

*Supply*

[English]

We are pleased that all the elements which needed to be considered were considered by the First Ministers. We think the package is a very positive one for the federal Government's role in our society, for greater participation by the provinces, and particularly because it constitutes an opening up to the Province of Quebec which was acceptable to the Government of the Province of Quebec.

I said that while accepting the Accord we would have more to say about the process of its consideration by Parliament and, very important, about the right of Canadians to learn in greater detail about what is involved and their right to make constructive suggestions about some of the details of that Accord.

Second, we said that we would have constructive suggestions to make about changing the Accord which would be consistent with its purposes and which we hope the federal Government and, in turn, the provincial Governments, will be able to reach final agreement upon and accept as positive.

I want to say something important on behalf of my colleagues with regard to the process. We want the Government to announce soon what it plans to do in terms of establishing a committee to look into the Accord and provide an opportunity for input from the people of Canada and Members of Parliament. The Government has an obligation to get this under way and to do so soon.

Today I want to talk about two groups of Canadians who are quite unhappy with the Accord. They are northerners and aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal peoples think they are doubly jeopardized because in addition to fearing that certain losses in terms of aboriginal rights could occur, since a majority of Canadians living north of the 60th parallel are aboriginal peoples, they believe that they lose once again in terms of discrimination against rights of people who live north of the 60th parallel.

I want to stress to Members of the Government that today's motion is fully consistent with the spirit and purpose of the Accord.

[Translation]

As a country, we wanted a process of renewal so that the founding partners of Confederation would feel both legally and morally comfortable within our federation. It would be most unfortunate if in the course of this process, two major groups of Canadians were to feel left out.

Seventy-five thousand people live in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, in an area that represents one third of Canada's territory. At a time when we are talking about the importance of Arctic sovereignty, the Accord as it reads today confers on northern Canadians a status that is somewhat inferior to that of the residents of other provinces. I am sure that we all want to try and improve the situation so that people in the north will not feel like second-class citizens. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) said last week that the

process will enhance our ability to achieve that goal, the goal being to realize more fully the aspirations of northern Canadians. Canadians in the north want a strong voice in the decisions affecting their future in Confederation. They want a strong voice in areas that affect them.

The leaders of the Governments of Yukon and the Northwest Territories believe that they should be able to consider the option for their territory to become a province. They have expressed serious doubts about the success of such an option, since now the approval of all provinces will be required for the two territories to become provinces.

• (1140)

[English]

Although there is no doubt that the central purpose of the last two First Ministers' meetings was to bring the people of Quebec, through their Government and in a positive way, to acceptance of a federal Canada, it was also desired by everyone there I am sure to do this without jeopardizing the rights of other Canadians. It would be very unfortunate if this accord, which is such a plus for so much of Canada, ends up doing injury to other Canadians. The changes I am proposing today are intended to avoid that possibility. They are intended to meet with the purpose and spirit of the Accord and I hope they will be listened to and accepted by the Government.

The people of Yukon and the Northwest Territories have two central complaints. First, they object to the amending formula which requires unanimity in order for them to obtain provincial status. This requirement is a departure from the history of the evolution of Canada. When your province, Mr. Speaker, as well as the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland became part of Confederation only the federal Government was involved in the decision. Certainly the other provinces played no role whatsoever. In 1982 this principle, which held sway up until then, was changed to require at least seven provinces and 50 per cent of the population to agree to the establishment of a territory as a province. With this Accord a more regressive step has been taken and, if adopted as part of our Constitution, all 10 provinces plus the federal Government have to be in agreement. This is quite unacceptable to the NDP.

The people in Yukon and the Northwest Territories simply want the restoration of the situation to what it was in 1982. They are not asking us to go back to the situation prior to 1982, they are simply asking us to restore the formula of seven provinces and 50 per cent of the population plus the federal Government being in agreement.

I hope the Government has an adequate answer to the question I am going to ask. Why have we changed the formula to require unanimity? It goes against our history. It goes against logic. It goes against fairness. The people of those two territories want the right to make up their own mind about becoming a province and they do not want one province alone to be able to say no. That is what is involved. Now is the time in this debate for all the Parties to make clear that what has