

The Constitution

chairs of the special joint committee on a renewed Canada.

I found that both of these meetings were very productive. I found that the people of Delta also appreciated very much the opportunity to present their views on the Canada we will be looking at in the future.

I do appreciate the fact that these meetings were both hosted by local community organizations, one by the Scott Road Business Association and the other by the Delta Chamber of Commerce, and by two very capable chairmen, Mr. Peter Podovnikoff and Mr. Sean Hogan. They did an excellent job. They brought focus to the meetings and helped to speed it along to keep the consensus and played a great part in the success of both of those evenings.

These events were designed to give the residents of my riding the opportunity to make known their views and concerns. My function was just to present the proposals with overhead projection and to listen and to see what the people felt and thought.

Out of the 150 people who attended the two meetings, approximately 35 had the opportunity to express their views. Their statements lasted anywhere from two minutes to fifteen minutes, but they all were thoughtful and sincere and obviously from the heart. I really appreciated the attitude and the atmosphere of the meetings as the people sought to seek a consensus and to understand the points of view of other people.

The general comments ran from very supportive to staunchly opposed to certain sections of the package. There was certainly no consensus. When the meetings were concluded those who attended at least left with a better understanding of the proposals and also what their neighbours and their community thought about the whole proposal.

Since it was not possible for the joint committee to meet in the Delta area, it was felt that this type of representation gave the people of Delta the opportunity to be heard. As I said, these conceptions have already been presented to the committee and to the right hon. Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs.

On the specific concerns that were mentioned at the meetings, we went through the various proposals. On reaffirming the rights and freedoms of citizens and on

the issue of property rights the vast majority was strongly in favour of property rights. Many people commented that it was a mistake not to have included these rights when the Constitution was repatriated in 1982.

The point was made on many occasions that all of the other constitutionalized countries of the world guarantee the right to property and that it was high time that Canada caught up with the rest of the world. Others pointed to it as a fact that was necessary to restrict the power of government over the people.

With regard to the notwithstanding clause, raising the majority to 60 per cent from 50 per cent, all of the participants who spoke on this item were unanimous that if it had to exist then strengthening it was a good change.

However, several speakers called for the total removal of the distinct society clause from the Constitution. Most cited the controversial Quebec sign law as a significant irritant to the rest of Canada and therefore justification for striking the clause.

It was pointed out at the meetings, again by the participants, that it was the western provinces that insisted on being a part of the charter in the first place and therefore it must play an important role for all the provinces.

On the matter of the distinct society clause, this was probably the most widely debated of all the issues in the meetings and people were very passionate on both sides. Those who spoke against the inclusion of this clause considered that it gave to one province a more significant role than the other nine.

One individual, for example, asked if a distinct society will be a sleeper clause that will be used to justify more powers for Quebec down the road. It was recommended that a limiting clause be added to it.

Another participant argued that Quebec's distinctiveness is an issue that was dreamed up in the minds of politicians. It was said that the official recognition of distinctiveness would further compound the problems that were created by the English and the French.

The criticism of culture being included in the distinct society clause was that Canada's many cultures have continued to flourish without official protection. The oriental population of B.C. was given as an example of a group of people whose language and culture has contin-