



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

**THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
SPEECH ON THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS OPPOSITION DAY MOTION:
QUEBEC'S TRADITIONAL DEMANDS
TUESDAY, MAY 11, 2010**

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to participate in this debate because I was one of the members who sat in this House at the time of the Meech Lake accord and the subsequent agreement. I know there was only one member of the Bloc who was also in this House. So, when we talk about this motion in relation to Quebec's position in Canada or outside Canada, we must also be familiar with the political situation at that time.

I wanted to participate as a Canadian citizen, as a Member of Parliament, and as a former minister of the Government of Canada. At the time, there was no Bloc Québécois. There were only Mr. Mulroney's Conservatives, the Liberals and some NDP members. At the time, Mr. Lucien Bouchard was one of the most influential ministers in Mr. Mulroney's cabinet. He was Mr. Mulroney's éminence grise on constitutional issues.

I was here in the House where the member from Montcalm currently is. As a Member of Parliament, I had the opportunity to hear Mr. Lucien Bouchard when he talked about Quebecers' aspirations and his vision of a united Canada. He was to me—I speak as a member—an individual who had a certain kind of presence, who wanted Quebec to enter a more welcoming Canada, but also a Canada focused on building a future together.

I recall one of my colleague's thoughts at the time. If Mr. Bouchard had continued a little longer, in fact, some of the members of the Liberal Party might have been convinced by his speech. Some things were accomplished. We can say that Mr. Bouchard changed the dynamics of the House by creating the Bloc Québécois with members of the Liberal and Conservative parties. He had a vision. Today, the same Mr. Lucien Bouchard, former minister of the Government of Canada, former Premier of Quebec, says that this whole experience is no longer required and that there already is a place for Quebec and Quebecers within Canadian federalism, a place that the rest of the world envies.

The Europeans are studying the Canadian experience and are wondering how to achieve the kind of federalism found here in Canada, how to protect the culture, language, tradition, history of various nations and still be part of a great nation, an ambitious nation, a progressive country, a country that has earned everyone's respect. It is the same question Mr. Bouchard was asking himself. With no malice, I wonder why today Mr. Bouchard is no longer part of this Bloc Québécois that is very different in its aspirations and ambitions from twenty years ago.

As an individual, I was experiencing a very strange situation at the time because there was talk of a Canada that was in danger.

What was my role as a citizen? At that time, as a citizen and a Member of Parliament, I agreed to improve the concept behind the Meech Lake accord.

Some people here, even Bloc members, will recall that the Charlottetown Accord had been negotiated by the present Quebec Premier and other people, including senators from Quebec, true Quebeckers, who always wanted the best for the people of their province and of Canada too. Together, they designed an accord to attract attention, to reinforce the conviction and the participation of all Canadians.

As a citizen, I felt compelled to promote Canada in the context of the Charlottetown Accord. That accord gave even more than the Meech Lake accord to Quebeckers.

During the referendum, I chaired 17 public conferences in my Toronto riding. Most voters were in favour of the Charlottetown Accord. They wanted to say yes to all Quebeckers and all Canadians who shared the vision of a strong and united Canada respecting all differences.

After that, I had the privilege to be a member of Mr. Martin's cabinet. We always talked about the role of Quebec within Canada. We discussed ways of moving forward, as a united Canada, to meet the challenges of Canadians, in Quebec as in all other provinces, from all cultures, traditions and nations. Quebeckers were included in our plan.

The other ministers and myself reviewed all previous demands from Quebec and the demands of that time. When we talk about immigration today, we see that there is a Canadian model and a Quebec model. I dare say that the Quebec model has a strong influence on Canadian immigration. That was an innovation of Canadian federalism. It is an innovation that Europeans want to emulate.

We also see Quebec as a leader in public health. That is thanks to the funds the federal government transfers to the provinces.

I want to finish in just a few moments and I want to do it in English. I only have a moment or two. It is important to keep in mind that when one talks about Quebec, the Québécois and a nation, there are many who speak another language in that province and who have just as much of a desire and ambition to be a part of a new Quebec and a new Canada. That has to be reflected in any motion.

This motion is very narrow. It restricts. It has no ambition. It has no future. It excludes rather than encompasses, includes and grows. I try very hard to speak in French if I can, but in English I must say that I cannot support this. It is not because I am speaking in English, but because there is not room for everyone in a Bloc Québécois view of the world and of Canada.