

Senate Reform

● (1620)

Mr. John McDermid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague, the Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker), for proposing this interesting resolution to the House today. It is often the case in Ottawa and in the House that much time is spent producing reports. These are very worth-while reports and are introduced with some fanfare, but after the media gives particular attention to these reports for a week or so, they tend to disappear.

As we know, the current controversy concerns the Senate because of some problems in the last number of weeks regarding a money Bill. Of course, when that happens it tends to attract the attention of many people who have forgotten about the Senate.

I thank the Hon. Member for bringing forward this resolution so that we are reminded not only in the House and the Senate but throughout Canada at large that these very worth-while reports do exist, especially the one to which the Hon. Member has referred.

However, with the greatest respect, at a time when governments should be devoting most of their efforts toward economic renewal, I wonder if there is much likelihood that the convening of a constitutional conference would lead to a speedy resolution of the Senate question. Can we expect at present that a consensus would emerge from such a conference as to which avenue Senate reform should take?

It is not for lack of proposals or want of proponents that the reform of the Senate may be an uncertain undertaking. Rather, it is due to the differences of opinion which people hold as to what modifications are best, and the problems associated with reconciling these differing viewpoints on fundamental change to the institution of the Upper House may require a lengthy process of intergovernmental discussion.

To illustrate some of the many proposals that have been made in recent years alone, we might recall the report of the 1972 Special Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution of Canada. In that report, the committee noted that historically it has been intended that the Senate's role should be to protect provincial, minority and regional interests, as well as to review legislation in a forum of "sober second thought".

The committee took the view that the Senate required reform, not abolition, given that the reasons behind its creation in 1867 were still present. It recommended that all Senators continue to be appointed by the federal Government, but that as vacancies occurred one-half of the Senators from each province and Territory should be appointed in the same manner as at present, with the other half appointed by the federal Government from a panel of nominees submitted by the appropriate provincial or territorial Government.

The Government of British Columbia recommended in 1978 that the Senate should not be abolished but should be substantially altered. It believed that the primary purpose of the Senate should be to institutionalize provincial or regional

participation in the federal law-making process and that its secondary purpose should be to review legislation passed by the House.

It recommended that Senate members be appointed and removed by the provincial Governments, with the leading Senator from each province being a provincial Cabinet Minister. I am not sure that that system would work well.

On the other hand, in that same year, 1978, the Ontario Select Committee on Constitutional Reform of the Ontario Legislature, the Canada West Foundation and the Progressive Conservative Party recommended the abolition of the Senate and its replacement by a "House of the Provinces". The Ontario Advisory Committee suggested that members be appointed by and represent the provincial Governments, and could include members of provincial Legislatures, Premiers or Cabinet Ministers. Federal Government representatives could participate in the House of the Provinces by introducing and speaking on Bills, but would not be permitted to take part in the voting.

The Canada West Foundation recommended that the House of the Provinces consist of provincial and territorial delegations casting a single weighted vote, and that these provincial delegations be composed of Cabinet Ministers and Legislative Assembly members, as well as civil servants. If the Hon. Member had stayed in the provincial House, he might have made it to the Senate.

Mr. Boudria: That's more than I can say for you.

Mr. McDermid: Moreover, all provincial Premiers would serve *ex officio* as members of the House of the Provinces, with each Premier serving as President of the House on a rotating basis. The Progressive Conservative Party recommended that the majority of members be delegated by the provincial Governments, with a small complement of federal appointees.

The Canadian Bar Association, in its 1978 report "Towards a New Canada", believed that the upper House should be reconstituted to represent regional interests in federal matters. The Bar Association recommended that members of the upper House should be appointed and serve at the pleasure of the provincial Governments while the federal Government would be empowered to name non-voting spokesmen to that House.

We all recall the 1979 Pepin-Robarts Task Force on Canadian Unity. That significant report indicated that a new second chamber should be known as the "Council of the Federation". It would be composed of delegations representing the provincial Governments and therefore acting under their instructions. The provincial delegations could be headed by a delegate of cabinet rank. The Hon. Member from the Ottawa Valley would not fit in that category, that's for sure.

As well, central Government Cabinet Ministers would be non-voting members, having the right to present and defend central government proposals before the Council of the Federation and its committees. The Fédération des Francophones