

*The Constitution*

support this statement of national unity. That is what this is all about, nation building.

I pay tribute to the First Ministers whose leadership and resolve have strengthened our federation and enriched our citizenship. From every region of Canada, from all political Parties, the First Ministers came to Meech Lake and theirs were the voices of confidence and unity and of belief in the greatness of Canada.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mulroney:** Let no one say our national unity is undermined by respecting differences and incorporating them in a common entity in the custody of a central authority.

It would be astounding if the nation that succeeded in resisting disunity felt more threatened by unity.

Together we ventured out on a long and difficult road in search of our political identity and constitutional sovereignty. Yet we never lost faith in ourselves, we never denied our tradition of tolerance and we never doubted that, somewhere at the end of our quest for democratic dialogue, a fraternal and honourable solution awaited us.

Success is now within our grasp.

I appeal to the civic spirit of every Member of this House so that we may put aside Party politics at this great moment in our history, this hour of strength drawn from our rediscovered solidarity.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mulroney:** This is what our fellow-citizens expect from us, from one end of this country to another in a great spirit of hope. We will do honour to ourselves not to disappoint them.

[*English*]

From Macdonald to Laurier, from King to Diefenbaker, from Meighen to Pearson, from Bennett to St. Laurent to Trudeau, the overriding objective of all Canadian Prime Ministers has been a strong and a united Canada. The Meech Lake Agreement contributes to that unity and is a statement as well of a vision of Canada, a vision that is rooted in our love of this country, our pride in its people, our respect for its traditions, our joy at its promise. But that promise shall be realized only in unity, only in the unity that comes from English and French Canadians, east and west, new Canadians and old, together, finally together in a strong and united Canada.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, we are embarking today upon what is one of the most important discussions or debates any nation can face, the revision of our Constitution. Canadians are familiar with constitutional discussions and with constitutional differences. We have been talking about it in earnest for at least two

decades and this is why I welcome the opportunity to restate my views once again this morning.

When the Constitution was patriated in 1982, the agreement contained one tragic flaw. In our attempt to break away from our colonial past, one of our most important and founding provinces was missing in that agreement, Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Since patriation, Quebec's absence has been deeply felt by all parties, and we have focused all our efforts on finding the fairest and most equitable way to complete this unfinished task.

I am proud to lead a Party that has always been in the forefront of constitutional thinking and debate.

Last year, I was the first to present a set of recommendations for enabling Quebecers to sign the Canadian Constitution with pride and dignity. These proposals were enthusiastically received by the Government of Quebec.

We were thus able to raise this debate above partisan considerations and to create a genuine climate of mutual understanding and generosity, the impact of which has surely contributed to the success of the meeting at Meech Lake.

[*English*]

I would like at this time to recognize and pay tribute to my caucus and my Party for pursuing this issue with vigour and commitment. Following the election of the Bourassa Government in Quebec, there was a new spirit of co-operation and a political will to participate fully in our confederation. I am very pleased that that spirit has been given some substance in the agreement we are discussing today. I know from my own participation in the Victoria conference in 1971 that the process of constitutional reform is long and difficult.

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I also must pause and congratulate all the First Ministers on reaching an agreement on a process which may in fact see Quebec brought into the constitutional agreement.

[*Translation*]

The question of Quebec's place in the Canadian federation lies at the very heart of our existence as a nation. The political history buffs among us are aware that ever since the end of the 18th century, attempts have been made to provide for a political structure that would allow Quebecers then referred to as "Canadiens", to protect their rights and safeguard their identity.

The beginnings of parliamentary democracy in our country were difficult, both in Upper and Lower Canada. The 1837 rebellions and the morass in which the Government of Union found itself led the British authorities to conclude that it was utopian to consider imposing or forcing on Canada a uniform system of government.

Clearly, what was needed was a political framework that would leave room for developing views and maintaining