

the aboriginal peoples. Some aboriginal groups testifying before the Committee asked that a specified number of seats be reserved for them in the Senate and perhaps also in the House of Commons. However, they recognized that the outcome of other discussions concerning aboriginal peoples are relevant to this request, among them discussions about self-government. The report of the Special Committee of the House of Commons on Indian Self-Government stated that "the best way to promote Indian rights is through Indian self-government and not by special representation for First Nations in Parliament. Nevertheless, the situation of Indian peoples will change with self-government, and special representation in Parliament might in future offer benefits that cannot now be anticipated." There is also continuing consultation through the constitutional conference of federal and provincial first ministers, with the aboriginal peoples participating, on this and other constitutional matters affecting aboriginal peoples. For these reasons we believe that no action should be taken at the present time to establish separate Senate seats for the aboriginal peoples.

We also heard representations about provincial official-language minorities. Such minorities are concerned primarily about the effects of provincial legislation, whereas the Senate is concerned with the passage of federal legislation. Aside from certain provisions in the Constitution, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it is the workings of provincial politics, aided where appropriate by national public opinion, that are the main protection for these minorities. However, it would not be inappropriate — and might well be desirable — for any process of appointment or election of senators to result in the inclusion in the Senate of representatives from these minorities, so as to make the chamber as broadly representative as possible. Under a process of direct election this could be achieved through the choice of candidates, through the delineation of constituencies, or through the choice of an electoral system.

The Committee's objectives for Senate reform

Our primary objective is to strengthen the Senate's capacity to fill its role of regional representation. At the same time it is important to preserve and strengthen the Senate's capacity to improve the quality of legislation and to investigate questions of public policy and administration.

To meet our primary objective, any reform should ensure that senators have more political authority and a measure of independence from party discipline. However, we also consider it essential that the House of Commons continue to be the pre-eminent chamber in Parliament, so that our system of responsible government can continue to operate effectively. Finally, our overriding concern is to ensure that Senate reform will strengthen the authority of Parliament as a whole to speak and act on behalf of Canadians in all parts of the country.

If these objectives are achieved, we believe that the functioning of our political system would be improved. Provincial governments, which now frequently speak on behalf of the people of their provinces in federal as well as provincial matters, would no longer have to carry that additional load. The excessive political burden now thrust upon federal-provincial conferences and intergovernmental relations would be reduced, because there would be a new forum whose principal role would be to discuss openly