

Oral Questions

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and this government have shown leadership in advancing the Meech Lake Accord. I regret that the hon. member is now having some second thoughts about the support of his party. That is regrettable. I indicated earlier that the—

Mr. Speller: You are playing politics.

Mr. Mazankowski: The hon. member suggests playing politics. It is his own colleague who is trying to inject politics into this. Maybe once the junior member has been around here for a little while he will realize the difference between politics and sincerity.

What is happening is that the consultation process is going on, as I indicated to his leader, in the hopes that there can be a drawing together of the opinions in bringing the parties together in an attempt to follow through perhaps with a first ministers' conference. We are certainly not ruling that out. I indicated that I appreciated the recommendation by the Leader of the Opposition and suggested to him that at an appropriate time that might be a possible course of action.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, I want to say on behalf of our party that we urge the government to hold a first ministers' meeting as soon as reasonably possible on the future of the Constitution and Meech Lake.

My question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. There is now a constitutional impasse in this country and a great deal of concern about the unity of Canada from one part of this country to the other.

On February 23 in the national press theatre the Prime Minister held a press conference. He said in part: "I will be meeting very soon with Senator Murray and I will be talking to some of the first ministers, no doubt. I will let you know as the events unfold".

Is the Deputy Prime Minister in a position to bring the House up to date on what has happened in the last two weeks? Premier Wells said yesterday that he had not heard from the Prime Minister. Has the Prime Minister been meeting with Senator Murray? Has the Prime Minister called the first ministers? Can the Deputy Prime Minister bring the House up to date on what has

happened in the last two weeks since he held that very important press conference?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the tenor of the hon. member's question and his expressed concern for the national unity of the country. I can say on behalf of my colleagues in the House that the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville has always been in the forefront of providing leadership on behalf of his party and the constituents which he represents in promoting national unity.

The senator has travelled across the country, as he was instructed to do, on the basis of the agreement reached at the first ministers' meeting in November. He has been in the process of exploring possible accommodations, including the idea of Premier McKenna's parallel accord.

The dialogue among all the provinces is continuing. It is going on at this very moment and has been going on at the level of the Prime Minister and the premiers, various cabinet ministers and officials. I want to assure to the hon. member that the federal government has not given up in this very worth-while process. We will continue to work and I am sure at the appropriate time the hon. member and other members of the House will be brought up to date.

The developments of yesterday and recent developments have obviously caused a greater sense of urgency. I want to give him the assurance that we treat this as an urgent matter and will invite the participation—and I am sure the Prime Minister would agree—of all hon. members, as we have in this House before. It is more than simply a government initiative, it is an initiative by Parliament, it is a resolution that has been supported by Parliament and we respect and appreciate the support from the hon. member and his party.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): With respect, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether or not the Deputy Prime Minister can tell us if during the last two weeks the Prime Minister has been in touch with other first ministers in this country? There are a few confusing signals coming out of this as to whether or not the Prime Minister himself has been in touch with First Ministers. Is the Prime Minister willing to look for some mechanism, to seek some accommodation of some of the