

about voting "no" to the idea of a referendum being misinterpreted particularly by the people of Quebec and that that would not be a good idea. In any event, I am glad that all Canadians will have an opportunity to participate in this debate and to vote one way or the other at the end of the process.

Predictably, I should like to talk about the substance of the consensus agreement; that is, the idea of Senate reform and why I think it will be difficult to convince Albertans to vote in favour of it. It is because as a people they have had a strong desire to change the method of governance in Canada to allow for an opportunity to have a more direct relationship with those they elect than they now have with their members of Parliament or senators.

Albertans are heavily influenced by the American system because of their full access to their news and current affairs coverage. They have been involved in a debate with various groups, including the Canada West Foundation, the Triple-E group and others in Western Canada which, through the force of logic or intuition, have pushed the idea of a different kind of Parliament. It is a Parliament that would involve a group of people that is elected and who will come back to the electorate that elects them and account to them, either through defeat or re-election, based on what they do for them. I refer to a parliamentary group which would exercise some power as a check on the exercise of executive power, in particular in majority government situations. I do not think, realistically, that anyone would expect a U.S. or Australian type of Senate.

Let us look at what the First Ministers have proposed. I believe it falls so far short of the expectation of Albertans that if we proceed without more, then the sense of betrayal would be great. As I said a moment ago, convincing Albertans to vote in favour of the consensus agreement will be most difficult.

The real power of the proposed Senate would be exercised in a joint sitting of the House of Commons and the Senate. The other powers are interesting. There are not that many appointments which would have to be ratified, although there are some.

I think that the double majority is okay, but only if we get what we want in terms of this different kind of governance. It certainly does not do anything for Western Canada.

In terms of another National Energy Program, I think a federal government wanting economic rents would find another way of collecting them. I do not think that is a significant matter. It is a symptom of the problem. A constitutional means of addressing the problem is not what we want. We want to address the cause of the problem, which is the type of governance we have. Those are all fine, but they are not significant powers.

The significant power of the Senate is proposed in a joint sitting. The ratio of members of the Commons to members of the Senate would be 5.4 to 1. Doing a rough calculation, and the arithmetic of honourable senators should substantiate it if they are interested, a majority government with 51.7 per cent

of the seats in the House of Commons could ignore completely 60 per cent of the senators voting against something in a joint sitting. That means that since 1949, in no majority government would the Senate with 60 per cent voting against legislation have had any effect in a joint sitting. This assumes that the other 40 per cent voted with the government.

I use the figure of 60 per cent because most majority governments are elected with 40 per cent of the popular vote. That is not a significant power. The obvious way to address that would be as the Australians have done, which is to ensure that the relative size of the House of Commons to the Senate would be such that a joint sitting would be meaningful. In Australia, as I observed in June when I spoke on the Beau-doin-Dobbie report, the nexus provision of its Constitution says it will never be more than two to one; that is, two members of their House of Representatives to every senator.

It is unlikely we would achieve that kind of ratio. However, something in the neighbourhood of 200 to 62 would start to make the Senate and the house in a joint sitting meaningful. I do not think that the likelihood of a federal government on a stand-alone basis, with support from Parliament, changing the number of members of the House of Commons downward is a likely scenario, given the propensity and the self-interest of members of the house not to do that. In any event, it would be a way of addressing the matter. I do not know whether or not that is even an option, and I will look carefully at it. It is, of course, important as to whether or not I vote "yes" or "no" myself.

The other means of giving the Senate power would be with a long suspensive veto, which would mean that it would have to have complete control over the joint sitting process, such that it could delay it for a long time—for example, one year. The premiers and the Prime Minister in their consensual agreement have proposed a 30-day timeframe within which ordinary legislation could be considered.

Those are things which would have to evolve and evolve quickly. By "quickly" I mean to say that they would have to be seen from the perspective before October 26 to ensure that Albertans would have a reason to support this package. 2

The other area of concern is the method of election and the term of office. In Australia, as you know, for many years the term was the same as for the members of the House of Representatives. But then they changed it, and their method of election was "first past the post". In turn, they changed that in 1919 to a form of proportional representation, and then, once again, in 1949, they made a change—this time to their present system of a single transferable vote. Why? Because, over that period of almost a century, they discovered that those other systems did not work. For that reason I think we would be very foolish if we did not learn from their experience. To start back in a pre-1919 situation with the proposed Senate for our new Parliament is not a good idea. I do not think we should do that. We should learn from the Australian experience.

The term of office there was coincident with that of the House. It is now a fixed six-year term. Many doors have been