



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 133 • NUMBER 267 • 1st SESSION • 35th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

The Speaker: We are going to sing “O Canada” and I invite everyone who is in the Chamber to join with us. We will be led by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

[*Editor’s Note: Whereupon members sang the national anthem.*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN EXECUTIVE SERVICES ORGANIZATION

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to relate the outstanding international volunteer efforts of my constituent, Mr. Bruce Decker of Grand Bend, Ontario.

Mr. Decker and his wife Jean recently returned to Canada from Romania where Mr. Decker had applied his expertise to a locomotive manufacturer in restructuring its marketing department. Mr. Decker offered his services under the auspices of the Canadian Executive Services Organization, a non-profit volunteer organization which among other valuable services has been providing advice to emerging market economies in central and eastern Europe since 1967.

CESO is supported by the Government of Canada principally through CIDA. In addition to government support, CESO is also supported by hundreds of Canadian corporations and 4,000 volunteers. It is this kind of commitment and dedication by thousands of other Canadians that has contributed to the high esteem Canada has earned throughout the world.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, if you are fleeing from the law in any country in the world, go to Canada. The taxpayers will look after you.

Take for instance Melissa Harris from Florida. She is a suspect in a double slaying who has fled across the border to Winnipeg. At the taxpayers’ cost she is applying for refugee status, from Florida no less.

This Liberal government is a disgrace led by a minister of immigration who will no doubt call this yet another isolated incident. Or if I back him in the corner again he will simply say that as the minister he has no jurisdiction over refugee boards.

Perhaps Canadians should take another look at the policies of this government which allow Americans to claim refugee status if they are criminals, like Charles Ng. What is more important to Canadians, their safety or Liberals looking for more votes?

* * *

THE CONSTITUTION

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has put forth hastily concocted post referendum proposals that seem, rather than working to bring about a consensus on national unity, to be creating even greater disunity.

The amending formula which proposes four regions does not take into account the strong views of many westerners that the prairie provinces are quite different from British Columbia, the third largest province in Canada. Past constitutional reports acknowledge the importance of this by considering British Columbia as a region for the purpose of constitutional amendments.

A second major question which this proposal raises concerns the implications for the creation of new provinces. At present the Yukon territory, Western Arctic and the newly created Nunavut are not demanding provincehood. However, it is imperative that constitutional measures not be put in place which would prevent the creation of new provinces at some time in the future.

I call on the Prime Minister to clarify what the implications are of this amending formula for the creation of new provinces in his proposed act.

* * *

LAMBTON COLLEGE

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Lambton College, which is located in my riding of Sarnia—Lambton, recently signed a formal partnership agreement with the Polytechnical University of Nicaragua. The agreement provides for faculty and student exchange programs, professional development and management linkages, sharing of educational

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development, linkages with the private sector, and joint international ventures between our two countries.

Lambton College will work closely with its partners in Nicaragua on health care, sustainable development and entrepreneurship. The agreement represents a major accomplishment for the college's international program, an important social and economic contribution to the development of Nicaragua.

I ask the Canadian International Development Agency to join with the private sector sponsors in funding this important project.

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TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for London—Middlesex, I wish to add my voice today to those countless numbers of Canadians who are calling on the federal government to take more stringent action against tobacco products. Such actions could take several forms, including declaring tobacco to be what it is: a hazardous substance.

It is my belief and that of many of my constituents that the use of tobacco represents the most serious avoidable threat to the health of Canadians today. In fact, this is much more than a belief; it is a proven fact which should cause governments at all levels to take whatever positive steps they can to address this enormous health threat.

I call on this government to enact legislation that will designate tobacco products as hazardous and strictly regulate its manufacture, marketing and distribution.

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INSURANCE BROKERS

Mr. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the past several months I have received numerous representations from insurance brokers in Simcoe North. These small business people have valid concerns about the possibility of chartered banks being permitted to aggressively enter the insurance business.

On the surface this may appear to be just two industries in competition over a business segment, but it is much more than that. It is about the survival of many hundreds of small insurance brokerage firms located in towns and cities throughout Canada. It is also about the consumers of insurance services who will receive less personalized, untailed insurance coverage from inexperienced bank representatives pushing inflexible, preset insurance plans.

This government is very concerned with creating conditions in which small and medium enterprises can grow and prosper. I

hope this positive attitude will prevail when it comes to the hundreds of insurance brokers across Canada.

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[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S PROPOSALS

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we all read in the newspapers this morning, the Prime Minister's proposals have been almost unanimously rejected by our major dailies' editorial writers and other observers. Alain Dubuc from *La Presse*, Michel Auger from *Le Journal de Montréal*, and editorial writers from *Le Soleil*, the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Ottawa Sun* were not fooled by the simplistic and superficial initiatives announced by the Prime Minister on Monday.

● (1405)

They see them as a hastily improvised reaction, to save face, by a government incapable of delivering on the constitutional promises it made during the Quebec referendum.

The Prime Minister's proposals have been rejected in English Canada for being overly generous to Quebec, and in Quebec for falling far short of its traditional minimum demands.

This is a repeat of the response to the Charlottetown agreement, which was rejected by all parties.

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[English]

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, when the government announces its efforts this afternoon to appease Quebec it will be showing its contempt for the people of British Columbia. By incorporating British Columbia into a veto region with the prairie provinces this government is demonstrating a profound ignorance of our people, geography and history.

A quick look at any atlas will show that British Columbia is a distinct geographical region. Contrary to what the Liberals believe, there is a difference between our Pacific coast and numerous mountain ranges and the wheat fields and gopher mounds of the prairies.

For too long the federal government has exploited British Columbia. We contribute more than our share to the federal coffers, but receive far less than we should when it comes to federal spending or representation in this House.

I agree with the leaders of all the B.C. provincial parties, including Liberal leader Gordon Campbell who denounced this proposal.

In its efforts to appease Quebec, this government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Guelph—Wellington.

* * *

REFORM PARTY

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians may be facing something never seen before: smiling Reformers.

A Reform strategy memo leaked after a so-called brainstorming session has suggested that Reform members should smile more in public. It took 50 staff members and two years of discussions to develop this new and drastic strategy. No doubt its writers had to overcome the following questions: Would anyone recognize a smiling Reformer? How would being happy affect their doom and gloom policies? Would Reformers welcome a happy person into their party?

We know that Reformers may have difficulty adjusting to this smiling theory. Fortunately for them, their leader is not bound to act on this recommendation, but unfortunately for us we will not find the answer to the most important question: Can Reformers smile?

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[*Translation*]

BRITISH COLUMBIA FRENCH-CANADIAN FEDERATION

Mrs. Anna Terrana (Vancouver East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the British Columbia French-Canadian Federation.

Last month, the federation held 50th anniversary celebrations; there was much to celebrate, including six community centres, two bilingual caisses populaires, three housing co-ops, French-language libraries, a weekly newspaper, an education service for francophones, education and training services for adults, immersion courses for students, a professional theatre company, a chamber of commerce, and French-language court services.

The 60,000 francophones living in Maillardville, Vancouver, Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Powell River, Nanaimo and other communities throughout the province are proud of their heritage, their culture and their roots, which will always belong to them.

I would ask my colleagues to join me in wishing the British Columbia French-Canadian Federation a happy anniversary and in commending it for its 50 years of successful work and its commitment and dedication to the cause of the French-speaking community outside Quebec.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House of an excellent initiative put forward by the Federal Office of Regional Development, in co-operation with the Business Development Bank of Canada.

Indeed, the setting up of a new fund called Idée-PME, with some \$25 million in capital for commercial loans, is a remarkable example of the positive results that can be achieved when we put the expertise of two agencies to work in an innovative partnership. That partnership, and this is a word which our friends opposite are fond of, confirms the federal government's will to improve the performance of economic agencies in Quebec, whether public or private.

It also confirms that Liberal members are committed to fostering a business climate which will promote economic development and job creation, which are so important for Quebecers and their province within the Canadian federation.

* * *

MANPOWER TRAINING

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will never cease to amaze us. On the very day he proposed a symbolic motion to show that he intends to recognize Quebec's distinct society status, he completely denied that distinctiveness by making an empty offer to all provinces, without distinction, regarding manpower training.

• (1410)

Reaching new heights of improvisation, the Prime Minister even had the nerve to use vocational training to try to show his good will, even though his offer does not in any way meet Quebec's unanimous plea for the transfer of powers and resources in this area.

The first time he has an opportunity to show that he respects Quebec's distinct character, the Prime Minister chooses instead to treat our province like any other. Should we remind him that it is Quebec, not Saskatchewan or Nova Scotia, that has been asking for years that the responsibility for vocational training be transferred to the province?

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[*English*]

NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister warns that this nation will fall apart if the federal government devolves some of its responsibilities. His favourite example is health care. If the health care system changes, he declares, Canada will cease to exist, as if Canada is nothing more than a collection of social programs. To Liberals, government spending is the glue that holds the country together.

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The bonds of unity are stronger than any government program. We emerged united from two world wars, a conscription crisis and a decade long depression not by our programs but by our strength of character and the firmness of our resolve.

Canadian unity rests largely on shared values like justice, freedom, equality and the opportunity and challenge afforded by our great land. If we neglect these things, we will indeed lose our country.

The Liberals should listen up. Changes to bring about a smaller, less intrusive federal government are essential if we are to preserve the unity of the federation.

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[Translation]

RECOGNITION OF QUEBEC AS A DISTINCT SOCIETY

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the referendum campaign, the Prime Minister promised to recognize Quebec as a distinct society. Now, he is putting forward new initiatives to fulfil his promise.

[English]

Unfortunately, the third party is once again putting its own political agenda ahead of Canada's by not supporting this initiative that will help preserve Canadian unity.

The third party's political manoeuvring is as apparent today as it was in 1989 when, in an article which appeared in *Macleans*, the leader of that party compared the constitutional evolution of our country to horse trading. He was willing then to trade off the distinct society clause for something else. Clearly this form of trade off bargaining serves to create greater differences among the regions and the provinces instead of creating a sense of Canadian unity.

When will the leader of the Reform Party and his colleagues start putting Canada first as opposed to their own political fortunes?

* * *

[Translation]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Quebecers who watched the television program *Enjeux* were horrified at the dramatic consequences of the Chinese birth rate policy. One million infant girls are rejected every year and left to die in crowded institutions, just because they were not born male. They die of neglect in government operated nurseries.

By refusing to raise the issue of human rights with his Chinese counterparts, on the pretext that this would hurt our trade relations, the Prime Minister is condoning this shameful practice. It is desperately urgent that this government face up to the human rights situation in China and condemn the violation of the most basic rights of Chinese infants.

* * *

LEADER OF THE BLOC QUEBECOIS

Mrs. Eleni Bakopanos (Saint-Denis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois reiterated once again that he is not interested in working to ensure that Quebec is recognized as a distinct society within the Canadian federation.

The leader of the Bloc suggested that he was more concerned with getting ready to be crowned leader of the PQ and appointed Premier of Quebec than with looking after the interests of all Quebecers.

[English]

By refusing to accept the federal government's proposal to recognize Quebec's distinct society, the leader of the Bloc has demonstrated that he is more concerned about preparing for his ascension to the PQ throne than responding to the demands of Quebecers.

[Translation]

The people of Quebec are finding out with dismay that the man they believed would champion their rights is actually prepared to sacrifice the recognition of distinct society for a separatist throne in Quebec. That is why the leader of the Bloc Québécois has lost interest in distinct society.

* * *

[English]

DANGEROUS OFFENDERS

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Phillippe Clement, Dean Cyr, Isaac Deas, Daniel Gingras, Clinton Suzack and Clinton Gayle. What do all of these names have in common? They are convicted felons who have either raped, killed or tortured innocent Canadians while under supervision.

These are not isolated cases. The list is much longer than those I have mentioned. For every name there is at least one victim whose life came to a violent, tragic end because their assailant was not fit to be walking the streets. Many of the families of these victims have pending lawsuits. They want to know why dangerous criminals are held in prisons without

fences. They want to know why ruthless killers are given birthday passes to go to shopping malls with unarmed guards. They want to know why the decision making process over parolees is made by political cronies who are incompetent and costing innocent Canadians their lives.

• (1415)

All these atrocities fall under the portfolio of the solicitor general. It is high time he took responsibility and realized that when it comes to the safety of Canadians there is no compromise. Canadians are tired of living in fear.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

RENEWAL OF CANADIAN FEDERALISM

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the *Globe and Mail* reported a split in the phoney committee chaired by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. I am referring to the committee that is supposed to consider changes in the federal system, to follow through on the referendum promises made by the Prime Minister.

It seems that on one side we have five ministers, including three from Quebec, demanding thorough changes and on the other side, four ministers from Ontario who persist in their belief that Quebecers will be satisfied with symbolic gestures.

My question is directed to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Are we to assume it was the profound split between members of his committee that led the Prime Minister to announce his proposals on such short notice, even before the committee tabled its report?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is impugning motive. We are working on various ways in which the Canadian federation could be improved.

Yes, we did discuss the issues of distinct society and veto rights, and the first results were there in the Prime Minister's announcement. We are now discussing other matters, including a more sensible division of powers between the provinces and Canada. We will submit our recommendations to the Prime Minister as soon as they are ready.

That ministers should differ in their opinions on various subjects is entirely normal in a party like ours that practices the democracy it preaches.

Oral Questions

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in view of the very deep split within the committee chaired by the minister, I want to ask him whether he would agree that the hollow initiatives announced by the Prime Minister show that he sided with the four ministers from Ontario who believe they can satisfy Quebecers' desire for change with this measly proposal.

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in our committee, we consider the interests of Canada, including those of Quebec. The ministers express their views on the basis of their knowledge, experience and judgment, which is entirely normal.

My conclusion with respect to distinct society and the veto is that we are clearly on the right track towards making substantial changes in the way the Canadian federation operates.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard "on the right track"; a look at the newspapers is enough to see it is the wrong track.

I want to ask the minister whether he would agree that the government's initiative is off to a very bad start and that the government is heading up another blind alley, since as we saw in the case of Charlottetown, any proposal to Quebec will be seen as too generous by English Canada and not enough by Quebec.

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our committee has approached the problems of unity from the perspective that we stayed together for 128 years and always managed to solve our problems, and also from the perspective that the French language was best able to thrive—and I saw this personally in the course of my career—while we were part of Canada.

The position on distinct society, which is gaining acceptance and which will be included in the resolution of the House of Commons, is also a recognition of aspects of distinct society, which developed in the Parliament of Canada and in the Canadian provinces. I repeat, it developed within Canada. The changes that are necessary can and should be made within Canada. In fact, that is the message sent to all Canadians, including the official opposition, by the vote on October 30.

• (1420)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one would certainly think in listening to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs that he has become a Pollyanna, since he is the only one pleased at this time with the situation in which he has placed himself and his government.

In the rush of reactions to the Prime Minister's announcement of his initiatives, the premiers of British Columbia, Alberta,

Oral Questions

even Manitoba have had some very harsh words to say about both the initiatives and the Prime Minister's attitude. All of the reactions triggered by the Prime Minister's proposals paint a picture of an increasingly divided Canada.

Is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs aware that the reactions to the Prime Minister's proposals clearly demonstrate that the proposals are in serious jeopardy, even now as we speak, and that his government is headed for a constitutional impasse?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. In connection with the distinct society, you have seen a large number of Canadian premiers, including those from the west, Mr. Filmon in particular, expressing their agreement. The Prime Minister has indicated that we would start with a House of Commons resolution on these questions, since we can do no more from the constitutional point of view at present, but that it was our wish to enshrine it in the Constitution.

What is happening with the distinct society question will also happen with the veto. The Prime Minister had promised during the closing week of the campaign that he would take steps to reinstate the Quebec veto lost by René Lévesque. We are going to reinstate it; this is the way to resolve the problems that exist in Canada. We have a committee looking at the other problems of the federation at this time, and it will be coming out with some conclusions.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs not agree that his proposals, his government's proposals, not only are dividing his own committee, the phoney committee, but also the cabinet and the caucus, as well as deeply dividing all of Canada?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that the official opposition come to grips with the fact that there was also divided opinion on the yes in Quebec, and that the yes side lost. When there is talk of divided opinions, the main place there is any division at this time is in Quebec, but it is also clear that the no side did win and that Quebecers—and this is a decision that you must accept because it is a democratic one—have clearly indicated that they want major changes, but within Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, one of the most obvious lessons from the past is that unity proposals are divisive if their only goal is to appease one province or one group in Canadian society.

After the referendum vote, Canadians demanded fresh thinking on national unity and there was a widespread demand from all Canadians to reshape our federation.

The Prime Minister has responded to this demand, not by bringing a broad forward looking Canada package to the House but rather by bringing a narrow backward looking Quebec package.

My question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. When will the government bring a national unity package to Parliament that addresses the legitimate concerns and aspirations of Canadians outside Quebec as well as inside Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians from all regions of the country have said they want to keep Canada united.

[*English*]

When Canadians from all parts of the country went to Montreal to express their views, they were representing views from all over Canada, from British Columbia to Alberta to Ontario to the maritimes. Canadians are united on that goal to keep Canada together. They want the federal government to find the ways to solve existing problems.

• (1425)

It is normal that many views would be offered, some of which are contradictory, on the means by which Canada can be kept together. However in the present instance there is no doubt that we have the support of Canadians for the measures the Prime Minister has introduced.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, during the referendum campaign the Prime Minister and the federal government showed that they were dangerously out of touch with the aspirations of Quebecers. Now with this half baked Quebec package, with nothing more than constitutional vetoes and distinct society, the government is showing that it is dangerously out of touch with the rest of the country.

There is nothing in these unity packages that addresses the concerns of the west, the north, Ontario or Atlantic Canada. In fact that absence of content merely alienates the millions of Canadians who are tired of this 30-year old federal two step to appease Quebec separatists.

When will the government change direction, abandon the status quo and develop a truly Canadian package for nation building, one that addresses the concerns and aspirations of Canadians outside Quebec as well as inside Quebec?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I ask the hon. member to recognize and acknowledge that the steps announced this week by the Prime Minister represent only the first steps in a strategy

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in the months to come that will make it clear that the government has a national vision for the future of the country.

Second, I invite the attention of the hon. member to the terms of the veto proposal the Prime Minister has put on the table reflecting the very approach taken by the Reform Party in its purported vision for the future. It requires regional consensus before any constitutional change could take place in the country. I would think the Reform Party as a regional party would support that approach and I expect it will.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in the government's remarks, no matter which minister addresses it, that indicates there is even an interest in the constitutional and systemic demands for change in other parts of the country.

For example, I have been in the House for two years and I have never yet—

Mr. Young: Nobody noticed.

Ms. Clancy: Recall.

Mr. Marchi: What are you, a cowboy?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southwest is about to put his question.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, in that period we have never yet seen the government give any priority whatsoever to the concerns and aspirations of British Columbia, the third most populous province in the country. B.C. is not even represented on the unity committee. It is not recognized by the government as a region in its own right.

The government is prepared to recognize Quebec as a distinct society. When is the federal government prepared to recognize British Columbia as an important province of Canada?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party emphasizes impressions. He wants to leave the impression that the British Columbia perspective is not reflected in these proposals, but the reality is quite different.

The hon. member should know, if he does not, that the constitutional amending formula already in the Constitution Act, 1982, requires unanimous consent of the provinces to any change falling within section 41 of the Constitution, an important list of changes.

British Columbia has a veto over any such change. British Columbia, with the other provinces, has a veto over any proposed change in section 43 of the Constitution, involving the interests of British Columbia or any adjacent province.

• (1430)

British Columbia can opt out, like any other province, of any change approved under section 38. The veto we will introduce this week will make it possible for British Columbia and any other western province to veto any other proposed constitutional change.

In that context how can the leader of the third party possibly suggest the western and the British Columbia perspective is not reflected in the Constitution?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs was totally serious yesterday when he announced that the phoney committee he chairs, which is divided, as the minister has indicated, will continue its deliberations despite the initiatives announced by the Prime Minister. It will even submit recommendations to the Prime Minister by Christmas.

Are we to understand that the phoney committee is continuing its work because it plans to offer Quebec more than the Prime Minister did barely two days ago?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is obviously obsessed with the word "phoney", which it must surely get from its own use of the word or from the example it provided with the regional commissions in Quebec, which were really phoney commissions.

The Bloc's questions are also becoming increasingly phoney, because the answer has been provided three times. The committee plans to submit its recommendations to the Prime Minister by Christmas. A few weeks are not going to bother us. However, in our report, we will clearly have to consider other options for solving the federation's current problems in connection with programs, activities, roles and jurisdictions.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the word "phoney" bothers the minister because it reflects the truth.

Does the minister not believe, rather, that the initiatives announced by the Prime Minister sound the death knell for the work of his committee, thus confirming beyond a doubt that the committee is phoney and was set up simply to create the illusion that Ottawa was preparing to offer changes to Quebec? This is the fact of the matter.

Oral Questions

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we had an example of phoney studies with the Le Hir reports, need I remind you. So, if the opposition and the Parti Québécois need a refresher on good examples of bad studies, they have the very thing right in their own bailiwick.

As for our committee, we will continue to examine ways to resolve the federation's problems, because our goal is not to destroy Canada, but to build it. This is what the majority of Canadians and Quebecers have asked us to do, and, because we believe in democracy, we will continue to try to build Canada.

[English]

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is proposing a package of change that reminds some of us of the Charlottetown accord, an accord which we emphatically rejected three years ago. He should not be surprised when British Columbia and Alberta, the two most populous and the two wealthiest provinces in the west, have rejected his offer.

How can the Prime Minister justify cobbling together a package which supposedly addresses the concerns of Quebec but which is seen as a slap in the face to Alberta and British Columbia?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the proposal which is reflected in the veto bill, to be tabled later today, comes very close to what was known as the Victoria formula of 1971, an approach favoured by the province of British Columbia.

Under the Constitution at present, in the absence of the legislation we will table today, it will be possible for constitutional change to take place under Section 38 of the Constitution Act, notwithstanding that it was opposed by British Columbia and two other western provinces, even if they comprised more than 50 per cent of the population of the west.

This bill will make it impossible for that to occur.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister talks about the 1971 reality. I would ask him to leap forward if he could to the 1995 reality.

• (1435)

He ignores the fact that Canada is changing and that in a generation British Columbia will have as many people in it as Quebec. He ignores the fact that the concerns of the west can no longer be ignored. If he does not know that, he should go out west and he would know that.

Why is the Prime Minister proposing veto provisions for central Canada when he must know that British Columbians will never approve of this package?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think we should assume for a moment that the hon. member speaks for the people of British Columbia.

I thought it was the Reform Party which proposed that we should change the situation so that there is regional consensus required before constitutional change takes place, which is exactly what this bill does.

I ask the hon. member, since he derives from a riding in British Columbia, whether he has the agreement of his colleagues from Alberta for the proposition that B.C. should itself and alone have a veto on constitutional change.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Given the last minute commitment made by the Prime Minister a few days before the referendum with a view to swaying Quebecers, followed by the striking of a phoney committee with a foggy mandate, and by the hasty announcement on Monday of his proposals, it appears increasingly obvious that the Prime Minister is improvising on his own.

Given the general outcry in response to the Prime Minister's proposals across Canada, will the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs admit that the Prime Minister, faced with a profoundly divided Liberal Party, is acting alone on this issue to save his skin?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. Quebec has been demanding a distinct society clause for a long time, for years, for decades. It has been doing so to achieve a very important objective: to provide Quebecers with the security afforded by the recognition, by the federal government and the Constitution, of the distinctiveness of the language spoken by the majority of them, which is different from the language used in the rest of Canada, the uniqueness of their culture, and the particular traditions of their civil code.

The Prime Minister's motion finally gives Quebec what it has been demanding for years, that is recognition by Canada as a whole, since Parliament is the only place which represents all Canadians from every region. The Canadian Parliament has been asked by the Prime Minister to pass this resolution giving Quebec the recognition it has been demanding for years.

Oral Questions

The fact that most premiers are now in agreement with respect to the distinct society shows once again that Canadians are now—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laval East.

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party was already profoundly divided on the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. Faced with the Prime Minister's phoney proposals, which are worse than those of Meech and Charlottetown in terms of Quebec's expectations, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs would like us to believe that everything is sweetness and light with the Liberal Party. Give us a break!

• (1440)

Given the fact that both the caucus and the phoney committee are profoundly divided, and that the proposals are being met with negative reactions throughout western Canada, Ontario, the maritimes, and Quebec, is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs aware that the Prime Minister—

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Dear colleagues, once again, I would ask you once again to ask shorter questions.

If the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs wants to answer the question, I will allow him to do so.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that the Prime Minister has the support of everyone in the caucus and in the party.

No doubt this hurts the Bloc members who would like to rewrite history. It hurts them to see that most Canadians across the country support the Prime Minister. But we know that Canadians are able to see beyond politics and to accept a fact, a reality; they are able to accept that we recognize Quebec as a distinct society.

What is most unfortunate is that only the Bloc members will refuse the proposal.

[*English*]

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

While the Minister of National Revenue from B.C. contends that recognizing Quebec as a distinct society will not amount to very much, conversely the Minister of Natural Resources from Alberta said that distinct society status in Quebec would amount

to something very substantial. One wonders whether it is substantial or not.

I ask the Prime Minister to explain how he intends to promote national unity across Canada when he is having such a problem getting unity even within his own cabinet.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last few days the Prime Minister has shown a leadership that unfortunately will not be understood by the Reform Party because it does not understand either the word Canada or the word leadership.

I met a woman in a wheelchair during the Montreal march who had come from Peace River, Alberta. I met her in an elevator and she said to me: "Madam Copps, I do not speak French but I know you do and will you please tell Quebecers that I am here because I care for my country, and Quebec is a part of my country". That is why the vast majority of Canadians will support the Prime Minister and his leadership, unlike the cheap politics of the Reform Party.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of cheap politics, there is clear evidence that old style Tory—Liberal federalism and politics are alive and well as far as central Canada is concerned.

For instance, the unity minister says the west should sacrifice its own concerns for the good of the country.

• (1445)

I ask the Prime Minister if he would explain why western provinces should yet again sacrifice their concerns and support a unity plan that is aimed solely at appeasing the separatists of Quebec.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talks about the western provinces and the regions. Certainly the Prime Minister has left the door open to a different Canadian configuration with the regions. In examining the proposition that calls for a recognition of four regions, he is actually following a study on Confederation written for the Canada West Foundation by the leader of the Reform Party, who called for the western provinces as one particular entity.

When the member opposite talks about the five regions of Canada and asks whether Alberta or British Columbia is a separate region, I would like to quote the House leader of the Reform Party, who says the five regions of Canada means British Columbia, not Alberta. The answer by the House leader of the Reform Party: "Not necessarily Alberta and British Columbia. All the provincial governments now have a say in the ratification formula".

When they want to talk about regions, I wish Reform members would ascertain whether they want regional status for Alberta or British Columbia.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***MANPOWER TRAINING**

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The Prime Minister announced two days ago that instead of recognizing the responsibility of Quebec in the area of vocational training, as we have all requested for many years, Ottawa intends to keep full control over the money it now spends on employment training by giving that money directly to the unemployed.

Can the minister confirm that, in the area of manpower training, the proposal that would have the federal government deal directly with individuals, bypassing the provinces, will prevent the provinces from implementing a true manpower training policy adapted to the needs of the labour market?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister made it very clear on Monday that the federal government was very much clarifying the respective responsibilities and we were transferring to the provinces a large number of responsibilities that had previously been under various regimes of shared programming.

For the member to claim that somehow there is now more interference is simply turning logic and reality on its head. We are making a very major departure for the province because we think that is a much better way of clarifying the role.

At the same time, I think everyone recognizes that under the Unemployment Insurance Act, as it was constitutionally agreed to in 1941 by all the provinces, including Quebec, the federal government has taken the trusteeship for those under the regime of that system and therefore we have a responsibility to the people in that system.

It is about time the hon. member learned a little about the real Constitution of Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister has such difficulty explaining his positions that he always has to resort to insults. It is exactly because we, in Quebec, understand the very basis of the Constitution of Canada that we say that manpower training is a Quebec jurisdiction both on legal and constitutional grounds.

Can the minister confirm that what he is about to do, by giving money directly to the unemployed, is to keep control over national standards, choices and needs, in spite of Quebec's rights?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, frankly, it is the height of absurdity to claim, as the hon. member has just done, that under the unemployment insurance program, where people have paid premiums, we have no responsibility of helping to pay benefits. The reason people pay premiums is so we can pay benefits. That is the whole purpose of the program.

Furthermore, the system has worked effectively in the past because we have the ability to share that responsibility across the country so that people who pay premiums in one part of the country can help pay benefits in another part of the country where there are higher levels of unemployment. That is the genius of the system. In this country we have learned to share from region to region and not isolate ourselves behind a wall.

* * *

● (1450)

*[Translation]***HIGH TECHNOLOGY**

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development.

It is a well-known fact that technology is an increasingly important element of the world and the Canadian economy. Could the Secretary of State tell the House what measures the government has taken and will take to support and reinforce the high technology sector of the Canadian economy?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier for his question.

[English]

The question gives me an opportunity to emphasize to Canadians that a priority of our government is to launch Canada into the knowledge age. To this end, we have undertaken to fund and develop a number of significant initiatives: the second long term space plan, CANARIE, PRECARN, TRIUMF, SchoolNet, the community access program, Canadian Technology Network, the

technology partnerships program, the telelearning network of centres of excellence. In the west and Quebec there is the new knowledge based industries and ideas fund; in Ontario, a new NRC institute in London; in the maritimes, ACOA's support for federal-provincial technology agreements; in Ottawa, the technological development—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

LABOUR MARKET TRAINING

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's Quebec package fails to heed the calls to decentralize social programs.

Giving labour market training to the provinces without giving them the resources indicates that the Prime Minister has decided to decentralize the federal debt.

Does the Minister of Human Resources Development admit that when he transfers responsibility without giving up resources he is transferring debt, not power?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made it very clear that when we table, as we intend to do on Friday, the full package of employment insurance measures that have been developed, we will ensure that the full recognition of responsibility for education and training by the provinces is acknowledged.

We would be more than interested and prepared to work with each of the provinces to ensure that the effective delivery of benefits under the employment insurance program is targeted, customized, and tailored to meet each provincial need and that there are full resources for the people in each of those regions to ensure they have adequate means of getting back to work. That is what it is all about, working together to get people back to work.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member did not understand my question.

Effective labour market training requires that the provinces have complete control and adequate resources. Will the minister admit that he has absolutely no intention of giving up the purse strings for labour market training?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of doing that. We will be proposing on Friday a number of initiatives and regimes that will enable and allow the provinces to fulfil the responsibilities they have under the training regime.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

This morning, we learned from a Canadian Press article that the unemployment insurance reform to be tabled in this House next Friday will base benefits on household income instead of on personal income. This measure will deny thousands of jobless people access to unemployment insurance benefits.

Will the minister confirm that his unemployment insurance reform will make the family income a determining factor in eligibility for UI benefits?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the poor member is totally confused. That is one reason I suggest he wait to see what we present, rather than basing his judgment on various news reports and speculation.

There is far too much assessment being made of our package before anyone has seen it. I would recommend that before deciding whether they like the menu, they should first read it.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister could at least read the newspapers.

And today, he could at least do one thing, and that is what I am asking him to do, which is to admit that, by taking into account not the income of the unemployed but rather the family income, he will deny thousands of women access to the unemployment insurance program, while continuing to require that these women pay their UI contributions?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member knew the dossier properly he would probably know that the child tax benefit, for example, where the federal government transfers \$5.4 billion directly to aid families with children, is based on a family income test. As a result, most of the beneficiaries, I would say almost 80 per cent, are women and children.

It is about time the Bloc Québécois began to be concerned far more about children and got off its hobby horse of separatism. The only way we will help poor children in this country is if all governments work together.

*Oral Questions***LABOUR MARKET TRAINING**

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the fact that training programs should be delivered by the provinces is neither revolutionary nor unreasonable. Along with these responsibilities, is the minister prepared to give the provinces the tax points to go along with these responsibilities?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not within my mandate to give away tax points.

Mr. Young: Don't do it.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): I have just received advice from my colleague, the Minister of Transport, not to do it. Of course I am always more than interested in his point of view and opinion.

On Friday I invite the hon. member to be in the House and to be available. We will be detailing exactly how we would be proposing to fundamentally restructure the employment insurance system in this country to first make sure there is strong support of income for those who are unemployed and need that support, and even more important, to ensure that we are able to provide a series of benefits to enable people to go back to work.

That is the key issue, how to get hundreds of thousands of Canadians back to work. That is the purpose of this government and that is the purpose of the reform we will present on Friday.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine why the provinces would like to buy into a program like this when the minister is willing to give them the responsibility of the program without giving them proper tax points.

I would like to ask this minister if he knows the difference between downsizing and downloading.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I do recognize is that when we talk about decentralizing there is a major difference between the position that has been constantly taken by members of the Reform Party and what I think many other Canadians are concerned about.

Canadians are telling us that we do not gain by transferring resources from one bureaucracy to another. We really should be transferring resources to people, to the private sector, to communities, to those who are best able to make decisions about how to get back to work.

The fundamental philosophy of the Liberal Party is to enhance the ability of individuals to make choices about their future. No more important choice can be made than to allow individuals to get back to work.

* * *

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

Recently some of our provincial colleagues have been discussing the creation of boot camps, particularly for young offenders. There is much research on the use of boot camps as a correctional tool. Can the minister tell the House what this research reveals about boot camps, youth and reoffending?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is in favour of what works.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Rock: If what is meant by boot camps are properly managed facilities, properly financed, structured, intended for and capable of giving young people a sense of social responsibility, what it means to be a member of a group, developing a sense of self-esteem with proper follow up, that works and we would favour such an approach. If they are properly managed and if the investment is made, it has been shown to work.

• (1500)

Too many governments in this country and too many politicians would have us believe that the approach is toward a boot camp which is more out of Hollywood than anything else, where people are put in chains in the 1930s style to work in the hot sun. That may suit the purpose of a politician who wants to pander to a certain narrow element of the electorate, and there are such politicians. But this government is in favour of what works, and what works is a responsible approach to youth justice.

* * *

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Revenue, the senior minister for British Columbia.

British Columbians are outraged that first we were shut out of the cabinet committee on unity and now we are denied the same veto rights as Ontario and Quebec.

I ask the minister: Why was B.C. shut out of the cabinet committee on unity? When will the minister finally stand up for the people of British Columbia instead of showing total contempt for British Columbians by telling us that we have to wait for demographics until we have basic equality with Ontario and Quebec? When will he stand up for British Columbians?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the representatives of the NDP at a time when we need to nation build are looking for differences.

Routine Proceedings

I can assure the hon. member that the minister for British Columbia is working very hard to ensure that British Columbia's voice is heard strongly and loudly in cabinet. I can also assure him that the regional veto proposal put forth by the Prime Minister, which is far better than the current amending formula, places in the hands of British Columbians the power to shape the Constitution more directly in the future than they ever had in the past. The Prime Minister never closed the door to future recognition of B.C. in a specific way.

I can say that at least on this side of the House we do not have one member of Parliament calling for a region of British Columbia and another calling for a region of Alberta, something that we see in the Reform Party.

* * *

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: Colleagues, I wish to draw to your attention the presence in the gallery of members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate and Assembly of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS[*English*]**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table in both official languages the government's response to 13 petitions.

* * *

[*Translation*]**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table the 104th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the federal electoral boundaries commissions reports tabled in the House and referred to the committee on Thursday, June 25, 1995.

[*English*]

While I am presenting the report, I want to thank members of the House who served on the subcommittees that did the work for the committee on procedure and House affairs at the hearing stage, ably chaired by the hon. members for Cumberland—Colchester, Leeds—Grenville, Dauphin—Swan River, and Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle.

● (1505)

There were 81 objections filed and the subcommittees heard the members who wished to be heard in respect of those objections. I know that all hon. members who appeared before the subcommittees were very much appreciative of their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 22 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, the committee's documents required by the act will also be filed with you today for referral to the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 105th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership and associate membership of the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*Translation*]

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 105th report later this day.

[*English*]

CODE OF CONDUCT

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the second report of the Special Joint Committee on a Code of Conduct.

The report recommends a change in the French name of the committee.

[*Translation*]

It recommends that the French name of the committee be changed to read as follows: "Comité mixte spécial sur un code de conduite".

[*English*]

If the House gives its consent, I also intend to move concurrence in the second report of the committee later this day.

* * *

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS ACT

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-110, an act respecting constitutional amendments.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed.)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion to be put without debate or amendment.

Routine Proceedings

I move:

That the following members be added to the list of associate members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: Stephen Harper and Ted White.

(Motion agreed to.)

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion to be put without debate or amendment.

I move, seconded by the chief government whip, that the 105th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled in the House earlier today be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

[English]

CODE OF CONDUCT

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to put forward a motion for concurrence, which I believe will be accepted without debate or amendment.

I move that the second report of the Special Joint Committee on a Code of Conduct presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

* * *

• (1510)

PEACEKEEPING

On the Order: Government orders

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find consent that Motion No. 22 under government business standing in the name of the Minister of National Defence be withdrawn from the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn)

* * *

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I wish to present a petition that has been circulating all across Canada from coast to coast to

coast. This particular petition has been signed by a number of Canadians from Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that managing the family home and caring for preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society. They also state that the Income Tax Act discriminates against families that make the choice to provide care in the home to preschool children, the disabled, the chronically ill, or the aged.

The petitioners therefore pray and call upon Parliament to pursue initiatives to eliminate tax discrimination against families that decide to provide care in the home for preschool children, the disabled, the chronically ill, and the aged.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): I ask, Mr. Speaker, that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of documents be allowed to stand.

[English]

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, on June 14, 1995 I put a notice of motion on the Order Paper that the government produce all business plans and outlook documents prepared by departments and other agencies. These are the documents that the government intended to publish under the new policy of outlook documents that were supposed to be tabled in the spring. By the end of the summer recess we were still waiting for some of these documents and therefore I put a motion on the Order Paper.

As of this date we are still waiting for the government to produce these documents. These are not new documents. They are ones that the government proposed be tabled as part of the new procedures in examining the spending of this government.

When can we expect to receive the documents we should have had months ago?

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, I understood the outlook documents have been placed before the various standing committees

of the House. Certainly all the ones for any of the standing committees which I serve on and have any responsibility for have received their documents. I am surprised to hear this from the hon. member, but I will undertake to look into the matter and get back to him as soon as possible.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

RECOGNITION OF QUEBEC AS A DISTINCT SOCIETY

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.) moved:

That

Whereas the People of Quebec have expressed the desire for recognition of Quebec's distinct society;

(1) the House recognize that Quebec is a distinct society within Canada;

(2) the House recognize that Quebec's distinct society includes its French-speaking majority, unique culture and civil law tradition;

(3) the House undertake to be guided by this reality;

(4) the House encourage all components of the legislative and executive branches of government to take note of this recognition and be guided in their conduct accordingly.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise in the House of Commons to launch the debate on the motion presented by the government to recognize Quebec as a distinct society within Canada.

• (1515)

I made three commitments during the Quebec referendum campaign: first, to recognize that Quebec forms a distinct society within Canada; second, not to make any constitutional change that affects Quebec without Quebecers' consent; and third, to undertake changes to bring services and the decision making process closer to citizens.

Less than a month after the referendum, the government is keeping its word and fulfilling its commitments. I would like to remind everyone that a majority of Quebecers said on October 30 that they want Quebec to continue to be a part of Canada and that they want changes to be made within Canada. The Government of Canada has understood that message, and the resolution we are debating today, as well as the bills on a veto and unemployment insurance reform, are testimony to the Government of Canada's respect for the choice of Quebecers.

By rejecting the option of separation promoted by the Parti Québécois and members of the official opposition, Quebecers have called on their provincial government to act like a full-fledged partner and to work with us for the evolution of the Canadian federation. It is unfortunate for Quebecers that their

Government Orders

government and the official opposition have not remembered that message. They refuse to respect the will of the majority and to represent all Quebecers, not just those who say the same things they do.

In fact, a few minutes ago, in the Quebec National Assembly, the Parti Québécois refused to recognize the results of the referendum in a motion put forward by the opposition asking the National Assembly to recognize them. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition, who is likely to be the next premier of Quebec, is still talking as if the referendum campaign were still underway. The referendum is over. Quebecers have voted for Canada, for change within Canada. It is about time certain members of this House realized that.

[*English*]

Our government understands the lessons that had to be learned. The result of the referendum on October 30 has shown us we cannot take Canada for granted. The Canada we have built deserves to be defended against its detractors. Canada deserves to have its evolution safeguarded. That is what we intend to do.

The measures we initiated on Monday move in that direction. All our actions have just one goal: to ensure the unity and evolution of Canada in order to respond to the aspirations of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The purpose of the motion we are debating today is to have the elected representatives of Canada recognize that Quebec is a distinct society within Canada. As a Quebecer and a franco-phone, I understand and share the desire of my fellow Quebecers to have our difference recognized.

• (1520)

The motion put forward by our government goes to the very heart of what makes Quebec different. The motion specifies that this distinct society includes, and I quote: "—its French-speaking majority, unique culture and civil law tradition".

That definition of what makes Quebec different is just, true to reality and unrestrictive. I am certain that most Quebecers will recognize themselves in that definition of distinct society. It includes our traditions, our culture, our legal system and our French soul.

[*English*]

The debate we are having today on this motion is an opportunity for the members of the official opposition to show solidarity with and good faith in their fellow citizens. It is an opportunity for them to act positively to support the recognition of the distinct society of Quebec by the House.

Government Orders

I would not want to miss this opportunity to speak directly to Quebecers who, since October 30, since the distressing statements by Mr. Parizeau, since the unacceptable actions by Mr. Landry, have been feeling nervous and unwelcome.

Quebec is made up of a francophone majority. That is what makes it different. However, Quebec is also made up of Quebecers who have come from every part of the world. They are full fledged Quebecers and Canadians. On behalf of the Government of Canada I want to tell them today that we have not forgotten them. I assure them of our full support. They can count on us.

[*Translation*]

Canada is a country where diversity is respected, where we can recognize and affirm our differences. We reject the idea that a country must require its citizens to have a single, uniform identity.

The reality of Canada accommodates recognition of Quebec as a distinct society within Canada. The reality of Canada includes the reality of Quebec.

We are calling today on the members of this House to recognize that Quebec is a distinct society within Canada.

[*English*]

During the referendum campaign the legislatures of Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland passed resolutions recognizing the uniqueness of Quebec within Canada by virtue of its language, culture and legal systems.

Canadians throughout the country also showed their attachment to Quebec during the referendum campaign. All across the country spontaneous demonstrations were organized in support of Quebec.

Today I call on Canadians who demonstrated their attachment to Quebec during the referendum campaign to support our government's initiative to recognize Quebec explicitly as a distinct society.

[*Translation*]

With the support of Canadians, with the support of governments in the other provinces, and with the support of members of this House, I am certain that, if the Government of Quebec so wishes, we will be able to entrench that recognition of Quebec's distinct society within the Canadian Constitution.

• (1525)

But now is not the time for constitutional discussions, because the Government of Quebec and the Leader of the Opposition himself have indicated that they refuse to participate in such discussions. That is why the government has decided to show Quebecers that it is possible to recognize their society for what it is, by calling on the House to vote in favour of this motion.

Once it is passed, this resolution will have an impact on how legislation is passed in the House of Commons. I remind Canadians that the legislative branch will be bound by this resolution, as will the executive branch. This is a real, dynamic recognition, recorded in the very heart of our country's government.

I believe that this is the type of assurance and guarantee that the majority of Quebecers are looking for. And the Leader of the Opposition need do only one thing to indicate to them that he respects their vote in favour of change within Canada. Unfortunately, he has already indicated that he does not intend to do that.

Moreover, the Leader of the Opposition often likes to remind us of those who did not support Meech. And each time, memory fails him. Well, I would like to remind him that his colleague sitting right beside him, the member for Roberval, was a member of the National Assembly in 1987 and he voted against Meech.

The party which he intends to lead voted against Meech and against Charlottetown, and is about to reject for a third time in a row the recognition of the fact that Quebec is a distinct society within Canada.

The party he still leads today is about to do the same. History will remember that.

[*English*]

As it concerns the aboriginal people of Canada, my government is clearly on record as respecting their aspirations. We recognize the unique legal position of aboriginal people, including the protection of aboriginal and treaty rights in the Canadian Constitution and the inherent right of self-government.

This resolution, through which the House is being called upon to confirm the reality that Quebec is a distinct society, is not intended in any way to infringe upon or derogate from those aboriginal or treaty rights. This position includes the inherent right of self-government.

[*Translation*]

Quebec has long claimed a veto over amendments to the Canadian Constitution to ensure that it is a full participant in the evolution of the Constitution and to have protection against amendments that could diminish the powers, rights and privileges of the National Assembly and the Government of Quebec.

The Government of Canada recognizes the legitimacy of those demands. Indeed, we are where we are today because, in 1981, the PQ government of the time abandoned its traditional demand of a veto in favour of the current amending formula. As far as we are concerned, our party has always, always supported a veto for Quebec.

Furthermore, the Government of Canada also recognizes that a constitutional amendment is a serious measure. It should be based on a broad consensus. No region of Canada should be excluded.

• (1530)

[*English*]

That is why the bill requires that the Government of Canada first obtain the consent of Quebec, Ontario and two provinces from both the western and Atlantic regions representing 50 per cent of the population of each of those two regions before proposing a constitutional amendment to Parliament.

Some people will say that this proposal does not respect the principle of equality of the provinces. I will answer that equality of the provinces means that all provinces have the same rights to make laws, to make decisions and to set policies to serve the interests of their citizens.

Our proposal does not change that reality. As the Minister of Justice indicated during question period, to change the Constitution today with the amending formula that exists it requires four small provinces to block an amendment but only two big provinces to achieve the same goal. It is a sign that the weight of the population is already incorporated in the Constitution that serves the country today.

Others will say, and we have already heard them, that the bill does not do justice to British Columbia. At this point I directly address the people of British Columbia. With the constitutional veto ascribed to western Canada in the bill, British Columbia will have a larger say on the Constitution than it has ever had in Canadian history. With almost half the population of the west, British Columbia will wield unprecedented weight. Some people are trying to characterize this tremendous progress as a setback. We should not believe them. It is the opposite. It is the start of a new era of British Columbia's strength in Canada.

In extending its veto to Quebec, Ontario, the Atlantic and western regions, our government is directly inspired by the major principles of our democracy. It is a solid, tangible measure that reconfirms the government's willingness to use practical, essential means to protect all regions of Canada with regard to future constitutional changes.

[*Translation*]

At a time when all modern societies must deal with an ever-changing world and environment, a world in which borders are disappearing, Canada must adapt. Accordingly, the third initiative put forward by our government at the beginning of the week is a response to the desire expressed by all Canadians for their governments to become closer to citizens.

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[*English*]

The reform that the Minister of Human Resources Development will table in the House on Friday is an example of the pragmatic approach we want to take to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Government of Canada.

Let us be clear. We will not abandon our constitutional responsibilities to help unemployed Canadians re-enter the labour market, a constitutional obligation we have had since 1941. We will continue to act to get Canadians back to work in partnership with all those who share that objective.

It is important to recognize and respect the responsibility of the provinces in the areas of education and labour market training.

[*Translation*]

We appreciate that workers need training to keep their job or find a better one, and we are prepared to help them. But we will do so only with the consent of the provinces, respecting the priorities of each. We are putting forward a proposal for partnership, and our main partners in this area are the provinces. In Canada, we overcome our difficulties through a spirit of compromise and mutual respect.

• (1535)

The spirit of cooperation and partnership that inspires us should motivate us to continue building this country in an atmosphere of generosity and respect. The measures we are taking today mean change without revolution, progress without break-up.

[*English*]

In the final days of the Quebec referendum people across Canada demonstrated an outpouring of love for their country the likes of which I have never seen in my 32 years in public life. They spoke out in one loud voice of their deep, deep attachment to Quebec and of their yearning to keep Canada together.

I said to them then that I would not let them down. Mr. Speaker, today I stand before you, before the eyes of the whole nation, and say proudly that I have not let them down and I know that they will not let Canada down.

[*Translation*]

I want to say to my fellow Quebecers: You have demonstrated your commitment to Canada. I am telling you that we, in the House of Commons and across Canada, will show that we warranted your faith. You were right in believing that Canada can and will change to meet your aspirations and those of all Canadians, that Quebec can stand proud and tall inside Canada.

In the coming days we will hear from those who defend only their own interests. We know the agenda of the separatists. They want to destroy Canada.

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And there are others in other parts of Canada who think that the way to win popularity and power is to divide, to attack, to pit Canadians against one another.

[English]

That is not the Canadian way. It has never been. The Canadian people are stronger, more open and more understanding than that. When the chips are down they stand up for Canada. That is what I ask them to do in the days and weeks ahead.

It is easier to attack than to work together. It is easier to shout than to listen. It is easier to destroy than to build. It is easier, yes, but it is wrong for ourselves, for our children and for our country. The shouters, the attackers, the destroyers have had their say. Now Canadians want to get on with building Canada. The initiatives we have tabled today and will table in the next few days will help us to get on with that job. I know Canadians across the country from B.C. to Quebec to Newfoundland and the north will support us.

• (1540)

[Translation]

That is why I call on all members of the House to support the motion of the government, which wants the House of Commons to recognize Quebec as a distinct society within Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: Dear colleagues, before recognizing the Leader of the Opposition, I will hear the hon. member for Sherbrooke on a point of order.

Mr. Charest: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order concerning the order in which the speakers will be recognized this afternoon. You will understand that the resolution before this House today is exceptional in nature and that, under similar circumstances, the House usually shows some flexibility.

Therefore, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for consent, this afternoon—and I think that my hon. colleague from the New Democratic Party plans to do the same—to be allowed to speak immediately after the leader of the Reform Party and, should the time normally provided be expired, to disregard the clock, so that each of us has an opportunity to speak on the resolution just tabled by the Prime Minister.

[English]

The Speaker: I will go directly to the whip of the government and will take the other two points of order.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I consulted with my colleagues about this issue earlier this day. I am pleased to report that we would consent to such a proposal and that we are willing to make the same offer to the hon. member for Yukon if she were to seek it.

The Speaker: I will recognize the hon. House leader of the Reform Party on the same point of order.

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, we have considered the matter and feel that we should use the regular order of speaking with regard to the resolution. If the government wishes to give up two of its slots as time goes on that is its business. We believe we should follow the regular order of speaking and not change the order of business.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, as far as the hon. member's request is concerned, I would just remind him that, not so long ago, my colleagues asked for consent in debates of great importance to Quebec, and he consistently denied consent. Let him now abide by a narrow interpretation of the Standing Orders and have a taste of his own medicine.

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sherbrooke and the hon. member for Yukon have both asked for unanimous consent. The House, as I understand it, has refused this consent. We will now proceed to the hon. leader of the opposition.

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand that you have ruled on this, but I would like to register within the House a point of order on the fact that at a time when we are trying to look at the future of this country it is regrettable that the Bloc and the Reform Party do not accept the proposal of the member for Sherbrooke.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we just heard the Prime Minister's speech. I think we should point out that this speech is a distinct departure from the approach the Prime Minister has taken in the past two years. During the 1993 election campaign and the subsequent two years in this House, the Prime Minister's approach was extremely hard, rigid and, I must admit, consistent, in other words, he did not mention the Constitution, did not feel it was appropriate to suggest any changes and was quite satisfied with Canada as it is.

He took a similar approach during the initial weeks of the referendum campaign, so much so that he put his feet up and relaxed until the last week of the campaign, when he woke up to the fact that the yes side was surging ahead and had become a very real threat to the no side. His reaction was very nervous, very improvised and came on very short notice.

He quickly arranged for a very large meeting in Verdun on October 24, where he said the following—this was the new Prime Minister—and I quote: “We will keep open all the other

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roads to change, including administrative and constitutional means. Any changes in constitutional jurisdiction will only be made with the consent of Quebecers”.

Back in the House, after a very narrow win by the no side, improvisation has been the name of the game in the federal government. First, it set up two committees—we still do not know what they are doing—which were short-circuited by the debate we are having today. One of the committees, chaired by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, is supposed to come up with and propose ways to resolve the current constitutional mess and deadlock. Second, we have the announcement the Prime Minister rushed to make on Monday about a resolution that would include a symbolic recognition of Quebec as a distinct society, a so-called veto and a vague delegation of activities in the area of manpower training.

• (1550)

The question is: What is behind this complete about-face by the Prime Minister, who has consistently fought the concept of a distinct identity for Quebec?

First of all, there were the circumstances. The Prime Minister was very surprised and even distressed by the almost irresistible advance of the yes side during the latter part of the referendum campaign. And it was fear, and fear is a very healthy reaction and also, according to the gospel, the father of wisdom, that inspired the sudden statements he made on October 24 and during the last days of the referendum campaign.

This surprising about-face is neither surprising nor an about-face, since the proposal is meaningless and a worthy successor to all the political positions taken so far by the Prime Minister since the beginning of his career with the federal government and on the federal scene. Words can be made to say what we want them to say, and the phrase “distinct society of Quebec” is no exception. Distortion is always possible.

The expression “distinct identity of Quebec” is a case in point. It may be useful to recall that its initial appearance in our constitutional vocabulary and on the political scene in Canada and Quebec actually dates back to February 1965 and the preliminary report of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, where the expression was used in a rather descriptive way, devoid of any political or legal content. It surfaced again, this time with a more formal meaning, in September 1970, when Mr. Bourassa, the newly elected Premier of Quebec who was attending a constitutional conference, actually used the expression in the meaning it has had more or less since that time.

However, starting in 1985, the term was to develop some very specific overtones, as in the Quebec Liberal Party platform in June 1985, before the election that would be held several months later, and this recognition of the distinct identity of Quebec was

to become a precondition for any decision by Quebec to become part of the Constitution of 1982.

We must therefore examine the context. In 1982, Quebec sustained a blow, a blow with which everyone is familiar, and which was felt very strongly by everyone including the Quebec Liberal Party, which had always refused to endorse the Constitution, even condemning it in a vote in the National Assembly in November 1981. And in 1985 the Quebec Liberal Party, in an attempt to unravel the knot, to bring things out into the open, proposed that Quebec set the precondition to signing the 1982 Constitution—the Prime Minister’s Constitution, the one that still has a blank at the bottom of its last page next to the name of Quebec—the precondition to any negotiation, of the unconditional recognition by the federal government and all of the provinces of Canada of the distinct character of Quebec.

Then, of course, on June 3, 1987, came the signing of the Meech Lake accord. The real one, the real Meech Lake; not the one to which the Prime Minister refers all the time, which is his accord, the one he had watered down later on, and the one I shall speak about later, but the true Meech Lake accord. On June 3, 1987, all of the first ministers of Canada, provincial and federal, reached agreement for the first time in history on the signing of a constitutional accord which would have allowed Quebec to preserve its honour, to return to the constitutional family, and then to come on board with enthusiasm. The words “honour” and “enthusiasm” correspond to two separate phases. First of all, the return to the family with head held high, because our distinct character has been recognized, and second, enthusiasm in redefining the division of powers between Canada and Quebec.

I am recalling a context which I see as extremely important since it offers a very good explanation of the degree to which today’s proposal, which is totally unacceptable and does not hold up, will not fly. It will not even make it into the history books, except perhaps as a footnote somewhere. It is a truly minimalist effort, nothing in comparison to previous efforts to attempt to settle the Canada and Quebec problem.

What was there in the Meech Lake accord of June 1987? Let us review this. First of all, there was entrenchment of the accord in the Constitution. Entrenching a formal agreement as part of the Constitution is by no means a trifle. This means there are consequences. This means the courts are obliged to take it into consideration, to apply it. They are bound by the clauses introduced into the Constitution.

• (1555)

You will note as well that the wording is extremely strong. So strong, in fact, that it greatly displeased the Prime Minister who has fought it ever since with all of his might. The formulation is that, henceforth—I shall describe it now. I will quote it verbatim in a few minutes—

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Ms. Copps: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bouchard: I would appreciate the Deputy Prime Minister allowing me to speak. This is perhaps one of the last speeches she will have the pleasure of hearing me give in this House. Would she let me speak?

Mr. Speaker, the Meech Lake accord of June 1987—and it is important to keep this in mind—required the courts, from the Supreme Court on down, to interpret all of the Constitution, including the Charter, “in a manner consistent with the recognition that Quebec constitutes within Canada a distinct society”. There was nothing to qualify this, no definition of content which would thereafter represent a limitation, simply the strong and clear statement of the principle to be recognized.

This, therefore, constrained the courts in future to recognize and implement a principle which imbued the Constitution with a new spirit. Each and every provision of the Constitution, with the amendments and everything that dates back to 1867, was tinged with something new: the recognition of Quebec’s distinct nature. It also introduced, formally, in terms of a legal instrument, a new criterion for interpreting all the provisions.

When I say all the provisions, I also mean the provisions of the Prime Minister’s Constitution, the 1982 one. It, let us remember, did a lot of things. One of the things the 1982 Constitution effectively introduced into Canada and Quebec’s legal and political landscape was the notion of a single country, a Canadian nation—this was a first.

This was the first time constitutional and legal texts talked about Canada as a single nation, the nation of Canada. The corollary, needless to say, was that Quebecers found their existence as a people being denied, implicitly, if not explicitly. Up to this point, there had been lots of discussion, but, under the Constitution of our forebears, the one we Quebecers agreed to, not the other one, the Prime Minister’s, the prevailing spirit was that there were two founding peoples.

It was not expressed this way in so many words, but this is what our forebears had in mind when they agreed to sign the 1867 confederation agreement. Otherwise, Lower Canada would never have agreed to sign the Constitution. This is what convinced Quebec parliamentarians of the time to enter into confederation, because they thought that French Canadians, as they were then called, could move about freely within Canada, could feel at home wherever they were and could be the equal of the other founding people everywhere.

What happened in 1982? A principle was introduced, which basically knocked the stuffing out of the concept many Quebecers had of Canada, including Quebecers who were still federalists.

The Meech Lake accord came back to this very point. It provided, in addition to the initial interpretation criterion—recognition of Quebec’s distinct nature—for a second criterion,

which was recognition—I will read the text, it is very short—that: “the existence of French-speaking Canadians, centred in Quebec, but also present elsewhere in Canada, and English-speaking Canadians, concentrated outside Quebec, but also present in Quebec—”constituted a fundamental characteristic of Canada.

This extremely important principle is enshrined in the text of the Meech Lake accord. This means there is a duality. I am sure that many lawyers, with a little bit of imagination, could have argued before the courts that this implied the recognition of two peoples and not a single Canadian people with the existence and the identity of Quebec mixed in with the lot and therefore annihilated. That was in the Meech Lake accord.

So when they say the accord did have teeth, it is true that it was an important document. Furthermore, it recognized something very important. It was the fact that Quebec’s distinct nature was not subject to the charter of rights and freedoms. This is a very significant principle and it convinced many Quebecers to accept the Meech Lake accord, despite the fact that many sovereignists opposed it. My colleague here, the member for Roberval, opposed it. I approved it. A lot of sovereignists like myself decided at the time to give federalists a chance—this has been referred to as the “beau risque”—and support Mr. Mulroney in this, which was leading to the recognition of something that had never yet been accepted.

• (1600)

This should be recognized as very important for it marked the beginning of the crisis that deeply divided the country and the Tory cabinet and led to my resignation and the resignation of several Tory MPs to form the Bloc Québécois. It is important to note that the original Meech not only recognized Quebec’s distinctiveness without limiting it, but also ensured that this recognition was not subordinate to the pre-eminent charter of rights and freedoms, which, as we know, is the Prime Minister’s baby.

If someone should know that the first Meech Lake accord protected the principle of recognizing Quebec’s distinctiveness against the application of the charter of rights, it is the Prime Minister. That is the reason why he was so vehemently opposed to it. As many people must remember, a milestone in the Prime Minister’s philosophy and political journey was the very important speech he delivered on January 16, 1990, here at a university, in Ottawa, in which he sounded the death knell of Meech.

You may wonder why, since he was not even a member of Parliament at the time. He may not have been an MP, but he was a candidate—still undeclared, I think—for his party’s leadership. He had not yet declared his candidacy, but everyone knows that the intention comes before the formal declaration. Everyone knew that this former MP and minister, who spoke before Ottawa university students on January 16, 1990, had every

chance of becoming the next Prime Minister of Canada and that his words therefore had weight.

What he said at the time is very important, because it marked the fatal attack against the Meech Lake accord. The Prime Minister had a lot of credibility, and he still does, I think, with all Canadians, and perhaps to an even greater degree in English Canada. I am not criticizing him but at the time—at least in English Canada, where there was a great deal of muted, latent opposition to the Meech Lake accord—his voice was heard as being extremely effective in destroying any political chance of success for the Meech Lake accord.

What he did was to invoke basic rights and the need to preserve the effectiveness of the charter of rights. He said this, and I quote: “By proposing that the distinctiveness of Quebec society be affirmed in a constitutional interpretation clause”, an effective interpretation criterion, as I said, “they are in fact splitting the country in two, with Quebec on one side and the other nine provinces on the other”. In his speech, the Prime Minister was desperately trying to demonstrate that recognition of Quebec’s distinctiveness should not be an interpretation principle, because it is too broad, because it would undermine the effectiveness of court rulings under the charter of rights, and that the substance of the Meech Lake agreement should therefore be drastically altered.

What the Prime Minister said in January 1990 throws an almost blinding light on his subsequent behaviour and successive positions, which are all in line with his efforts to water down recognition of Quebec’s distinctiveness.

Why did the Prime Minister, who is an honest man, a responsible public figure who wants what is best for Canada—and no doubt for Quebec as well—throw such a monkey wrench in works that were bringing hope, at the time, for a moment of grace, harmony and agreement? Why did he do that? I respectfully submit—I could be mistaken, but this is a possible explanation—that he did it first because, in his opinion, and I respect his opinion, Canada is a nation. In his view, there is only one people in Canada, the Canadian people, comprised of a number of components, including one called Quebec.

• (1605)

The bottom line for him, and this is another principle of his, Quebec is like any other province. Quebec is one of the good little chicks around the federal hen.

Some hon. members: Ha, ha.

Mr. Bouchard: But he is a logical man, Mr. Speaker. I would never challenge his logic, since his logic leads him to conclude, and this is a characteristic of his position, if he does not recognize the distinctiveness of Quebec in its true sense, it is because he came to the logical conclusion that there is only one, real national government, namely Ottawa, to represent Cana-

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dian values, make major decisions, decide the basic trust of anything and everything happening in Canada and that the provinces are just that, provinces. They exist under the Constitution. There is not much that can be done about that. There they are.

Since they are part of the Constitution, the provinces have to be tolerated, but nothing keeps this government from cutting funding and putting the squeeze on them. The federal government is in trouble? It is experiencing financial difficulties? They just cut funding to the provinces, while keeping the tax money and points and without cutting taxes.

The provinces are actually viewed as some kind of arrangement, and they are respected as such, entities, administrative entities, perhaps huge municipalities in the eyes of the Prime Minister and other like-minded individuals, including his mentor, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who tried relentlessly to impose as a reality a fiction of Canada.

These people are living with a fantasy of what Canada should be. Their vision of Canada is quite simple. Imagine a circle, the federal system; all around this circle, you have little squares, dots or what not called provinces and, in the middle, you have the basic national state. Very often, their speeches and attitudes have reflected some sort of weariness about the presence of the provinces, whether Quebec or the other provinces, provinces that have identities and aspirations. I know for a fact that the Reform Party has legitimate concerns about this.

So, you can understand now why this reasonable and responsible man did what he did in 1982. I do not think it is justifiable but, in 1982, this man, who had this vision of Canada, went as far as to impose it on Quebec.

Never in the history of this country—and I know a thing or two about history from my studies, and many—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bouchard: Indeed, I studied history and I am being modest in saying that I know a thing or two on the subject. And I am not alone in Quebec to have studied history. Bear in mind that Quebec’s motto is “Je me souviens”, which means I remember. If Quebec’s identity has survived this long, it is because of its long memory.

Like many other Quebecers, as a student, I was not a sovereignist, but this did not prevent me from being critical of the confederation. And my criticism is on record. I might have put in writing as the editor of the student newspaper and all, but it never occurred to me that, someday, a democratic Canada, English Canada, a nation that is open, tolerant and respectful of individual rights, could actually rely on its weight to crush Quebec’s wish, tear up the Constitution agreed upon by our forefathers in 1867 and replace it with another constitution that

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was not recognized by Quebec but imposed on Quebec, a constitution repudiated by every democratic entity and political party in Quebec, including federalist parties.

I would never have thought that this kind of thing could happen in my country. I would like to tell the Prime Minister, who feels that I refer to 1982 too often, that I can understand why that makes him uncomfortable. I can understand that, but I want to remind him of that sunny day when, along with Her Majesty the Queen of England, as Queen in right of Canada, and Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Ouellet, he signed, on the lawn of Parliament, the patriation of the 1982 Constitution. That day, which was a great day for the rest of Canada, is the day that Quebecers' desire to achieve sovereignty was exacerbated.

• (1610)

We can now see that, for someone coming back to lead the country, the original version of the Meech lake accord, that is the one signed by the then Prime Minister and by all the premiers of Canada, was a threat. He perceived that agreement as a terrible threat, as something which could undermine what he had accomplished, even by encroaching on the collective rights of Quebecers.

So, what did he do? He did a controlled skid. He realized that he should not oppose the recognition of Quebec's very distinct nature, that he could not deny that—indeed, it would have been somewhat preposterous to say that Quebec is not distinct, given all that distinguishes us, and at such a deep level too. So, he kept the expression, but did everything possible to make it meaningless.

It is at that level that his political work paid off. Make no mistake about it: he is a capable and formidable politician. I am among those who have the deepest respect for his political know-how, as demonstrated by his succeeding in diluting the concept of Quebec's distinct nature. What did he do after his January speech? He made sure that it would become obvious to Mr. Mulroney, who was then Prime Minister, that—

Ms. Copps: Your friend.

Mr. Bouchard: Pardon me?

Ms. Copps: Your pal, your buddy.

Mr. Duceppe: They have no class.

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, they say that Mr. Mulroney was my friend, as though that was a bad thing. Yes, we were friends for 30 years.

Ms. Copps: What did you deliver?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Bouchard: What do you have to say against Mr. Mulroney? What does she have to say against Mr. Mulroney? Let us hear it. What does she have to say?

One hon. member: Stand up.

Mr. Bouchard: This is not the place to discuss personal issues. The Deputy Prime Minister should not express any animosity she may have towards a person during this debate.

Here are the facts: at the time, that man, Brian Mulroney, was Prime Minister. He had succeeded in having the Meech Lake accord signed on June 3. No one had ever managed to do something like that in Canada. Never. Obviously, the Prime Minister is not on his way to achieve that either.

If I am not mistaken, the opposition organized by the current Prime Minister, then a possible candidate, and later an official one, for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada, convinced Mr. Mulroney and his entourage, of which I was no longer a member, that he had to negotiate with him. So, without many people knowing about it, I certainly was not aware of it, people decided to move closer to the views held by the future Prime Minister, so that he, since he controlled the leaders of the provincial Liberal parties, who were blocking the Meech Lake accord, could remove the obstacles and ensure that the accord would be signed, albeit with a revised content.

That agreement was reached by the so-called Charest commission. They agreed on diluting the content of Meech. The Quebec caucus of the Conservative party, which was under my responsibility, had pledged that the substantive provisions of Meech would never be changed. I believe it was in the last days of May that we learned there would be a Charest report, which had the support of the Conservative and Liberal parties and which diluted the recognition of Quebec's distinct nature to such an extent that the charter of rights would apply to it, thus having the effect of making it sterile.

That is when I resigned. I resigned, as did others, as a matter of principle. I had not come to Ottawa to support the views of the current Prime Minister. I had come here to fight them.

So that led in June 1990 to Meech II, son of Meech, watered down Meech, wishy-washy Meech, the Prime Minister's Meech which was even then rejected by English Canadians for still going too far. In Newfoundland, Manitoba and among English Canadians in general, two out of three surveys showed that it was still giving too much to Quebec, whereas it had become unacceptable for Quebec, even for those who had supported it until then.

• (1615)

Then came Charlottetown, where it was diluted still further. This is where they started to define recognition of the distinctive nature of Quebec; by defining it, of course, they restricted it. They started to put it on the same footing as equality between the provinces; distinct, equality for all. Everybody was distinct. Something for everyone, everyone on the same footing. It no longer had any meaning. The people rejected it. Not me, not the

wicked separatists, but all of the people of Quebec, all of the people in English Canada.

So, bye bye Charlottetown.

What is this week's incarnation? What are they proposing to us now? I have to admit that I have a compliment for the Prime Minister: this last attempt to water down distinct character is the best yet. This time we do not need a lawyer's opinion appended to the resolution to know that it means nothing.

Remember, in the somewhat comic episodes involving Meech II, there was still some doubt, still some people who were wondering "maybe it does still mean something". Some lawyers signed a legal opinion that it meant nothing, which was appended to the Meech Lake accord.

This time, there is no need to pay any lawyers. There is nothing that needs to be appended; all one needs to do is read it to realize it means nothing. They took no chances this time.

Why? First of all because it leaves untouched the concept of a single Canadian people according to the 1982 Constitution. In other words, the Prime Minister saved his Constitution, the one that is not Quebec's, the one we did not sign but he signed on the steps in front of Parliament. His Constitution is intact.

There is only one Canadian nation; Quebec is part of all that and should live with it and blend in. The identity of the Quebec people? Sorry, some other time.

Furthermore, what we have here is just a simple resolution. Just that. So what does this mean in legal terms, a resolution by Parliament, by the House of Commons? It is a wish formally expressed by a group of parliamentarians but without any legal effect. The courts are not bound by this resolution. A lawyer could not even put it before a court, which would refuse to acknowledge its existence because legally, a resolution does not exist. It is nothing.

An hon. member: Wishful thinking.

Mr. Bouchard: Just wishful thinking. And even the House is not bound by this resolution. If the House passed the resolution, with the Bloc voting against it, of course, if the House, on the strength of its majority, were to impose adoption of the resolution, the very next morning the resolution would not be binding. The House could do anything at all. Imagine if the government were to change. What would our Reform Party friends do with the resolution and the so-called veto? We will talk about that one tomorrow.

It is just a mirage. This resolution is a mirage. Not smoke and mirrors, that would be too strong a term, because it implies there is more than meets the eye, and in this case, when you read the

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resolution, it is all there. So this is not a case of smoke and mirrors but a mirage.

It demonstrates a complete failure to appreciate what Quebecers want. I think that, when people have been in Ottawa for a few years, and it might happen to me because I have been here for some time—they tend to become a little isolated from what is happening in Quebec. It is almost inevitable. Being on the Hill is like living under a glass dome, and because we always breathe the same oxygen, see the same faces, listen to the same voices, read the same newspapers and talk to the same reporters who are listening to us, we finally lose touch to some extent—not altogether, of course not—with what is going on out there.

Remember what it was like in the House the night the Charlottetown resolution was adopted. I remember. It was a very solemn occasion, of course. The whole House rose to adopt Charlottetown, all parties, all members. There were only six or seven members—The member for Beaver River was with us, members of the Bloc, in the corner, along the curtain, and we voted against the resolution. We almost felt embarrassed to do so. I told myself that evening: Could it be that the Bloc, having been in Ottawa for too long, has lost touch with reality, that it has failed to understand that Canadians and Quebecers want the Charlottetown accord? Could I be wrong? Could we, the dissident minority, the outcasts along the curtain, be wrong? Could we be wrong or could all these intelligent people who fly to their ridings every day, who meet everybody, who know the issues, who are advised by people who are extremely bright, people from the Privy Council, be wrong?

• (1620)

They were wrong indeed. The people proved them wrong. So I was saying that there is something in Ottawa that makes people lose touch with reality, at least with Quebec's reality. How can the Prime Minister think that Quebecers will be pleased to hear him say that he recognizes the fact that they are a distinct society? How can he think that this will make us, Quebecers, happy? We certainly know that we are a distinct society and we have known it for quite some time.

What we want is the means to make our own decisions, to plan Quebec's future based on our differences. That is what we want, but we are not getting it. There is nothing to that effect in the resolution.

What I am saying basically is that the Prime Minister and his colleagues are burying their heads in the sand. By constantly refusing to face reality, they eventually sink into some kind of surrealism. This is evident from the fact that, from Meech 1 to Meech 2 and from Meech 2 to Charlottetown, Quebec was

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always offered less and less. Maybe they offered a little less each time because they were tired by their previous effort.

They tried Meech 1, it did not work. They offered Quebec a little less in Meech 2 and, of course, it did not work either. They offered even less in Charlottetown, which was rejected by the people in a referendum. So what are they doing now? They are trying again, offering less than in Charlottetown this time. And they think that Quebec will go for it. They even think that Quebecers are fascinated by this debate. Well, they are not. I am sure they will not be listening to us today or tomorrow. I am convinced that they have now moved on to other things that are of greater concern to them.

It has now become the debate of the Prime Minister, who is just discovering the distinct society clause, who wakes up at night thinking about Quebec's distinct nature. Too late, Mr. Prime Minister, it is over. You can sleep at night and dream of things other than Quebec's distinct nature. It is a thing from the past, from the political past.

When I said that the government's approach borders on surrealism, let the people be the judge. On the one hand, as I have just shown, the federal government's offers are less and less meaningful, ever shrinking.

At the same time, and moving in the opposite direction, Quebec's demands are growing and are more attuned to the reality of the people of Quebec. Why? We have only to look at events in recent years. In May 1980: 40 per cent of Quebecers give their support to a soft question on something that ended up simply being a mandate to negotiate, to try to negotiate sovereignty-association. Charlottetown, 1992: the Accord reached by all parties and governments, including the Government of Quebec under Mr. Bourassa, is rejected. In 1995: sovereignty on a hard question, that is, the legal and political ability to proclaim sovereignty following a yes vote, 49.4 per cent vote in favour.

While Quebec, on the move toward sovereignty, is ever increasingly achieving its status as a people and wanting to assume this status with means that are rightfully its own, the federal government offers less and is surprised when the offer is refused. Is this surprising? Not to the people in Quebec, at least.

What I am saying in fact is that the whole debate on Quebec's distinct nature has largely lost its immediate relevance.

• (1625)

Why? First, because, in Quebec, everyone knows that it is impossible for English Canada to get its act together enough to propose something acceptable to Quebec on this point. This House is an example of English Canada, for once. I was talking about the other House, which is disconnected from the people of Quebec and Canada. At least this House shows us that, in

English Canada, there are a lot of differences in opinion on the Prime Minister's vision.

Therefore, Quebecers, who see all this, know what happens in English Canada and have lived through 30 years of useless efforts, know full well that nothing positive will come in response to their basic expectations about the recognition of Quebec's distinct nature. It is also out of date, because it must be understood that the phrase "Quebec's distinctiveness" was a compromise right from the start. It is a phrase that Mr. Bourassa used out of political courtesy, out of political correctness, I would say, to avoid using the actual phrase "the people of Quebec".

He knew that to recognize the people of Quebec would scare the federal government and English Canada and that it would never go over. So Mr. Bourassa, who has a way with words, who must have read the old reports of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, found this phrase, included it in his speech, and ended up making it one of the conditions for Quebec's joining the 1982 Constitution.

But English Canada saw right through it. People have great instincts. I think that people in both Quebec and English Canada have very sound political instincts. English Canada realized, perhaps more or less consciously that, behind the phrase "Quebec's distinct society" lurked the phrase "the people of Quebec", and that is why they rejected the agreement. That is why they will always refuse to recognize Quebec's distinctiveness, as they have done so far. If we ask them, and if Quebec does not act to secure this recognition, they will always refuse. They will never let a Prime Minister of Canada turn this recognition into a legal reality.

I just said that I urge the Prime Minister to be realistic. I would also like to tell him that I want to preach by example and that we in Quebec now intend to face reality. First of all, everyone in Quebec is tired of talking about the Constitution. Everyone is sick and tired of hearing these phrases that keep changing year after year and month after month: special status, asymmetrical federalism—that one was quite a find; we never found out what it meant but it will probably be explained to us some day—, equitable federalism, cultural sovereignty, distinct society, and also "equality or independence" and then "masters in our own home", all this to go around in circles.

The people of Quebec know that we have tried everything, that we have gone through the dictionary, and that all these efforts have led nowhere. It is time for a reality check; the people have had enough of these debates. Second, we in Quebec have more pressing priorities like government finances. In Quebec, the integrity of our public finances—which, incidentally, are in better shape than the federal government's, but that is none of my concern since I am not responsible for managing

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federal affairs, while the Parti Québécois may entrust me with the public finances of Quebec—is a basic requirement, not only as a matter of correctness or sound management practice.

No, in Quebec—and it is the same in Ottawa, I am sure—putting our fiscal house in order is a matter of restoring our ability to choose. Unless the government's financial base is restored, no one will have any choice any more. There is no point in holding debates on the environment, the Constitution, the future of political systems, export policy, social assistance or any other issue, if steps are not taken to ensure that the government will be able to make choices.

Any government that is in a financial squeeze has no room to breathe and can no longer carry out its basic function. That is why we in Quebec, if the Parti Québécois puts its trust in me, will address this problem. I will not waste any time reading constitutional proposals made by the Prime Minister if they look anything like this. There are other priorities, but these will be dealt with in greater detail in Quebec City. We may participate in discussions. After all, we are still part of the federal system. I can see where the Prime Minister is coming from. I heard his plea the other day, when he said he was prepared to discuss in the interest of the people of Quebec and Canada. But in the meantime, anything that may be in the interest of Quebec will not fall on deaf ears if the Parti Québécois puts its trust in me.

• (1630)

What Quebec wants, when all is said and done, with respect to the Constitution—a discussion that may continue tomorrow again, for the Prime Minister has yet another proposal to make to us tomorrow; the Prime Minister is suddenly becoming very active, hyperactive even, in connection with the Constitution—let us be clear right from the start, what Quebec wants, what we need, with respect to the Constitution, we know we cannot expect from either the federal government or English Canada. We know that we are the only ones who can give it to ourselves, take it for ourselves, and to the extent that our future as a people, the remedy for our present problems, the flowering of our economic, social and cultural identity, is linked to our status as a people. We now know, from the message we are receiving from English Canada, particularly after today's inadequate resolution, that it is up to us to give ourselves the status of a people.

We have nothing to ask for, nothing to beg for from the federal government and English Canada. We do not mean this arrogantly; we are merely speaking as adults. We have attained a sort of political maturity which comes from all of the conclusions we have drawn from all of those years of empty discussions, of going around in circles. English Canadians are also familiar with this; they are just as tired and disillusioned as we are. So Quebec knows that its rendezvous with the future is a rendezvous with itself, that it will involve a referendum, that it will

address Quebec's sovereignty so that Quebec may come into its own as a people.

I would like to say to the Prime Minister that it might happen, perhaps not here in this House but one day—whether I take over the responsibilities I shall be seeking shortly or someone else does—that whoever becomes the Premier of Quebec might face him across the table. I hope that this will come to pass. My personal wish, in the interests of Quebec and of Canada, although I am aware that it is harder to convince Canada of this than Quebec, is that one day a premier of Quebec will find himself across the table from his federal counterpart, precisely for the purpose of discussing political systems.

But I would not want this Premier to stand alone like his predecessors, those who failed, who paid a high personal price and sometimes made Quebec pay a high price as well and caused strong tensions in relations between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Not that we did not send good negotiators. Not that the people who came here to negotiate on behalf of Quebec, as Premiers, were not competent. I would say we sent our best people. No one could be better than René Lévesque to negotiate for Quebec.

But from now on, the situation will be different, because the Premiers who will come to talk about the Constitution and political arrangements will come with a mandate from the people of Quebec. They will not be out to retaliate, to be aggressive, to be negative. No. They will come with respect but confident, with the confidence of a prime minister, a head of state, who has received a mandate for sovereignty from the people. In other words, we will negotiate as equals, and then we will be able to agree, and only then. As long as Quebec comes here as a province like the others, we will never be able to agree, because those who came here and failed when they represented Quebec were not always separatists, as the Prime Minister said. Very often, and I would say in most cases, they were federalists. But success escaped them as well.

Why? Because Quebec federalists are Quebec nationalists, first and foremost. They realize that Quebecers cannot develop their potential unless they do so as a group, and as such they must have the resources and the capability to define their own policies.

I am not saying we will no longer speak to each other. We will have to, all the time. We are neighbours and partners through our history and all kinds of connections. We are practically doomed to talk to each other. That being the case, and I offer this advice in all modesty to the Prime Minister, he will have to be careful not to waste the capital of good will that is left. If we keep tossing resolutions back and forth and discussing the kind of futilities we have before us today, it will create more false hopes and perhaps fuel feelings of resentment. Let us be careful.

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• (1635)

Let us call some kind of truce where we can address our primary concerns. I just mentioned what we have to do in Quebec. I do not know when we will be able to come back to this discussion. It may be sooner than the Prime Minister thinks. Who knows? This time we will not let him know one year in advance. Let us create the climate that will have to prevail when we have this real meeting, this real discussion, where we will have to and, for the first time, be able to look realistically and lucidly, but with a chance at succeeding, at defining a new partnership between Canada and Quebec.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Every day, the Prime Minister has to face our questions, including questions on this motion. Could we have a question period for each member who addresses the House? I ask for the unanimous consent of the House and for the consent of the Bloc Québécois to ask questions following this important speech by the leader of that party, maybe the longest speech of the century. I hope that the Bloc Québécois will have the courage to accept our questions.

The Speaker: It is not a matter of courage. We have rules in this House. The member has asked for unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent.

[*English*]

We will continue with the debate. I say this only so that we all understand. The hon. leader of the Reform Party because of the rules will have 20 minutes and then there will be questions and answers.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, today I address the motion of the Prime Minister calling on the House to recognize Quebec as a distinct society within Canada.

Let me begin by reminding the House why we are even considering such a motion at this time. As hon. members know, last month the Prime Minister came very close to losing the Quebec referendum on secession. It is now generally agreed that there are two principal reasons for this.

First, there was no sustained effort made by the federalist forces to make clear in advance of the referendum the terms and conditions Canada would demand in the event of a secession attempt. Thus the separatists were allowed to perpetuate the fiction that a separate Quebec would simply enter into a new and better economic union with Canada. Over 30 per cent of the

people who voted yes on October 30 thought they could do so and still retain all the benefits of being Canadian.

The second was the demand for change in Quebec. The demand for real systemic change was grossly underestimated by the Prime Minister and the no side. Rather than countering the separatist dream with a federalist vision of a new and better Canada, the federalists offered the status quo plus administrative tinkering.

It was only in the last week of the campaign that the Prime Minister felt compelled by events to offer something to Quebec which could be construed as change. What he offered was not a new vision of the federalism of the 21st century, nor a realignment of federal and provincial powers, which has been demanded by large numbers of people inside and outside of Quebec.

What the Prime Minister offered were Mulroney leftovers, two items resurrected from the discredited Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. These were the concept of a constitutional veto for the government of Quebec and a distinct society clause, the subject of the motion before us.

I remind the House that Reform favours a fundamentally different approach to confronting the separatist threat and preserving the federal union. Our approach is two-tracked. On the one hand, we offer a package of 20 changes in the federal system which can be accomplished without constitutional negotiation, changes which strengthen the power of the federal government to preserve the economic union, which strengthen the position of the provinces with respect to the natural resources, social services, culture and language, and which reform federal institutions to make them more representative and accountable.

• (1640)

At the same time, we insist on the development of a Canadian position on terms and conditions of separation, terms and conditions which Canada would insist on if any province actually attempts to secede.

I have vowed as a federal political leader that as long as I have anything to do with it, federalists will never go into another contest with Quebec separatists as ill prepared, as ill equipped and as ill led as they were the last time.

The next time, and it will be the last time, we will fight separatist dreams with a federalist vision of the future and we will fight separatist illusions with the naked truth about what separation from Canada really means.

Therefore I speak as one who fundamentally disagrees with the Prime Minister's strategy or lack of strategy on national unity and who feels that this motion and the other elements of the Prime Minister's Quebec package are backward steps.

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Having said this, my colleagues and I have applied ourselves to the Prime Minister's motion to see if there is any way it could be amended to permit the statutory recognition of the historical, linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of Quebec without the negative consequences that have led to the rejection of previous attempts to accomplish the same end.

I have three proposals to make embodied in three amendments. I urge the government to consider these amendments carefully because in our judgment they are essential to giving the Prime Minister's motion even a 50:50 chance of gaining acceptance outside of Quebec.

Our first proposal pertains to safeguarding the equality of the provinces. During the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accord discussions, as many members will remember, the biggest single objection to the inclusion of any distinct society clause for Quebec was that it would confer on the Government of Quebec powers not conferred on the other provinces. In other words, the concern was and is that the distinct society clause would violate the concept of equality of the provinces.

The Prime Minister in his remarks a few minutes ago hastened to assure us this is not the intention of the federal government; it is not its intention to grant Quebec special powers or status by virtue of this motion. If the government really means that, it will have no hesitancy in supporting our first amendment to the motion, the inclusion of a clear statement that nothing in this resolution shall confer on or be interpreted as conferring on the legislature or Government of Quebec any new legislative or executive powers, proprietary rights, status or any other rights or privileges not conferred on the legislature or government of any other province.

This amendment is essential to reconcile the motion before us with the principle of equality of the provinces. This is necessary to get similar types of motions through most of the provincial legislatures.

Our second proposal pertains to safeguarding minority rights in Quebec. One of the legitimate concerns of minorities within Quebec, the English speaking minority, the aboriginal minority and other ethnic minorities, and the Prime Minister made reference to this, is that recognition of Quebec as a distinct society could be used by an overzealous separatist government to diminish their rights, in particular their educational rights and rights to freedom of speech.

The fears of such minorities were aroused on the night of the referendum when the premier of Quebec blamed ethnic voters for defeating the referendum, implying those voters were not part of Quebec's distinct society. The fears of such minorities will be heightened, not allayed, by clause 2 of the Prime Minister's motion because it says Quebec's distinct society

includes its French speaking majority but says nothing about the distinct society's including Quebec's minorities.

• (1645)

A few minutes ago the Prime Minister said: "Quebecers who come from other parts of the world are full fledged Quebecers. We have not forgotten them". The reality is that he has forgotten to include them in the definition of distinct society included in clause 2 of his motion.

The Prime Minister will hasten to assure these Quebecers that it is not the intention of the federal government to allow the Quebec government to use any designation of Quebec as a distinct society to circumscribe the rights of minorities. Surely no federalist in this House and surely no Liberal would ever want this distinct society clause to be harnessed to the cause of ethnic nationalism by any Quebec government.

Again, if that is the case, and if the government is sincere in its claim, then it will welcome the second amendment to its motion, namely the inclusion of a clear statement that nothing in this resolution shall diminish or be interpreted as diminishing in any way the rights and freedoms of any resident of Quebec.

This amendment is essential to safeguarding minority rights in Quebec.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): It was in Charlottetown.

Mr. Manning: It is not in here.

A third proposal is to safeguard the integrity of Canada. There is one further change required to the Prime Minister's motion to ensure that it does not reinforce and assist the separatists in the next referendum on separation. The Prime Minister is well aware that for 20 years or more the separatists have been telling Quebecers that because Quebec is a distinct society, therefore it should be a sovereign state. We heard that again today. By affirming the first part of that sentence, which is what the Prime Minister's motion does, the federal government runs the risk of legitimizing the second part of the sentence.

Again, I assume the goodwill and good intentions on the part of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will hasten to assure us that it is not the intention of the federal government to allow the separatist Government of Quebec to use the distinct society clause to legitimize the division of Canada. If the government is sincere in that claim, then it will welcome and endorse our third amendment to the motion, namely the inclusion of a clear statement that nothing in this resolution shall deny or be interpreted as denying that Canada constitutes one nation.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, I urge the Prime Minister to not follow in the footsteps of the former Conservative Prime Minister, who ensured Quebecers that these proposals were acceptable to the rest of Canada, when in fact they were not.

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I ask the Prime Minister to tell Quebecers that his motion will not get the support of a majority of Canadians outside Quebec, nor will it get the support of the provinces. Only by amending it will that motion stand a better chance of being approved.

[English]

If the government will amend the motion as proposed, Reformers will support the amended motion, notwithstanding our belief that it will contribute little or nothing to the unification of the federation. However, if the government votes down these amendments, if it puts its commitment to distinct society ahead of the equality of the provinces, if it puts its commitment to distinct society ahead of minority rights in Quebec, if it puts its commitment to distinct society ahead of the unity and the integrity of Canada as one nation, then we will vote against the motion and we will encourage every citizen loyal to Canada to oppose the motion as well.

I therefore move:

That the motion be amended by adding immediately after the word "accordingly", the following:

"5. Nothing in this resolution shall:

- (i) confer or be interpreted as conferring upon the legislature or government of Quebec, any new legislative or executive powers, proprietary rights, status, or any other rights or privileges not conferred on the legislature or government of any province;
- (ii) diminish or be interpreted as diminishing in any way the rights and freedoms of any resident of Quebec;
- (iii) deny or be interpreted as denying that Canada constitutes one nation".

• (1650)

The Speaker: Colleagues, of course we are going to entertain questions and comments for 10 minutes. I will take these amendments under advisement and I will return to the House no later than tomorrow's sitting, after I have had a look at them.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was intrigued by the hon. member's sudden concern for the minorities in Quebec. When we look at the platform of the Reform Party, one of its principal proposals is to repeal the Official Languages Act. As a matter of fact, it is not only to repeal the Official Languages Act but to replace it with a policy whereby Quebec would be for the most part French speaking and the rest of the provinces would be English speaking.

I can recall debating in the official languages committee time after time with the Reform representative on that committee, what I consider to be a very hostile proposal to the minorities in Quebec. It is a geographical type of bilingualism where Reform would recognize, maybe in the city of Montreal, bilingual rights, or in some other small part of Quebec, but for the rest of Quebec it would be entirely French speaking. By the way, it

would sell out the French speaking minorities in the other provinces as well.

I am intrigued but not totally surprised by the approach of the leader of the Reform Party today. He seems to jump on any opportunity for political gain.

Does this mean that he is withdrawing his platform proposals to repeal the Official Languages Act and his proposals for geographic linguistic rights to now adopt a policy for all of Canada whereby we will recognize bilingualism?

The Official Languages Act has a balance within it whereby we recognize the rights of anglophones in Quebec and we recognize the rights of francophones outside Quebec, including Ontario, the west and the Atlantic provinces. Is that what he is now proposing or is he simply proposing this provision today for Quebec minorities but tomorrow for something else?

I remind him that this is not an amendment to the Constitution or to the legislation; it is put forward as a formal resolution of this House and a commitment to the Quebec people, but it is not a constitutional amendment or legislation. Consequently, his proposed amendments to the Official Languages Act would be more harmful to the minorities in Quebec than what he is proposing as an amendment to this resolution.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, somewhere in the hon. member's remarks there were about three questions.

First, we recognize that this motion is not a constitutional motion. We also recognize that senior members of the government have implied that if this is passed by the House it may be imported into the Constitution at a later date. That is why we gave it the scrutiny which we did.

Second, with respect to minority rights, in the area of language the Reform Party advocates more jurisdiction over language being given to the provinces and private associations. That will be more popular in Quebec than the current policy of the current government. The second thing we say however is that the sole role of the federal government should be the protection of the rights of minorities from discrimination on the basis of race, language and culture.

• (1655)

Our argument is that under our language policy the federal government is no longer both a player and a referee in the language area. It is just a referee and it can provide more protection by playing that role.

Third, if the hon. member is sincere, which I think he is, in wanting protection for the rights of minorities in Quebec, that would surely lead him to urge his colleagues to support at least the second of these amendments we have put forward.

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Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to hear the hon. member say he supports minority rights. However, people should be judged not by what they say but by what they do.

The member's party has held a position which has now been proven to be against the charter of rights, which is not to allow turbaned Sikhs in the RCMP. His party stood against that group to say they should not be allowed in the RCMP. Recently in the courts it was ruled that to keep them out would be against the charter of rights.

I would like to ask the leader of the third party whether he would support that ruling in the courts and whether he supports turbaned Sikhs in the RCMP.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the question has nothing to do with this debate here today. Our point is the Reform Party is committed to the defence of human rights and the use of the power of the federal government to do that.

We argue that when the government gets to be both a player and a referee in a policy area, whether it is multiculturalism or linguistic policy, what suffers is its capacity to be the referee. Again I would say to the member if he wants to not just talk but to act, if he is really concerned about minority rights, he will support the second of these amendments we have put forward.

Mr. Murray Calder (Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday and today the third party and the leader of the third party talked about our proposal on the regions of Canada. We proposed four. He has said there should be five.

Is the fifth region B.C. or Alberta?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, it is B.C.

The other point the member misses which will come up when we discuss the bill, is that the bigger issue is giving this constitutional veto to the people or the government. We know that all the members here were embarrassed by the flip-flopping of the Prime Minister on that subject. One day he told this House that he meant to give that veto to the people of Quebec. Then he said yesterday that no, he was going to give it to the Government of Quebec. He was going to give a separatist government a constitutional veto over the Constitution of Canada.

If the hon. member wants to ask questions about that bill, he should direct them to the Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pierrette Ringuette—Maltais (Madawaska—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you may rest assured I am not rising to sing. As a French Canadian, however, I am delighted to speak at this historic moment on the motion of the Prime Minister recogniz-

ing that the people of "la belle province" form a distinct society within our country and ensuring that our legislation and our actions will be guided by this reality.

• (1700)

A few weeks ago, Canadians from sea to sea showed their support for Quebec with a demonstration in Montreal and a number of other activities.

Our Prime Minister on our behalf and on his own, as a proud Quebecer and an honest Canadian, is confirming his commitment to recognize Quebec's distinct society. I applaud him on my own behalf and on behalf of the people of Madawaska—Victoria and especially on behalf of all the people of Canada who believe in the strength, determination and positive vision of his leadership for the future of our country and of our children, wherever they may be in this great and wonderful country.

During the referendum period, I canvassed people's homes. I also listened to the fine emotional speeches devoid of truth given by the separatist wizards in Quebec. How can anyone be trying, in a democratic and modern society, to lull Quebecers to sleep as in the time of Duplessis?

The PQ even spent millions on hidden studies to see if they could not come up with an extra dose of sleeping tablets so Quebecers would swallow all their speeches.

From his emperor's throne, the leader of the Bloc even dared tamper with the freedom of the women of Quebec—ah, white only and preferably old stock—telling them they should be pregnant and in the kitchen. I can assure you that if such a statement had been aimed at women in New Brunswick or Canada, the Canadian society as a whole, not just women, would have been up in arms and would have the leader, regardless of his political allegiance.

A while ago, I listened to the leader of the opposition, the leader of the Bloc Quebecois. I must say that, if I were in a position to give him an award, a trophy for his separatist theatrics, I would do it right now in recognition of the drama he added to the debate this afternoon.

I noted, among other things, that this great actor talked about the prime minister doing an about face concerning Quebec as a distinct society. This great actor who likes to talk about other politicians doing about faces should look at his own track record regarding his political allegiance over the past 20 years. When it was opportune to be a federalist, he espoused the federalist discourse, but when a separatist discourse became more opportune, he went that way.

The past 20 years in the life of this great actor will result in his being remembered in history books in Quebec as the number one actor in terms of the Quebec people and its future.

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• (1705)

I can understand the total confusion of the Bloc Québécois leader who, today in this House, must decide whether or not he will support the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society, at a time when he is making grand political speeches as he prepares to embark on another great adventure, heading for political life in Quebec. I can see his confusion.

Honestly, does he really believe in the distinct society for Quebecers? Does he believe in it or will he try once again, for personal political gain, to trick the Quebec people into following him?

I would also like to remind the leader of the Bloc that, when they talk about respect, when they ask for respect for the Quebec people, naturally they must also respect all of the Canadian population, people like me, a French Canadian living in New Brunswick, not in English speaking Canada like the grand master of this terminology, former Prime Minister Mulroney, taught them repeatedly. He also spoke of tearing up the Constitution. I must admit he is a good pupil of the former Prime Minister of Canada.

Today's leadership will no doubt be followed by that of provincial premiers, who will certainly look after their own interests first. I would like to remind them that there must be some kind of basis for these interests, a foundation if you will. Since the foundation of our country in 1867, Quebec has been recognized, not in so many words but by institutions; just read the 1867 Constitution. Each pillar of the foundation supports our country, Canada, and is part of it.

My Quebec roots go back to 1642, when my ancestors settled in the Boucherville region and I am proud to be a French Canadian like the more than a million others all over Canada who feel close to the seven million Quebecers and share their pride.

I am one of those who want to build and not destroy, one of those who welcome the global challenges of the year 2000. We should join together, not go our separate ways like some egocentric politicians are preaching.

I did not sing, even though my heart and my head agree with this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but your time is up.

Do I have the unanimous consent of the House to give the member a few minutes more?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Very well. You have two more minutes.

Mrs. Ringuette-Maltais: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I thank my colleagues for this expression of great democracy in the House.

I thank our Prime Minister who fulfilled his commitments and those of Canadians from all across the country. Contrary to what these horror story tellers and these wizards have said, we did in fact act with respect and honour before, during and after the October 30 referendum, whether or not it suits these separatists who would like to swindle Quebecers out of a promising future within Canada.

• (1710)

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the comments made by the hon. member from New Brunswick, and I must say that it is true, that we on this side are very proud. We are very proud of our leader, because our leader has the courage to tell the truth in this House. All Bloc members are proud of their leader because, during the election campaign, he said things that were true, put historic events in their context, and made us proud of being members of the Bloc Québécois.

The hon. member told us that she wanted to build and not to destroy. The goal of the Bloc Québécois, of all Quebec sovereignists, is also to build, but to build Quebec, our homeland, our country, so that it can fulfil our aspirations. At the same time, we want to work with the rest of Canada.

We have proposed a formula for partnership with the rest of Canada. It was extraordinary. The Fathers of the Canadian Confederation, who represented Lower Canada, would tell us that we are right, over 120 years later, to propose changes in North America north of the U.S., because the current system no longer works.

The Prime Minister's proposal is a case in point. He cannot even approach his provincial counterparts to try to get something enshrined in the Constitution. All they are offering us is a motion of the House that is practically meaningless, that is not worth the paper it is printed on.

It is important, I think, to weigh our words in this House, to show Quebec a little respect. Quebec was one of the four provinces that founded this country, but the time has come to move on. The rest of Canada should understand this.

Mrs. Pierrette Ringuette-Maltais (Madawaska—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not find a question in what the hon. member opposite said but, in his remarks, he complained about the Prime Minister's unwillingness to entrench the principles of distinct society in the Constitution, when the Leader of the Opposition himself is on record as saying that he did not want to deal with constitutional changes any more.

A minimum of consistency is indicated, do you not think? Public statements cannot be made to mean different things from day to day, depending on the circumstances. Our colleague from the Bloc Québécois also indicated that he was in favour of a partnership with Canada. The Canadian federation is indeed a

partnership between the ten provinces and the two territories. There is no bigger and better example of partnership than what we have right now.

Take the European Community for example. These countries are in the process of establishing a federation like ours because they have seen how successful this kind of partnership is. So, when I hear—

An hon. member: Come on now.

Mrs. Ringuette—Maltais: I guess some members of this House cannot take the truth when they hear it. When I hear members say that the system does not work—I would like the hon. member to comment on this—and talk about areas of responsibility and jurisdiction—

• (1715)

Personally, as a New Brunswicker, I find that totally unacceptable. I cannot understand that the people of Quebec would go along with that. Dropping out of school is a serious problem in Quebec in an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. This is totally unacceptable.

At a time when the whole world is moving toward a major achievement in ensuring education for people of all ages, wherever they live, Quebec is stalling. And this is an exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

As for what the hon. member opposite said, I think he should take a good look at his government's policies.

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great conviction that I support the Prime Minister's motion to officially recognize that Quebec is a distinct society within Canada, because of its language, culture, tradition and French speaking majority.

I am deeply attached to Canada. But I also freely chose to live in Quebec. I chose to do my best to promote Quebec's society and quality of life. I chose to raise my children in Quebec and have them benefit from what is truly the heart of Canada's history, culture, heritage and duality.

I live in Montreal, the urban gem of Canada. In spite of all the obstacles, constitutional and others, in spite of all the attempts to divide its French and English speaking communities, Montreal remains a city where the Canadian duality is felt daily, but in great harmony. It is a place where francophones and anglophones live and work in peace and real harmony.

Montreal is unique because of its cultural and linguistic duality, but also because of the contribution made by so many other communities which have given Montreal its unique character as a cosmopolitan, friendly, warm and extraordinary city.

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I had the privilege, after a business career, to enter politics and begin my political life in Quebec's National Assembly. I wanted to do my best to make a contribution and help Quebec fulfil its goals.

While an MNA, I worked with two persons who are now members of this House, the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, and the hon. member for Roberval. We did not agree and we did not see things the same way, but we all worked to promote the well-being of Quebecers, because we felt that it was our common objective.

It was during my term as a member of the Quebec National Assembly that I had the opportunity to defend the Meech Lake Accord, to vote for the Meech Lake Accord, which was supposed to include for the first time in the Canadian Constitution the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society, which would make Quebec a part of the Constitution of 1982.

I listened to the leader of the Opposition with a great deal of respect, with all the respect he is due, as he explained to us how and why he and the Parti québécois had not supported the Meech Lake Accord, why they had voted against the Meech Lake Accord and, after that, against the Charlottetown Accord.

• (1720)

Despite all these explanations, I am convinced that the fundamental reason is that, whatever the accord, whatever the proposal that is made to either party, the Parti québécois or the Bloc, which are fundamentally dedicated to Quebec's independence, will reject it. Whatever the proposal that is put to the sovereignists in order to make Canada work better, to rebuild Canada, to renew Canada, it is logical that these parties, the Bloc Québécois and the Parti québécois, will reject it because, fundamentally, as the leader of the Opposition himself emphasized before the media, he is not interested in receiving proposals because, he said: "I am a sovereignist."

That is fair enough, but they should not try to delude us into believing that they considered these proposals objectively because, fundamentally, they do not believe in them, they do not want them.

I found it quite ironic that the Leader of the Opposition should give lessons to the Prime Minister telling him: "While you will take care of the Constitution, I will be doing something else, I will be putting Quebec's financial house in order". How ironical. We all know very well that the leader of the Bloc Québécois' purpose when he created this party involved the constitutional issue of separating Quebec from Canada.

Since his election, before his election, every day in the House of Commons, the constitutional issue has been the principal subject of debate. The Parti Québécois, the Bloc Québécois' ally in Quebec City, naturally spoke about the constitutional issue and the separation of Quebec throughout the electoral campaign. That is what happened before and during the election of the

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Parti Quebecois and throughout its life in government up until the referendum. All they talked about was the Constitution, separation and independence.

Today, the Leader of the Opposition has the gall to tell us: "We will set the Constitution aside and we will deal with public affairs". Yet, it was the Parti Quebecois government that said, during the election campaign, it would choose another way of governing, of managing public affairs more efficiently. All that has happened in Quebec, all that the Bloc Quebecois has done since its election, has been to talk about the independence of Quebec. According to them, nothing is working in the federal government or in Canada, naturally.

Every day in the House, it is the same thing.

[*English*]

Montreal, the economic motor of Quebec and 50 per cent of its population, is severely sick. In many quarters of Montreal the economy is dying. Investment is drying up. Leases are being curtailed or cancelled. Anybody who knows and follows what is going on in Montreal today will say that it is a sick city. The economy of Montreal is in desperate straits.

Meanwhile, what have we done? We have spent time and money on commissions, studies and propaganda instead of looking after the well-being of the citizens of Quebec. Today we are told that at last this is what they are going to be doing.

[*Translation*]

I will vote with conviction for this motion, because I firmly believe that the place of Quebec, which is the heart and soul of Canada, is within Canada and that its destiny and that of Canada are intertwined forever. That is why, on the day the vote is taken, I will proudly stand and vote with conviction in favour of the prime minister's motion. I invite all hon. members to give it strong support.

• (1725)

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know this is a solemn day and, if I may say, it is the day of awakening for Canada. This awakening has been triggered by the resolution introduced by the Prime Minister. I must admit that I find it rather amusing. Since our arrival here two years ago, we have been called all sorts of things. The favourite nickname given to us is separatists, but after two years this government finally gave birth to this resolution which is meaningless, in our view.

Why is this resolution meaningless? Why are the members opposite surprised by our reaction, by our position on all this? I am astonished. Actually, I think I understand. When the Prime Minister says he does not listen to Radio-Canada because he wants a good night's sleep, he has deprived himself of a good

source of information. If the Prime Minister had listened to all the media without distinction in Quebec and if he had read all of the newspapers, he would already know that Quebec has already stated loud and clear what it wants.

What we see here today is no response to that. And one should not be surprised. Some of my colleagues from the Atlantic region understand pretty well what I mean because I have been telling them for two years what sovereignty is all about and what the difference between a sovereignist and a separatist is. This is the period for questions and comments, but I think I will focus on comments tonight.

I have been explaining to them for two years the difference between a sovereignist and a separatist. Mr. Speaker, you were here when the issue was raised in this House and I told the House what Quebec wants to be, because if you want to inform people you have to repeat the message people wish to convey. This is why I had explained that a sovereignist is someone who is able to assert and accept himself.

I believe they understood in part what it means to be a sovereignist or to assert oneself. My honourable colleagues have even used the expression in a bill, which says that Canada wants to affirm its sovereignty over its oceans. I have nothing against that, but we have been blamed for two years for using the same expression.

What are we to think when the members opposite try to scold us? We have been told that the regional commissions on the future of Quebec were phoney. They have once more deprived themselves of an incomparable source of information. Mr. Speaker, I can see that you are getting impatient. I will now stop speaking but first I wish to say that I will continue my colleagues' education on what Quebec really wants. May I add that they really did not choose the right way today.

Mr. Lincoln: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. First of all, perhaps the member should talk to his leader, who said that there was no difference, describing himself as a separatist in Washington. I think that, in his mind, the words sovereignist and separatist had the same meaning. He boasted about being a separatist in Washington and was very proud of that. So I thought there was no difference, taking the Leader of the Opposition at his word.

The member talks about Quebec as if he was speaking on behalf of all Quebecers. Let me remind him that, on referendum day, a little over 49 per cent of Quebecers voted in favour of his option, but the majority voted for the other option. So it seems to me that the majority of Quebecers have stated their position. If it changes some day, then so be it. However, for the time being, what counts is that we have won a totally democratic referendum despite a totally vague question.

Points of Order

We won a referendum in which Quebec clearly chose to follow the lead given by the Prime Minister, which is to have recognition of the distinct society, to give a veto to Quebec and to sort out jurisdictions. That is what we will do, and that is what we are in the process of doing.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

[*English*]

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5.30 p.m. this is now private members' time. Perhaps there is a compromise that if we allow this point of order we can add time to private members' hour so that members will not be deprived of any of their time.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, as members know, an amendment to the main motion was introduced by the Reform Party a little while ago by the hon. leader of the Reform Party.

I have had an opportunity to examine the motion and I want to briefly indicate to the Speaker that I contend the motion is irreceivable and out of order. The motion confers—

An hon. member: That is debating the motion.

Mr. Boudria: I am not debating the motion. I am challenging the receivability of the motion. I understand Mr. Speaker will be ruling on it tomorrow morning and it is customary for us when a motion comes into the House to argue whether—

The Deputy Speaker: As indicated before, this time will be added to the private members' hour. The hon. member cannot be interrupted on a point of order. When he is finished I will hear other members on the same point of order.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, the amendment in question refers to conferring on the legislature or the Government of Quebec new executive powers, propriety rights and so on. It also refers to privileges not conferred on the legislature or the government of any province; in other words, provinces including Quebec but possibly other provinces as well.

Our parliamentary precedents, Beauchesne's sixth edition, page 176, citation 579 says:

(1) An amendment setting forth a proposition dealing with a matter which is foreign to the proposition involved in the main motion is not relevant and cannot be moved.

(2) An amendment may not raise a new question which can only be considered in a distinct motion after proper notice.

It is on those two points that I believe the amendment is irreceivable. I have indicated that it introduces two new concepts in subsection (i) which are not referred to in the original motion.

Mr. Speaker will also be guided by the decision of 1923 when the Speaker of the House decided that the report of a parliamen-

tary committee as a prerequisite to accepting a particular initiative was a new concept because it was not in the main motion and was therefore out of order. Similarly, subsection (i) of this amendment is out of order.

[*Translation*]

Second, I want to point out that, on October 16, 1970, Mr. Baldwin moved the following motion: That the motion be amended by striking out all the words after "that" and adding the following: "the government should forthwith introduce legislative proposals to meet the conditions referred to in the motion".

That was a totally new element which was not in the original proposal. Consequently, it was out of order.

For these two reasons, I argue that, when you make your ruling tomorrow morning, it will be to the effect that the amendment proposed by the leader of the Reform Party is out of order.

● (1735)

Mr. Gilles Ducesse (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, obviously you cannot rule on this immediately. This is why the opposition whip is asking you to do so tomorrow morning and to ponder the issue this evening.

I submit that the point of order should have been raised before 5.30 p.m., during debate on the motion, and that if we agreed to hear that point of order, it was not to prolong a debate which could no longer be extended. Otherwise, we will never again get unanimous consent to hear a point of order outside the period provided for such a debate.

I submit that the point of order dealing specifically with the debate should be raised tomorrow, or the next time we discuss the resolution. I also submit that the Speaker in the Chair will not be able to make a ruling, because he must ponder the issue. You can no more do it immediately now than he could do it immediately then, otherwise it would be too easy to resort to the tactic. They want to save time and raise a point of order outside the period provided and ask for your ruling on it tomorrow morning. That is too soon.

I submit that we should follow up on the point of order. We know that there is one coming, but we should act as if we had not heard it, and entertain it in the period reserved for this debate. Otherwise, we will be getting around the rules for the sake of it and also to achieve indirectly what cannot be done directly.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, while I have some sympathy with what the whip for the Bloc Québécois has said, you have allowed a discussion of this because of the request made by the government whip and I would like to respond to his comments.

Private Members' Business

I assure the House that not only did we verify the contents of the motion but it was reviewed by the table prior to presentation by the hon. leader of the Reform Party.

The chief government whip alleges this is not relevant to the motion before the House. Relevance under citation 568 of Beauchesne is a criterion. I will explain very briefly why the amendment is relevant:

(5) Nothing in this resolution shall:

- (i) Confer or be interpreted as conferring upon the legislature of the Government of Quebec, any new legislative or executive powers, proprietary rights, status, or any other rights or privileges not conferred upon the legislature or government of any province.

Point three of the motion states "the House undertake to be guided by this reality", that being the reality of Quebec's distinct society.

Point four states that the House "encourage all components of the legislative and executive branches of government to take note of this recognition and once again to be guided in their conduct accordingly".

Since we are instructing not only the House but the legislative and executive branches of the government to be guided in their conduct, it is clear they have an unlimited range of options in terms of how to implement this guidance. Subsection (i) of the amendment simply refers to a specific route they may take that shall not be considered. Therefore it is highly relevant to the motion.

Under citation 569 of Beauchesne adding words to a motion is an acceptable method of adding additional relevant material. Citation 567 instructs that these amendments can be made to increase the acceptability of a motion. Once again, since the stated intention of the leader of the Reform Party is to make this acceptable, not only to the members of the House but to a broader section of Canadians, it is perfectly in order.

I hope the government will make every effort to accommodate all Canadians in what is, after all, said to be a unity resolution. That would be a wiser use of time than trying to construe that the equality of provinces, the equality of citizens or the very integrity of the country is out of order on the floor of the House of Commons.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank all three hon. members for their interventions. I agree that it might have been better to deal with this point of order during the debate rather than in private member's hour. However, the Speaker is seized with the matter. The interventions, having heard them tonight, will be available in the blues and the Speaker will be able to consider the interventions of all three members when he makes his ruling tomorrow. That is one of the reasons the Speaker was anxious to hear the interventions tonight.

It is certainly now 5.30. The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CANADA WATER EXPORT PROHIBITION ACT

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP) moved that Bill C-202, an act to act to prohibit the export of water by interbasin transfers, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see so many colleagues in the House during this private members' hour. There is a lot of interest in this topic and I indicate my appreciation for that and also my appreciation to my hon. colleague for Regina—Lumsden for seconding this motion. I know he has had a longstanding interest in the subject material that is embodied in Bill C-202, as well as many other members of the House who over the last number of days have contacted me with an indication of their support, that they will endorse the principle of this bill at second reading and will vote in favour of it.

If this bill passes it would prohibit any company or any organization from diverting water from a Canadian river basin into, in this case, an American river basin for export purposes.

One might ask what prompts this bill at this time. A few days ago one of the officials responsible for the environmental aspects of the North American Free Trade Agreement made a speech in Montreal.

He said high water consumption and pollution could trigger disputes within the North American Free Trade Agreement. He urged Canadians to better manage their water resources and said that while Canada has sovereignty over its water, the resource is also a global treasure, much the same as the Amazon rainforest is a global treasure, that the world per se depends on it. Implicit in his remarks was that the North American continent depends on Canadian water.

He closed with this:

Pressure on Canada to increase exports to the United States will mount as scarcity becomes more widespread. Canadians therefore have an interest in encouraging their American neighbours to better manage their water too.

As late as November 9, 1995 in Montreal one of the key representatives to the NAFTA warned us as Canadians that a water crisis is pending in the United States and that the United States is obviously considering Canada as a source to relieve this pressure in the future.

We also want to acknowledge that water diversion schemes per se are not new. These are concepts that have been around for some time. We are well aware of the grand canal project enthusiastically promoted by Simon Reisman, one of our key trade negotiators with the United States.

Another is the North American water and power alliance, commonly called NAWAPA; coming out of California a massive scheme to divert western Canadian rivers into the south-western United States and northern Mexico.

There was also a project to pipe vast quantities of Great Lakes water to the high plains states in the southwest to replete their depleted aquifer, a 1984 scheme. A few years later there was a proposal to feed New York City's vast population with Lake Ontario water. A few years later came a concept involving the blasting of a 400-mile canal from Lake Superior to the Missouri River in South Dakota at a cost of \$30 billion.

There was also a proposal to construct a canal from Lake Erie to the Ohio River, again to move water and shipping between the two countries. There was also a federally funded plan to drill a hole in the bottom of Lake Michigan and drain the water through bedrock layers for southern Illinois cities.

• (1745)

I have a list here. I could go on and on, but I make the point that there has been a long list over particularly the last two decades, when water diversion was an entrepreneurial interest by some very creative people, primarily to move Canadian water to the United States.

Anyone who has travelled in the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico will acknowledge that the water sources there are presently being used to their maximum. The Colorado River often dries up before it actually reaches the ocean because all the water is used up. Also, one could wade across the Rio Grande River at El Paso probably without even getting their knees wet, which indicates that massive river system is exclusively used for domestic, agricultural, and industrial water needs.

We acknowledge that virtually all of the major aquifers in the southwest United States and northern Mexico are being depleted on a daily basis. When one travels through the area and talks to people who are responsible for water resources for the future, virtually everyone assumes that Canada will one day be their salvation, that Canada's fresh water, which people in Mexico and the United States assume is being wasted, will be diverted one way or another for use in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.

Major industrial development, agricultural expansion, and population increases are occurring in that southern sun belt. There has been vast industrialization of Mexico, particularly in the maquiladora zone, where just in the last few months hundreds of new industries have started up, all with some need for water. The case is clear that increasingly there will be a need, much earlier than anticipated even a few years ago, to obtain vast amounts of water. I can say that our American friends to the south almost exclusively look to Canada as a source for that water to make up for their shortfall.

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I think it is fair to say that over the last couple of decades the hope was that this matter would go away. All levels of government had not taken any decisive action up until very recently in the hopes that this was a problem that hopefully would never occur. I refer particularly to the governments of British Columbia and Ontario—there may be others, but I am not familiar with them tonight—which passed legislation in their provincial legislatures banning exports of water from their provinces.

We have to acknowledge that there are two levels of government involved in the management of water resources in Canada. Under the Constitution Act the provinces exercise direct control over many aspects of water management within their boundaries. Water is a natural resource and provincial governments have jurisdiction over it within their own boundaries. They are therefore able to legislate in the areas of domestic and industrial water supply, pollution control, hydroelectric power development, irrigation, recreational use of water, et cetera.

However, again because of the Constitution Act, the federal government has jurisdiction over inland and ocean fisheries, including their protection and particularly the protection of river basins. In addition, Parliament has the residual power to legislate for peace, order and good government of the country, including the regulation of trade and commerce. The federal government is responsible for conducting relations with other countries, which is extremely important with respect to water because so much of Canada's water resources are in boundary water basins.

We basically have two areas of jurisdiction: provincial jurisdiction for use within the province; and because it could become a matter of international trade and because international trade and commerce is a federal responsibility, there is a need for the federal government to become involved in this as well.

As I have said, some provinces have taken the only action at their disposal and have passed legislation prohibiting this type of interbasin sale of water. My thesis would be that may be fine and dandy, but the federal government must also act. Some people have said that there is a federal policy. Some years ago, back in 1987, Canada tabled a water policy, which was essentially a statement of what the government would like to do in the future. It has no legislative authority. There are no regulations or laws or statutes attached to it. It is simply a policy and nothing more. Part of that policy states that "the Government of Canada will take all possible measures within the limits of its constitutional authority to prohibit the export of Canadian water by interbasin diversions".

• (1750)

At the time I was in the House and I thought we were finally going to make some headway in this area. I was absolutely thrilled some months later on August 25, 1988 when Bill C-156 was tabled in the House. It was entitled the Canada Water

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Preservation Act, an act to prohibit any export or diversion of boundary waters for the purpose of export. We thought we were finally going to have legislation passed in the House that would indicate the will of Canada in this area. Unfortunately, Bill C-156 died on the Order Paper and it has never been reintroduced. Today we do not have any federal legislation that would prohibit the export of water from Canada in terms of interbasin transfers to the United States for eventual sale into Mexico. That is the purpose of Bill C-202.

Part of the motivation for this came from a number of schemes, one from my own constituency, namely on the North Thompson River. This scheme was intended to divert about 50 per cent of the water flow of the North Thompson River into the Columbia River basin, which would eventually travel through various water basins in the United States for eventual sale in the Los Angeles area. Since this scheme was proposed formally to the provincial government in British Columbia, people obviously have opposed it in light of the fact that there is an absence of federal legislation. Of course they are concerned that NAFTA opened the door for this type of enterprise, which I will discuss in a moment.

Many communities rallied quickly. Over the past few months I was able to table in the House 123,000 names of people from a variety of communities throughout British Columbia and various parts of Canada but particularly from the communities of Kamloops, Heffley Creek, Raleigh, Westsyde, Barrière, McLure, Avola, Vinsula, Clearwater, Black Pines, Chu Chua, Birch Island, Blue River, Louis Creek, Whispering Pines, and many others within my constituency, to say nothing about cities, communities, and rural areas throughout all of British Columbia, much of Alberta, and other parts of western Canada. There has been an overwhelming negative reaction to this proposal.

There have been times when people have said that NAFTA protects us from this. I want to reject that. NAFTA includes water as a good under the terms of the agreement. I would emphasize the word "good". We could also use the term "commodity". Article 102 of NAFTA sets forth the objective of the agreement "to eliminate barriers to trade and facilitate the cross-border movement of goods and services between the territories of the parties, to increase substantially investment opportunities in the territories of the parties, and to establish a framework for further trilateral, regional, multilateral co-operation to expand and enhance the benefits of this agreement".

Basically it says that the purpose of NAFTA is to eliminate barriers to trade in goods. Water is a good. Therefore, fundamentally this is one of the purposes of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

It goes on to describe this more accurately. It is important to take a moment to do that. Goods are defined in article 201 of

NAFTA as products that are understood in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or now the World Trade Organization. This means that any good covered by a GATT tariff heading is subject to all the provisions of the agreements themselves unless explicitly excluded.

A number of areas in NAFTA were excluded specifically. Raw logs, beer, and two or three other items were mentioned specifically as being exclusions from the North American Free Trade Agreement.

An hon. member: What about water?

Mr. Riis: Water was not mentioned. The evidence has shown that water was never part of the discussions. The negotiators now have admitted that. The politicians involved in the negotiations have said that water was never even mentioned in any serious way.

• (1755)

Therefore, to understand the basis for the inclusion of water in the trade agreements one must first look to the relevant section of the harmonized commodity coding system of GATT. The harmonized commodity coding system for classifying goods for customs tariff and other purposes adopted by the GATT include the following: "2201: It includes waters, including natural or artificial mineral waters and aerated waters not containing sugar or sweetening material nor flavoured, including ice and snow". It then goes on to article 2201(90) and lists all other water.

Let me provide a clarification of this harmonized commodity coding system. The GATT harmonized commodity description and coding system explanatory notes were adopted by the GATT signatories. The explanatory notes state the following: "This heading covers ordinary natural water of all kinds, other than sea water. Such water remains in this heading whether or not it is clarified or purified".

I could recite a whole number of these subsections and the technical aspects of NAFTA, but fundamentally it states that water, under the World Trade Organization and under NAFTA, is considered a commodity or a good. This obviously causes people a great deal of concern.

I think it is fair to say that at a time when NAFTA opens the door to this type of export and knowing that we have to treat, as a result of NAFTA, American and Canadian entrepreneurs on a level playing field and that we cannot discriminate against Americans in favour of Canadians, since Canadians right now are diverting water within the country, exporting water, and selling water in a variety of forms, an American entrepreneur can now use NAFTA and come forward and do the same. They could export water from the North Thompson River in British Columbia to the Los Angeles basin.

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I think it is also clear in international law. I am not an international lawyer, but I have talked to many of them. They say that if it comes to a dispute in this area, provincial legislatures will not have much impact. Even national legislation will not have much impact, although this is what we are doing tonight. The provisions of the international trade agreement between three sovereign nations will be paramount if there is a dispute. Of course a dispute settling mechanism panel will take into consideration that the three signatories to the North America Free Trade Agreement have agreed, as per the schedules I have indicated, that water is a commodity, just like coal or codfish or wheat or anything else, to be bought or sold among three countries.

For that reason and to give us some influence at that international dispute settlement mechanism table when the time comes, I think we should pass this legislation to very clearly indicate where the people of Canada stand on this issue.

For Canadians water is something special. I think we all agree that water is a commodity unlike cod or timber or nickel or whatever. It is virtually like blood itself. It is the life of Canada. Water is something very special in the Canadian psyche.

I urge my colleagues to pass this legislation in order to send a very clear message that this is where Canada stands.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Kamloops on this bill concerning our water resources, which are so obviously valuable for our communities and all of Canada.

We wholeheartedly share the hon. member's goal to conserve our water resources and to keep a tight control over the development of these resources. But at the same time, with all due respect, we think that the hon. member's approach is too narrow, and that the whole issue of water resources should be looked at in a much more comprehensive and integrated way.

We think the whole issue should be looked at in the broadest context possible.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Water is our most precious resource. We have the greatest freshwater reserves of the world. It behoves us to use them wisely. Our jobs, our economy, our quality of life, our environment, our farming and our forestry depend on water. All other resources depend on water for sustenance.

It is clear that we have to control our water exports. At the same time we have to do more than look at interbasin transfers or interbasin exports. For instance, today a large part of the water exports are being carried out through supertankers which load water from our coastal areas, lakes, streams and rivers, and carry it to other parts of the continent and beyond. We have to look at that type of export. We also have to look at the draining of water resources such as the mining of our groundwater reserves that might go southward.

I agree with the content of Bill C-202. It is in sync with the present water policy of the federal government which opposes water exports through interbasin transfers. We should look at the whole question of water in a formal, comprehensive manner, looking at not only the exports themselves but the use of water, water conservation and conception, the impacts of the use of water on ecosystems generally and the impacts of various processes such as industrial manufacturing and others on our water. We must also take into account the jurisdictional question, the input of provincial and municipal governments that deliver our water and have much to do with the retailing of water to Canadians from coast to coast.

The government has been looking at the water issue for some time now. For some 10 years there have been consultations and workshops. We have decided to accelerate the process. We are reviewing our water policies and our water legislation. Throughout next year we will consult broadly across Canada to find out from Canadians and various levels of government that have a clear interest in and responsibility for water issues how we should deal with the question of water comprehensively, including the key question of water exports.

We fully back the principle of the bill. At the same time our decision is that a much more comprehensive approach has to be taken. We want to look at the full range of water exports, including supertankers and the mining of groundwater. We do not want to limit the study and future legislation to the question of exports. We must treat water issues much more broadly, look at an ecosystemic approach, treat water as the most precious resource of the 21st century for us and for generations that follow.

To our aboriginal people water is the essence of life. They see streams, lakes and rivers as the veins and the arteries in the body of mother earth. They say that the cleaner the water flows, the cleaner the arteries and the veins in the body of mother earth. They also say that the healthier the veins and arteries, the healthier mother earth.

• (1805)

I thank the member for Kamloops for having brought the subject forward and enabling us to discuss it. I commit myself to the issue being looked at very broadly by the government in an overall consultation next year which hopefully will lead to comprehensive legislation on water for Canada.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak about the bill introduced by my colleague from the NDP, an act to prohibit the export of water by interbasin transfers.

The purpose of this bill, introduced by the member for Kamloops, is clear from the title: to prohibit the export of our water by interbasin transfers.

Many questions come to mind, which are not answered in this bill. These questions occurred to me after I read an article by Louis-Gilles Francoeur, published yesterday in *Le Devoir*. Its title is rather instructive. It is a question: "Scientists' recommendation: fresh water under federal control?"

The journalist was referring to the report by the Canadian Water Resources Association and to the Canadian Global Change Program, which recommends that the federal government get involved in managing fresh water resources, especially by taking over control of the main hydrographic basins, such as the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes.

This report, published in August under the auspices of the Royal Society of Canada, suggests that the federal government review its 1970 Canada Water Act in terms of the new outlook and the new circumstances in this area.

The bill presented by the member for Kamloops is similar, since it suggests that the federal government get involved in the export of its water resources.

I will now go back to the report, which Mr. Francoeur quotes extensively in his article. It says: "The way the situation is evolving, management of fresh water, a provincial resource—again, a strictly provincial resource—could become a constitutional issue, like many other environmental management issues, for that matter. Water resource management is a strategic issue, particularly in Quebec, considering the importance of hydro-electric power".

In light of this quote, one can clearly see that fresh water and the management of this resource is under the provinces' jurisdiction. I do not know if the member for Kamloops consulted the authorities in his province, British Columbia, before introducing his bill. I am sure his province would not agree to give up this jurisdiction. In fact, if his province, or any other, decided to export water by interbasin transfers, could they not do it since it is a matter of provincial jurisdiction?

I cannot see how the federal government would once again intrude on matters of provincial jurisdiction. We know that it is a habit dear to the Liberals, especially with regard to the environment, but for a New Democrat to get into the fray, asking the federal government to put its big fat paws into his own province's business, is beyond me. I cannot see what the member is trying to do with his bill. To protect water? To conserve water? These are matters of provincial jurisdiction. Does the member not trust his provincial government in this respect?

As a matter of fact, his province, the member will correct me if I am wrong, made its position very clear with Bill C-9, The Water Protection Act, tabled by the minister Moe Sihota. I would like the member for Kamloops to tell us more about this piece of legislation. Right from the start, minister Sihota stated his intentions on this matter.

In a press release issued on April 27, 1995, Mr. Sihota said, and I quote:

[English]

The key is for the province to have control over that development, not the federal through NAFTA or the United States.

• (1810)

[Translation]

I believe it is quite clear. Minister Sihota wants to deal with water himself because it comes under his jurisdiction, "not the federal", as he said so well in his press release. If the Environment minister of his own province says that he wants control over this matter and is telling the federal government not to interfere, why does the hon. member for Kamloops seek to impose a new act on his province and on the others? Would it not be better to leave the question of water management to the provinces, like British Columbia, that have jurisdiction over it?

Unfortunately, I have not looked at this issue with regard to the North American Free Trade Agreement. We should certainly look at this question of water exports, or trade in water, in connection with this agreement.

I sense that, once again, this will be served to us with an ecosystem sauce, that is to say, we will be told that we should consider the large living systems as a whole, because they justify Ottawa's interference with provincial jurisdictions. The report referred to before is asking Ottawa to develop a strategy for interconnected basins. Under this strategy, Ottawa would look after large basins like the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, while provinces and municipalities would manage small basins in accordance with federal policies.

I will read to you two paragraphs from Francoeur's article, which show clearly the interfering intent of the federal government. It says: "Ottawa proposes to reduce the role of the provinces, which own water resources, by drowning their constitutional responsibilities in a sea of intervenors. For example, the report suggests that we create a consortium with representatives of the public sector (federal, provincial, territorial and

municipal governments), the First Nations, the universities, the colleges and private sector businesses, which would tackle various problems related to water on a national and international level. The scientific societies' report also suggests that we extend federal jurisdiction to estuaries like the St. Lawrence estuary and to coastal zones, which are provincial properties, in the context of a global approach focused on ecosystems and interconnected drainage basins."

This report puts forward the same arguments the federal government uses to justify interfering in provincial jurisdictions. Ecosystems, the nation, globalization, always the same ingredients the federal government uses to push the provinces around. Unlike Obelix, who was the only one to fall into the kettle of magic potion, all the federalists have been cooked in the same pot. The hon. member for Kamloops is no exception because his bill reflects perfectly the centralizing views promoted by the federal government in environmental matters.

Finally, the report goes on to say that Environment Canada should enhance the protection of fresh water ecosystems by assuming jurisdiction over fresh water fishing. Yet, since 1922—

Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Oh, my God, it is unbelievable.

Mrs. Guay: Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite listened they might learn something.

Yet, since 1922, Quebec has been managing fresh water fishing within its boundaries, which shows the inconsistency of a system where water belongs to the provinces and the fish belong to Ottawa.

It is clear from this report that fresh water is under provincial jurisdiction. In B.C., minister Sihota goes even further by legislating trading provincial water.

In a federal paper entitled *Media Backgrounder Federal Water Policy—Executive Summary*, we read this, and I quote:

[English]

—the provinces exercise direct control over many aspects of water management within their boundaries. Their competence to legislate in water matters derives from their jurisdiction over management of public lands, property and civil rights, and matters of a local and private nature. Provinces, therefore, have authority to legislate in areas of domestic and industrial water supply, pollution control, non-nuclear thermal and hydroelectric power development, irrigation and recreation.

[Translation]

Moreover, in Quebec, the Gérin-Lajoie philosophy, which says that Quebec's constitutional jurisdiction should be extended to its international relations, has been the object of an undeniable consensus since 1965.

Private Members' Business

• (1815)

If we combine all this, that is, provincial jurisdiction over water, the provinces' wish to take charge of their international relations, as the member for Kamloops' province does through its Water Protection Act, and if we add to that the federal government's mediocrity, or even paucity in terms of the environment, it must be recognized that Bill C-202 is not a desirable bill.

[English]

Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like a point of clarification. Does debate on a private member's bill go from one side of the House to the other?

The Deputy Speaker: Usually, but we try to give all three parties a chance to speak first. According to my list, it is the hon. member for Peace River who now has the floor.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, there is quite a bit of interest in this bill. We have been interested for some time in the matter of water and water exports.

It is a pleasure for me to speak to Bill C-202, which is an act to prohibit the export of water by interbasin transfers. I know the hon. member for Kamloops has been following this issue for quite a few years. Since he is from British Columbia, I can understand his interest in the subject.

Contrary to what the previous speaker stated, these rivers quite often run through more than one province and quite a big area is affected.

We in the Reform Party have also been interested in the topic of water exports. Our 1993 blue sheet, which contains the Reform Party's principles, policies, and election platform, states that the Reform Party supports the position that notwithstanding the inclusion of water in the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement, exclusive and unrestricted control of water in all its forms will be maintained by and for Canada and both free trade agreements should be amended to reflect this.

The blue sheet went further to state that until federal policies related to the free trade agreements are initiated and Canada's control over water resources is established within both free trade agreements, the Reform Party would not support the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

I believe we are covered here. However, in examining the research I can see that there are cases that can be made for either side of the argument. The first argument is that the free trade agreement and NAFTA entitle the United States to a certain share of Canada's fresh water. The second argument is that the trade agreements do not entitle the U.S. to our water. I would like to address these two arguments. I will speak about the

Private Members' Business

second argument first, which is the Canadian government's official position.

Water was never mentioned during the free trade negotiations. The free trade agreements are commercial agreements, which deal with traded goods and services. Of course bottled water is a traded good, but water in rivers and lakes is by no stretch of the imagination a traded commodity, so what is the big fuss?

Furthermore, the Canadian government amended the implementing legislation to the Canada–U.S. Free Trade Agreement by stating that none of the free trade agreement provisions, such as the proportional sharing agreement, applied to natural surface or ground water, other than article 401, which deals with tariff elimination.

It would seem that our water is secure. Just to make triple sure there is no room for misunderstanding or legal manoeuvres by the Americans, in December of 1993 the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States put out a joint statement, which states that "NAFTA creates no rights to the natural water resources of any party to the agreement. Unless water in any form has entered into commerce and has become a good or product, it is not covered by the provisions of any trade agreement, including NAFTA. Nothing in the NAFTA agreement would oblige any NAFTA party to either exploit its water for commercial use or begin exporting water in any form. Water in its natural state in lakes, rivers, reservoirs, aquifers, water basins and the like is not a good or product and is not traded and therefore is not and never has been subject to the terms of any trade agreement".

The official argument goes even further, to state that international rights and obligations respecting water in its natural state are contained in separate treaties and agreements negotiated for that purpose. Examples are the United States–Canada boundary waters treaty of 1909 and the 1944 boundary waters treaty between Mexico and the United States.

• (1820)

It would seem that any reasonable person would be completely satisfied that all the *t*'s had been crossed and the *i*'s dotted. But of course we are not all lawyers. Lawyers can find tiny holes and drive trucks through them. Before we know it, water could be making its way south of the border.

Let me give some mention of the other argument, the one that says we have goofed and we have allowed the trade agreements to be finalized without specifically exempting water in our rivers and lakes.

The argument could be made that water is a good under the free trade agreement and NAFTA. This is because both trade agreements state that a good is one that is understood to be a good in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Sure

enough, the GATT tariff schedule has a heading for water, which is very broad. The heading, numbered 22.01, is reserved for waters, including natural or artificial mineral waters and aerated waters, not containing sugar or any other sweetener matter for flavouring, plus ice or snow.

With that kind of a description, it would seem that natural water of all kinds, other than sea water, could be classified as a good. Since the trade agreement says we must allow all parties to the agreement the same rights in respect of trade in goods and services, we could be forced to give the United States and Mexico the same rights to our water resources that we now enjoy.

Fancy lawyers notwithstanding, I would like to think that the side agreement signed by all three governments carries a lot of weight. Even though the free trade agreement and NAFTA were never changed to include clarification about Canada's sovereignty over its water resource, a mistake we could rectify if we have a chance to open this agreement again to allow a new country in, I believe we still are protected and can never be forced to sell our water to our neighbours in the drier climates.

Of course our final safeguard is that we can always opt out of NAFTA or the free trade agreement. That is our bottom line: if we are not happy with what we are expected to deliver, we have the right to opt out. All we have to do is provide our neighbours with written notification six months in advance.

Let me get back to the bill under debate. I agree fully with its contents and intent. I do not think that any party in Canada, no matter what its political stripe, would support the exporting of water by interbasin transfer. Apart from a threat to our sovereignty, water exports also carry ecological risks. Interbasin water transfers can introduce parasites and other organisms to new environments, which could have a very negative effect. A good example of this is the introduction of zebra mussels into the Great Lakes by ocean-going vessels.

Other problems occur when the flow of fresh water is reduced in estuaries where sea water and river water mix. This upsets the saline balance of the water and has detrimental effects to the birds and fish that depend on that particular ecosystem. It is also reported that dams can cause a change in weather patterns and climate and can cause mercury contamination in the food chain.

I would agree with the hon. member for Kamloops that more research could be done into the effects of interbasin transfer. To that end, I would agree to sending Bill C–202 to committee for further study.

I support this bill, although I am not entirely sure that it is necessary or that we are not sufficiently protected already. However, if there is any concern at all that we are not, let us pass this bill. It can be added as a further safeguard we can take to protect our very valuable water supply.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order, the hon. for Kamloops, who has already spoken on the matter.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I have a very short point of order before my friend from Broadview—Greenwood participates in the debate.

In light of the suggestion by my honourable friend who has just spoken for the Reform Party, I wonder if I could ask you, Mr. Speaker, to ask the House whether there would be unanimous support to put a motion on the floor to send this matter to committee for further discussion and examination.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

An hon. member: No.

The Deputy Speaker: There is clearly not unanimous consent.

• (1825)

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to my very first speech in the House of Commons in 1988. This was the issue I talked about when I opposed the free trade agreement; that water was a part of the free trade agreement.

I congratulate the member for Kamloops for bringing this private member's bill forward. On this issue we should have a general debate. Basically our country is water blind when it comes to understanding the complexities and depth of what is going on around this issue.

When I left high school and went to study in Texas I kept in touch with a few of my friends over the years. When I was running in 1988 for the first time to become a member of Parliament I received a call from an old college classmate of mine who said in that free trade agreement there has to be something dealing with water.

I asked my good friend Bert Edmunston to tell me more. He said the chief free trade negotiator for President Ronald Reagan was a personal friend of his and spent his entire life, including his Ph.D. thesis, studying North American water management, Clayton Yeutter. He worked as a young political assistant for Congressman Jim Wright who spent most of his time studying North American water management.

My friend, even though he was in Houston, an American looking out for the United States, gave me a little friendly heads up that there has to be something in that agreement dealing with North American water management.

I then talked to a few other people, lawyers and experts, much more expert than I was on this issue. I was going to focus on the whole issue of unfettered foreign investment, something I was opposed to, chapter 14. However, when this water dimension came into the deal that got my interest even more.

Private Members' Business

I remember standing on the other side of the House saying to then Prime Minister Mulroney: "If water is not part of this free trade agreement and yet there is so much worry about it, why do you not ask your friend, President Reagan, for a one-page protocol letter signed by him and you stating water is not a part of this deal? That would put all Canadians across Canada at ease." As the member for Kamloops said, whatever we do in the House or in any provincial house on the whole issue of water is subservient to the free trade agreement.

I could not sell Prime Minister Mulroney on getting a one-page protocol letter exempting water and of course the deal went through.

However, that very first month I was elected I discovered as an MP I had access to the Library of Parliament and the researchers. I remember asking them to find out a little more about Clayton Yeutter's Ph.D. thesis. Apparently it was on the whole issue of water. Lo and behold, about four months later his Ph.D. transcript from the University of Nebraska, pulled off microfiche, landed on my desk. It was about 700 pages on how the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was to replumb the entire North American system. I remember after I received that Ph.D. thesis of Clayton Yeutter sending him letters complimenting him on this great thesis on how to replumb the North American water system. I asked him if he would comment as the chief free trade negotiator on whether it was in or out of the free trade agreement.

• (1830)

I never had an answer to the first letter, the second letter or the third letter. Therefore we must have our heads up on this issue.

I can remember the hon. member for Kamloops in opposition presenting thousands of petitions on the floor of the House, giving us a heads up on interbasin transfers. We have to deal with this issue.

To the member for Kamloops, his private member's bill today is in the right direction but it is too narrow. The member has said no interbasin transfers. As my colleague the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment knows, we already have an interbasin transfer from Lake Ontario into the St. Lawrence. That is one of the reasons we can maintain Montreal as a port. If we ever stopped that transfer from Lake Ontario, a joint decision made by the International Joint Commission, Montreal would not be a port.

This of course is something that was never discussed during the last referendum. Our friends who want to create their own country do not realize that Canada and the United States together, nation to nation, decide on the flow of water from Lake Ontario. We happily maintain Montreal as one of the great ports of the world. That in a manner of speaking is basin transfer.,Maybe

Private Members' Business

I am happy to participate in this debate today. It touches on an issue we will have to deal with in a comprehensive way over the next three to five years.

A chapter in one of the books by the former premier of Quebec, Robert Bourassa, dealt with the grand canal, the recycling of water from James Bay up over Mount Amos, down into the Georgian Bay system, through the French River, into all the Great Lakes and through Lake Michigan into the United States. This chapter had a contribution by Tom Kierans from Newfoundland who spent his entire life working for that great U.S. firm, Bechtel Group Inc. I am intrigued by this idea.

What I am trying to say is this is an issue we will have to face up to. Fifteen years from now our American friends will not be able to carry on without Canadian water. What will we do?

The member for Kamloops, who has been consistent on this issue and is pricking our conscience and our thought process here again tonight, is giving us a heads up on a very important issue. I hope through my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, and other colleagues we can take this issue on in a comprehensive way in the not too distant future.

Maybe, as the member said in his speech, there are many different factors in this equation, many intricacies related to our first peoples, our aboriginals, and our whole environmental system. There are the different types of waters, processes and

everything else that we have to deal with. I hope we can get into that in the not too distant future.

With respect to my colleagues from the Bloc, water is really not a provincial debate or issue. When we look at the way 65 per cent of our waters flow north into James Bay, when we see the way waters flow back and forth, if there was ever a reason for my colleagues across the floor to convert from Bloc Quebecois to Bloc canadien, it is around the whole issue of water.

Unless we have a strong national government managing our water resources for the interests of all Canadians, the entire community is in jeopardy. The best way to secure the precious resource of water for all Quebecers is by making sure the national Government of Canada is working on behalf of all Quebecers. Quebec alone would not have the same capacity or the same thrust.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. Pursuant to our Standing Orders, this item is dropped from the Order Paper.

[English]

It being 6.39 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 6.39 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons by the Queen’s Printer for Canada.

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