

that the country and its inhabitants are prepared to defend.

The participants at the Toronto conference gave eloquent testimony of this willingness on the weekend when they recognized the distinct character of Quebec society and said that they agreed with including this recognition in the Constitution. But while each of these cultures makes up our Canadian heritage, the government should recognize the distinct nature of Quebec society and Quebec's need to protect and promote its character as a society where most people speak French.

Since the aspects of institutional reform and a more prosperous future for Canada were not dealt with as such in the questionnaire, I would prefer to stop here.

• (2120)

I will move on to some other issues, such as the aboriginal one which I touched on a few moments ago, and on which I will dwell a little. Given the importance we attach to the role and the contribution the first inhabitants of this country have made and will make to the progress and prosperity of Canada, the aboriginal right to self-government constitutes one of the pillars of the proposed constitutional reform. Members of the First Nations will then have the right to devise their own solution to the problems affecting their own society, the right to take their own place in the Canada of tomorrow. If we cannot change anything to the past, we can see to it that our aboriginal people are masters of their future.

In closing, I would like to reiterate how great a country Canada is. How many times will people from outside have to repeat it before we begin to really believe it; Every day we are enjoying conditions of living that are the envy of other people on this planet. In all honesty we cannot act in such a way that our children will be deprived of all that makes our life so enriching.

It is our duty as Canadians to work together to foster dialogues that will assure national unity, economic stability and the needed degrees of autonomy for the provinces. The proposals tabled by the government have set off a process, the success of which only our efforts can guarantee. Now is not the time to give up.

The Constitution

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in the debate on the work done by people regarding the Constitution.

[*English*]

As a member of the special joint committee on a renewed Canada, I have had the opportunity over the last few months to hear many views on the government's 28 proposals for constitutional reform.

I would like to begin my address by extending a very special thank you to all of the people who took the time to come and address the committee. They were extremely helpful to us in attempting to find solutions to this tremendous challenge that faces us.

As well I want to extend great appreciation to those many Canadians who would have liked to appear before the committee, but for a lack of time and a number of other reasons, were unable to do so. They deserve special thanks as well.

I hope hon. members will forgive me if I pay a special tribute to my own constituents who took the time in a number of ways to inform me of their views on a number of critical issues that are found within those particular proposals.

Many of you will know that the constituency of St. Boniface is very close to the geographic centre, east-west of Canada. It, as well, has access to our great north. We have a majority of English speaking citizens with an important minority of French speaking citizens, almost 20 per cent, and of course, we have important representation from our new Canadian communities as well as our aboriginal Canadians.

How did my constituents participate in the debate and help to inform me? There were phone calls to both the Ottawa and Winnipeg offices. There were a number of well thought out letters to me indicating concern, identifying priorities and both the telephone calls and the letters were extremely useful.

I also managed to meet a broader range of constituents through three hearings which I held. The first one was on January 6 at Dakota high school. The second one was on January 7 at J. H. Bruns Collegiate which is the centre of the constituency. Dakota is in the south. On