

*The Constitution*

The essence of all the meetings is that if we do truly want to keep this country united we have to do more than come up with a Constitution that we can all accept, we need to understand each other better. We have to get to know the regions and other Canadians and understand their needs, their wants and their aspirations. There were many suggestions given on ways that we could accomplish this. It was pointed out that the cost of air flights in Canada is prohibitive. It is cheaper to head south and visit the United States than it is to travel east or west in Canada. It has been suggested there should be travel incentives developed to encourage Canadians to visit other areas. There should be student exchanges to develop understanding among the young. Our educational system has to be expanded. We must put pressure on the powers that be in the educational system to ensure that students learn the history and geography of this great nation and learn to better appreciate it.

An immigrant who has taken up Canadian citizenship ended up telling the rest of us at our meetings that to truly appreciate Canada, it seems one must back away and look at it from another nation.

At the Rocky Mountain House and Red Deer meetings the environment emerged as a very hot topic. The message was that the environment is important to all of us. Also that there is one level of taxpayer in this country and that taxpayer wants rights protected but resents two layers of government doing the same thing and apparently being in conflict with each other.

From my meeting in Nordegg, I quote: "We need strong guidelines and we need one level of government to enforce them". From Rocky Mountain House another quote: "We need strong environmental guidelines but they should be there to help and guide industry, not to kill it".

Concerns were raised about the aboriginal people. The Innisfail group said that 10 years is too long to take to resolve these problems, that we need a commitment to fast track the program. The general consensus was that we need to redress the valid concerns of the aboriginal people. As one person said: "Let us be careful we do not entrench apartheid". There is great support to get rid of the Department of Indian Affairs and allow the aboriginal people the right to self-government.

This was done with a limited understanding of the term self-government. It is awkward to approve or disapprove of something that has not been properly defined. The position taken is that we need to develop a country where a Canadian is a Canadian. We should not be French, English, Indian or whatever. We should be first and foremost Canadian with the same rights and responsibilities.

To my groups, economic union is an issue that is so basic and makes so much good sense that no one could understand why it is not a given. We have to eliminate interprovincial trade barriers and broaden the common market within Canada.

To quote one of my meetings: "It is ridiculous to watch other countries work to develop trading blocs when we have not even developed free trade within our own country". The overwhelming message I received was that people in this country want a nation, a nation that stands free and stands for something.

They do not want a splintered nation of isolated regions. They want a nation of proud, unified Canadians. We in Alberta are proud of our province and its place in Confederation. To quote one of my participants: "Of course, we are proud Albertans. We are Canadians first".

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of frustration out there. There is still a large degree of irritation and anger. There is also a lot of misunderstanding and questions but there is also a lot of patriotism and a tremendous amount of love and appreciation for this huge, sprawling country of ours.

Canadians love this land. We want to preserve our national heritage of clear skies, clean water, productive soil and most importantly, our heritage of tolerance and understanding.

A friend in Red Deer challenged me and though what he said might be a little simplistic it was sincere. He said: "It is time for Canadians to stand back from their obsession with their own problems and appreciate what we have. It is time that we recognize that Canada is more than two founding nations". He said it was time for me, as an MP to stand up in Red Deer with a French speaking Canadian, the president of the Native Friendship Centre, representatives of the language and cultural groups of our city and proclaim, "We are all Canadians,