

[Translation]

For his part, Premier Bourassa declared: "It is with great pride as a Quebecer and as a Canadian that I express my deep satisfaction today with Quebec's return to the Canadian Constitution."

Nor was the mood of elation and hope restricted to First Ministers. I remember the reaction in the House of Commons very well. The headlines echoed the mood of those optimistic days. *Le Devoir's* headline was "Canada has said yes to Quebec"; "A real *tour de force*" according to *Le Droit*; "Equal partners at last" said the *Calgary Herald*; "The welcome pact" was how the *Globe and Mail* described it. The joy felt across Canada sprang from a simple emotion—love of country, love of Canada.

The Meech Lake Accord is the product of 19 years of comprehensive constitutional review and of extensive commentary in learned journals and the media. But in the three years since the Accord was signed, three provincial governments, all original signatories of the Accord, have changed and their successors have raised concerns about it. And, regrettably, the complexity of the Accord has been reduced to symbols and code words that have distorted its intent as an instrument for unity.

Premier McKenna is saying that the Meech Lake Accord can be improved by adding to it and without subtracting from it. He is the first of the dissenting Premiers to recognize that Meech Lake cannot be reopened without losing the achievements and progress of the last three years in terms of consensus-building and momentum on one of our gravest constitutional problems.

[English]

By choosing to table a companion resolution Premier McKenna is acknowledging that Meech Lake cannot be opened and amended directly because to do so would mean eleven legislatures starting over from the beginning.

Premier McKenna's initiative endorses the major elements of the Meech Lake Accord. It recognizes that the distinct society clause works with and not against the Charter. It acknowledges that no new powers are conferred by recognizing the role of the National Assembly of Quebec in promoting Quebec's distinct identity.

### *Government Orders*

It supports the spending power clause by providing an appropriate balance in a federal system. But it also has the virtue of moving the debate beyond symbols to ways of meeting the remaining concerns of Canadians.

By ensuring that each of the elements in his resolution can be judged on its own merits and that amendments can be proclaimed when the necessary level of consent has been reached, Premier McKenna has introduced welcome flexibility on the substance of the issue.

In leaving open the timing of the eventual proclamation of amendments, he has introduced as well flexibility on procedures, subject to the proviso that the Meech Lake Accord would have to be part of the Constitution before additional amendments to the Constitution were made.

By leaving open the possibility that other amendments could be added to the companion resolution and that existing provisions could be altered or even deleted, Premier McKenna has provided still another element of flexibility.

We, in Parliament, in convening national public hearings on Premier McKenna's companion resolution by a Special Committee of the House of Commons, will introduce a further element of flexibility.

This differs from the process followed to achieve the amendment on aboriginal rights in 1983 and the Meech Lake Accord in 1987, whereby governments concluded an executive agreement and agreed to have it adopted, as is, by their respective legislatures.

Parliament will not be asked to debate or commit itself to the text, or an amended version of it, until the people themselves have had a chance to speak to the issues involved and the committee has reported.

Today's motion therefore triggers an important stage of consultation among Canadians. Further action, if appropriate, however will be specifically referred to Parliament pursuant to a decision made at that time.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in referring the New Brunswick resolution to a special committee, the House of Commons is inviting Manitoba's leaders to build on Premier McKenna's initiative set out in the second, companion resolution. We are inviting Premier Wells to do so as well—to come before the Parliamentary Committee and to put forward his constitutional proposals for consideration. Mr. Speaker, this would be a positive, constructive way