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participation, within the Constitution, the Province of Quebec, the second largest province in terms of size and population, and the home and birthplace of francophone culture on this North American continent.

I am proud to have the opportunity to be part of the beginning of the process of parliamentary discussion and, we hope and trust, eventual modification of the Meech Lake Accord to reflect as fully as possible the consensus which we are able to obtain right across this country and the aspirations and inspiration from which it springs.

The Meech Lake Accord, when initially announced in very broad terms, with its wording as yet unspecified, was greeted, unfortunately, by a salvo from a person who used to sit in this place, a person I could perhaps most politely describe as driven to petty invective and personal imprecations which have no part in a national debate of such major proportions. Those comments were, of course, picked up and spread across the country by members of the media, as is its duty and, indeed, its right. However, in spite of that kind of interest, there have been some intelligent, persuasive and very deeply felt objections and criticisms to the contents of the Meech Lake Accord.

We are continuing in a constitutional process which will take some time, but it is worth devoting time to. It is a constitutional process which will reframe the Constitution. If our amendments are not accepted through the process of constitutional adaptation, it will then again have to be subjected to further amendment. It is worth while remembering that this is not the first Constitution which has held sway in Canada even dating back to the year 1867 when Confederation was formed. That distinction belongs, of course, to the Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee, the six nations of the Iroquois, who now inhabit the southern part of Ontario but who previously were spread across the eastern half of this entire continent.

The Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee was not simply understandings on an oral basis. Those understandings were essential to the life and spirit of a document, which infused and united the six nations. It was a genuine constitution in the sense of being codified by means of the wampum, and by the ability of those who could interpret the wampum. Those who have read the transcription, shall I say, of the great law of peace into the English or French language, have found that it is a document of considerable complexity, but one which is obviously infused and marked by the need for goodwill, good intentions and fair understanding in order to make it work.

Thus it is with the present Constitution of Canada, be it in its unamended form or with the addition of the amendments we are contemplating today. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper), said that actions speak louder than words. Indeed, they do, and this should be a key to the understanding of the Constitutional context in which we propose amendments to recognize the self-government rights of the native people of Canada.

The aboriginal people have had to put up with much. They have had to put up with dispossession, displacement, the stripping of their culture and the imposition on them of the myth of two founding peoples in this country, whereas there were in fact many peoples before even one of the so-called founding peoples came.

In more recent years they have had to put up with being dragged through the process of four First Ministers' conferences, seeming to have the goal within their grasp and then having it snatched away by intransigence and an unwillingness to recognize the centrality of their role to this country and to this society. They had to put up with the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) not accepting their invitation—and we know that he was busy with other matters—to come to discuss before the final Meech Lake meeting in the Langevin Block the claims and the requests of aboriginal peoples and their just demands. They have had to put up with a double standard.

• (1520)

I could recite the history at some length. However, I think briefly outlining some of the wounds that the aboriginal people of this country have felt through the recent constitutional process will suffice. They went through four conferences in five years. They had the most recent conference adjourned on them early. They were not given the opportunity to sit up until five in the morning to reach an agreement. We know that if an agreement had been possible they would have sat far beyond that. We all know that the best decisions are not taken at five in the morning. Regrettably, they did not even get a mention in the closing speech of the most recent conference in the Langevin Block.

The prediction of Mr. Jim Sinclair, the Métis leader for Saskatchewan, that it would be awfully easy by comparison to bring Quebec in because Quebec was seen by the Premiers and by those involved in the constitutional process as being one of "our own" was sadly fulfilled. The native people did not have that courtesy extended to them. The aboriginal people of this country have consistently supported the inclusion of the Province of Quebec in the Constitution. Their magnanimity in that regard is also to be commended.

Their objections to the Meech Lake Accord do not extend to a desire to see it rejected. They know that political will rather than merely supportive language will be the ultimate instrument by which aboriginal self-government rights will be entrenched. I am glad to say that that political will exists in my Party at all levels. When we form the Government of Canada we will ensure, if it has not already been remedied, that the insulting omission of the entrenchment of aboriginal self-government rights is included.

While it is said that the inclusion of Quebec in the constitutional process radically strengthens the opportunity to entrench aboriginal self-government rights, that is a conclusion for the long term. It is not the way that aboriginal people or, I believe, the majority of Canadians would have wanted to see it. I say that because it offers the hope of bringing aboriginal