

There is one category of programs where funding would have to be offered to Ontario just as it would have to be offered to Newfoundland. That category is for new national shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

One example would be a new national Child Care program. All provinces ... at least all provinces that join the federal program or otherwise achieve the national objectives set out under the federal program ... would receive federal contributions toward provincial expenditures. And, why not?

That money ... like expenditures for existing programs like Medicare or the Canada Assistance Plan ... would be for have-not Canadians, not for have-not provinces. That is how national shared-cost programs have been used in the past and should be used in the future, to exercise national leadership in providing key social services for Canadians wherever they may live.

The Meech Lake Accord confirms that that national leadership role can continue and it does so without limiting our ability to redress regional disparities.

As Premier Peterson said here in St. John's on December 1,

"Clyde Wells' interpretation of Meech Lake, in my opinion, is almost unsupported intellectually by any constitutional scholar that I know.

"His interpretation, in my view, is not the correct interpretation legally or politically."

Mr. Wells sees a problem here that none of his fellow premiers in Atlantic Canada sees. Brian Peckford didn't see it and still doesn't. Neither does Joe Ghiz, John Buchanan or Frank McKenna, or if they do they aren't saying anything about it, which is hardly credible.

The real problem that Mr. Wells has with this is that it puts a modest limit on federal intrusion into provincial jurisdiction. Mr. Wells is fixated on centralizing power in the federal government. Anything that detracts from that goal is simply awful in his view.

This is another area where he and I part company in our view of federalism. I do not believe that the kind of omnipotent central authority that former Prime Minister Trudeau wanted to create is good for Canada. Mr. Wells embraces Mr. Trudeau's approach. I reject it and I fought against it on issues like jurisdiction over the offshore.