five propositions submitted in 1986 by Premier Bourassa's government.

A little later, he added that history:

— has also decided that Canada should be faced with the challenge of allowing an important minority, with its special characteristics, to live and prosper in the middle of a sea of anglophones.

We Canadians have always met that challenge, which was again put forward when the Quebec government, through its Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, on May 9, 1986, stated the five conditions for Quebec to adhere whole-heartedly to the Constitution.

[English]

So what was in English a heedless and needless eight year constitutional wrangle became in French "un défi à relever".

He went further when he said...

[Translation]

— and I quote page 1978:

I am proud to say that during these six years, even at the darkest hours, we, in the Liberal Party, have always supported the efforts made to bring Quebec freely into the Constitution of Canada.

[English]

Honourable senators, that is a very accurate, objective and sympathetic recitation and description of the circumstances which form the background to the present constitutional discussions. I raise the matter not so much to score a point on the Leader of the Opposition or to contradict him, but because one still reads and hears academics, eminent scholars, even some Canadian statesmen, and today the Honourable Senator Kenny, with some severity declaring that it was all a terrible mistake on the part of Prime Minister Mulroney ever to have "reopened the constitutional file in 1986", as if the constitutional file had been closed in 1982.

Honourable senators, we all know that there was, and remains, some glaring unfinished business out of the 1982 Constitution. Quebec was not a party to that agreement. When Premier Bourassa put forward the five conditions under which Quebec would give its political assent to the 1982 Constitution, the other provinces, with the encouragement of the federal government, agreed on a Quebec round with a view to reintegrating Quebec into the constitutional family on the basis of those five conditions. Still, as I say, some commentators reproach Prime Minister Mulroney and the other provinces for having responded positively to this initiative on the part of the new federalist Quebec government led by Premier Bourassa. What response would they have had us make to this Quebec initiative? A negative response? And what would have been the consequences of that?