

*The Constitution*

that some of the comments I have collected were made prior to the recent conferences. People and positions might have changed, matured if you will, but there is still a strong sense of frustration, in some cases alienation, and it would not be fair to the people I represent if I left those comments out.

Many of the people who talked to me at my public forums are absolutely and completely frustrated with the apparent never-ending constitutional discussions. Almost every meeting concluded that the economy was equally important but that it does not seem to attract the same attention. We know we cannot go back in time, but questions raised more than once were: "What was wrong with the way things were? Why did we not leave the Constitution until all Canadians were committed and agreeable to the terms of repatriation?"

It is obvious to me, listening to the national debate and especially listening to my constituents, that there are serious questions facing us and differing views on how they should be answered. I have had representations on the need for strong central powers and others equally strong appealing for more provincial powers.

There was agreement, though, that we need to clarify the areas of jurisdiction and that those who claim responsibility for programs must have the legal responsibility to fund them. There are far too many areas in which people see a duplication of services and expenditures.

Institutional reform is one of the key recommendations in the government's proposals on constitutional renewal. The main focus in my province on institutional reform is the upper chamber. The very strong feeling from Albertans is that the Senate needs a major overhaul to better protect regional interests. That is the reason for Alberta's demand for a Triple-E Senate—elected, effective and equal. Senate reform is a major issue to the people of Alberta and we cannot overstate our feelings about the need to change the Senate. There is impetus to change the House of Commons as well, to make it more representative of the views of our constituents. Strong feelings surfaced about the behaviour in this place. The daily Question Period was referred to as a circus. Heckling, catcalls and general conduct was described as childish. Opposition for the sake of opposition without offering alternatives and blind obedience to

party policy and block voting were both considered and called mindless.

• (2000)

People expect more of us as lawmakers and leaders than they see. We need to clean up our act and set an example. We need to show Canadians that we are working for them and for Canada.

I cannot state strongly enough or often enough that the overwhelming feeling that came out of each and every one of my meetings is that we are committed to Canada and that our Canada includes Quebec. We want this nation to be unified but there is some resentment over what is being perceived as Quebec's demands.

The phrase, distinct society, has been mentioned by other people. There is a growing acceptance of the distinct society proposal from the recent workshops. At the time of my meetings there was still concern because people were uncertain and unclear about what was meant by a distinct society. Almost everyone who attended our meetings recognizes and accepts the historical reality of Quebec's place in Canada. We know Quebec is distinct. We accept the historical rights of Quebecers to the French language, culture and the use of the Napoleonic law. No one had a problem with that.

The concern expressed was extensions and applications in other areas that might diminish the rights of others. In almost every meeting the question of bill 178 came up and the use of the notwithstanding clause to enforce it.

The sign law does not affect anyone in the province of Alberta. It has absolutely nothing to do with the Constitution but it does have a lot to do with the attitude and concern about the application of the distinct society clause.

The point I must emphasize to accurately reflect the expressed views is found in a quote from my meeting at Sylvan Lake where it was said: "We are concerned about the word 'distinct'. No one should be given a special label. When all is said and done, we have to be equals. We are all Canadians. I do not mind the way it is worded in the proposals as long it is not used for something else".

Someone else said to summarize and end the meeting: "Quebec must stay. We all lose if they go. Your job is to keep the country united but not at an outrageous cost".