

I am like Gary Filmon, and Gary Doer, and Sharon Carstairs, in that I was not in the room on that night at Meech Lake, or four weeks later in the Langevin Building, when eleven First Ministers agreed on the Accord. But I have been in rooms like that, as a First Minister, trying to get agreement on a difficult issue among Governments which, while all belonging to one country, are driven by different priorities and perspectives. And so I know how hard it is to get even majority agreement, let alone unanimity. The process fails much more than it succeeds - that is why there was such euphoria, everywhere in Canada, when that extraordinary Agreement was achieved.

Indeed, it was the failure to get that type of agreement, in 1982, that left us with the problem we are trying to resolve today. It is not stubbornness which produces reluctance to open the agreement already achieved; it is the virtual certainty that to reopen Meech is to unravel it, and therefore to destroy it.

That is where the initiative by Premier McKenna becomes so important. He, like everyone, recognizes that the Meech Lake Accord is not perfect, anymore than the British North America Act of 1867 was perfect, or the Statute of Westminster of 1931, or the Constitution Act of 1982.

Perfection is not available to mere mortals. But improvement is, and Premier McKenna has proposed an approach that allows an improvement of the Meech Lake Accord. He was the first Premier to oppose Meech Lake, and he considered all his options. He accepts that to reopen it is to kill it; and to kill it would have a high price for all of Canada. So, the New Brunswick Legislature introduced a companion Resolution to Meech Lake, which calls for additions to the Meech Lake Accord, additions which would repair some of the weaknesses of the original Accord. New Brunswick has asked other provinces to consider which of the McKenna proposals they could accept, which they could not, and what new proposals they might add as companion measures to the Meech Lake Accord.

That was a constructive initiative by one political leader, who used both compromise and creativity to help move this process and country forward. Other political leaders have responded. Nova Scotia has endorsed the McKenna companion Resolution. Significantly, Quebec has not ruled out the McKenna additions. The Parliament of Canada has approved the McKenna approach, and all-party hearings were held here, and elsewhere in Canada, by a Committee which will report to Parliament on May 18th.

An important aspect of the McKenna approach is that it invites other creative proposals by other legislatures, legislatures which have concerns about Meech Lake, but who want the country to move forward. In my view, as one Western Canadian, it provides a particular opportunity to Manitoba to propose positive additions that reflect the priorities of this Province and region.