

● (1440)

[English]

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

BRIEFINGS FOR OPPOSITION MEMBERS—GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. Lorna Marsden: Honourable senators, the Leader of the Government is no doubt aware of the debate going on about the government briefing members of the Opposition on the North American Free Trade Agreement. I wonder if the Leader of the Government could tell us what measures have been taken to brief provincial elected representatives on that trade agreement?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I must confess that I do not really know the answer to that question. During the free trade negotiations with the United States there were perhaps a dozen meetings at the first ministers level, occasional meetings at the ministerial level and quite frequent meetings, many of them conducted by conference call and the like, among officials.

Senator Frith: The provinces were much noisier about the whole thing then.

Senator Murray: I am aware that there have been ministerial meetings on this matter and some official contact but I would have to enquire to see whether there is a schedule of meetings planned on these negotiations. Meanwhile, I should also point out that what we call the SAGITs, the Sectoral Advisory Committees are, I think, in place and the private sector consultations are ongoing.

Senator Marsden: Honourable senators, I would be grateful if the Leader of the Government would provide us with whatever schedule of briefings there is, including those briefings that have already taken place and, in particular, if we could know what opportunity provincial governments have had to put items on the agenda.

Senator Murray: Yes.

[Translation]

CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCES

ACCESSIBILITY TO FRANCOPHONES OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Hon. L. Norbert Thériault: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

It arises from the fact mentioned by Senator Corbin at the beginning of today's sitting. I raise it because I saw a headline in Montreal's *La Presse* dated today saying that Mr. Bouchard rebuffed the Francophones outside Quebec.

Would the Leader of the Government in the Senate find out from his colleague Mr. Bouchard why he snubbed Francophones outside Quebec?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government in the Senate): Honourable senators, I can not comment on a newspaper article, but I will be pleased to consult my colleague Mr. Bouchard for clarification on this matter.

[Senator Lavoie-Roux.]

Senator Thériault: Honourable senators, I appreciate the answer given by the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

As Francophones outside Quebec, we have had to fight for our rights from the very beginning, especially because many Anglophones in Canada do not know what our people needs.

Apparently, to be recognized, one must be a people! In Acadia, we believe that we are a people. Now it is no longer Anglophones who cause us problems but rather Quebec's new elite.

Hon. Jean-Maurice Simard: Honourable senators, I cannot let that comment by Senator Thériault pass so easily.

I can tell you that I for one was shocked when I saw the headline of that article which spoke of "rebuff". That is not the word Mr. Bouchard used, obviously.

After I got over my momentary shock, honourable senators, I can tell you that I prefer to remember Benoît Bouchard's major contribution in resolving several Acadian issues in favour of the French-speaking minority, although Mr. Bouchard's inapt choice of words in this case is unfortunate—

Senator Thériault: By what authority is Senator Simard answering my question?

Senator Simard: Yes, I am answering your question.

Senator Thériault: By what authority?

Senator Simard: Well, go ahead and ask whatever you like, but let me decide what I want to say and how long my answer will be.

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I let Senator Simard proceed, although it is entirely against the *Rules of the Senate*.

A question was directed to the Leader of the Government, who is the only person who may entertain such questions, unless we are talking about a chairman of a committee. Those are the Senate rules.

However, Mr. Speaker, if you are prepared to let Senator Simard speak, I have no objection, but I can assure you we will do likewise.

Hon. Jacques Hébert: No respect for the *Rules of the Senate!*

Senator Simard: I noted your objection.

Hon. Royce Frith (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Simard, we all did!

● (1450)

[English]

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

BRIEFINGS FOR SENATORS—GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. M. Lorne Bonnell: I understand, honourable senators, that we have a new Leader of the Government. Senator Simard is now answering questions on behalf of the government and we congratulate him on that promotion.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!