

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
10TH ASSEMBLY, 9TH SESSION**

TABLED DOCUMENT NO. 60-87(1)

TABLED ON MAY 8, 1987



Northwest
Territories Government Leader

TABLED DOCUMENT NO. 60-87(1)
TABLED ON

MAY 27 1987.

MAY 08 1987

The Right Honourable M. Brian Mulroney, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing to you at this time to express the grave concerns of my government with respect to some of the provisions included in the agreement you reached with the provinces at Meech Lake on April 30th.

My colleagues and I congratulate you on hammering out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation. However, in so doing you have created a significant barrier to the constitutional aspirations of Canadians living in the NWT and the Yukon.

It is clear that the main thrust of the agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. However, in so doing the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well.

From the perspective of my government and that of the Yukon, and of virtually all of the 75,000 people who live in the two northern territories, the otherwise laudable achievement of the accord is completely negated by an overriding sense of betrayal. A place was secured for Quebec but the price is permanent colonial status for other "distinct societies" within Canada.

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In view of the recent discussion in Canada on sovereignty in the Arctic and the strong position taken by your Government on that issue, I find it ironical that the Heech Lake Agreement seeks to entrench a status for Northern Canadians which is somewhat less than that enjoyed by Canadians living in the Provinces. Divided sovereignty is a feature of all federal systems. If Canada wishes to affirm that the Arctic is indeed a part of Canada, nothing could strengthen that case more emphatically than the fact of sovereign provincial governments delivering their programs to northern peoples in the same way the original ten provinces do for their own residents.

NWT and Yukon were not invited to participate in these deliberations which have resulted in a damaging blow to our constitutional aspirations and we would like to hope that the inclusion of s.42(1)(f) in the unanimity provisions was simply an oversight. To assure that the point of view of northerners is reflected in the upcoming discussion of the accord, we ask that the NWT and Yukon be invited to participate in the subsequent stages of the process.

Attached is a summary of the basic position of the NWT on this important matter.

I look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Yours Sincerely,



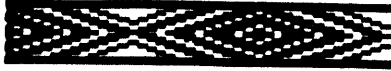
Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader

Attachment

Meech Lake Agreement

Position of the NWT

1. The Agreement was negotiated without any representation of the interests of the NWT and Yukon. While the Prime Minister is "technically" the representative of the people of the federal territories at such a conference, he clearly missed that "technical" nicety on this occasion and effectively betrayed his northern "wards."
2. The inclusion of s.42(1)(f) ("the creation of new Provinces") among the matters now requiring unanimity for constitutional change has made it even more difficult for Canadians in the NWT and Yukon to achieve their legitimate long term aspirations -- to become full partners in Confederation. We could have lived with the two-third's requirement but unanimity occurs so seldom in federations as complex as ours, that we fear this part of the accord will preclude provincehood for the NWT and Yukon virtually forever. No other province in Canada has had to face such difficulties. Alberta and Saskatchewan found it difficult enough dealing with the federal government alone. The irony of this is that in the process of bringing one "distinct society" into the club the Prime Minister and Premiers have permanently barred other "distinct societies" from full membership.
3. Because the NWT is composed of a majority of aboriginal people and because aboriginal people comprise a solid majority in our Legislative Assembly, there is a special sense of betrayal here with respect to this "historic accord." Where Canada's aboriginal people were flatly denied any such recognition exactly one month ago, the Prime Minister and the Premiers should understand if the people of the NWT do not rejoice with other Canadians over the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society within Canada."
4. Given that the Prime Minister either chooses to ignore or is unaware of the special interests of Canadians living in the NWT and Yukon, the government of the NWT takes the position that it must be represented at all future constitutional conferences. The injustice of totally excluding Canadians (even as few as 75,000) from Constitutional talks that will determine the future of Canada must be obvious to everyone. Any achievements in constitutional development that result from such conferences will inevitably be clouded by the fact of the effective disfranchisement of all northern Canadians.



Government Leader

MAY 26 1987

The Honourable Robert Bourassa
Premier of Quebec
Quebec City, Quebec

Dear Premier Bourassa:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. I deeply sympathize with the desire of the people of Quebec to have their special interests and uniqueness protected in the Canadian Constitution. The northern territories, too, are unique societies within Canada whose interests should not be ignored within the constitution. I am aware of your keen interest in and knowledge of the North and your long struggle to have the distinct nature of your society recognized within the Canadian Confederation. You surely understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see your province become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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This provision would make it even more difficult for Canadians in the NWT and Yukon to achieve their legitimate long term aspirations -- to become full partners in Confederation. We could have lived with the two-third's requirement but unanimity occurs so seldom in federations as complex as ours, that we fear this part of the accord will preclude provincehood for the NWT and Yukon forever. No other province in Canada has had to face such difficulties. Alberta and Saskatchewan found it difficult enough dealing with the federal government alone when they achieved provincehood in 1905.

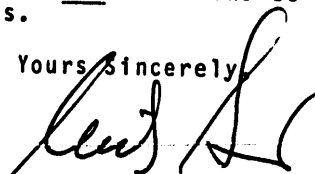
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But there is a second irony here as well that is felt by Northerners. In view of the recent discussions in Canada on sovereignty in the Arctic and the strong position taken by the Canadian Government on that issue it seems inconsistent that the Meech Lake Agreement would entrench a status for Northern Canadians which is somewhat less than that enjoyed by Canadians living in the Provinces. Divided sovereignty is a feature of all federal systems. If Canada wishes to affirm that the Arctic is indeed a part of Canada, nothing could strengthen that case more emphatically than the fact of sovereign provincial governments delivering their programs to northern peoples in the same way the original ten provinces do for their own residents.

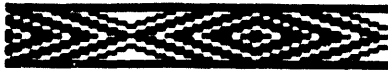
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We are asking for your support, and that of the Prime Minister and the other Premiers in securing a place at the table in the upcoming discussion of these matters. If these meetings are to lead to fundamental changes to Canada's Constitution, it seems only just that all Canadians be represented equally in that process.

Yours sincerely



Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Brian Peckford
Premier of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland

Dear Premier Peckford:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. As the Premier of the last province to enter the Canadian Confederation, you are aware of how difficult it is for newcomers to be recognized and heard. I have always been impressed by the forceful way in which you have brought the distinct voice of Newfoundland to the table in the Canadian political and constitutional forum. I am sure that you appreciate the need for smaller jurisdictions to be heard and listened to in these forums. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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As well, because the NWT is composed of a majority of aboriginal people and because aboriginal people comprise a solid majority in our Legislative Assembly, there is a special sense of betrayal here with respect to this "historic accord." Where Canada's aboriginal people were flatly denied any such recognition exactly one month ago, the Prime Minister and the Premiers should not be surprised if the Inuit, Dene, and Metis of the NWT do not rejoice as much as other Canadians over the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society within Canada." The irony they see here is that in the process of bringing one "distinct society" into the federation, the first ministers of Canada may have permanently barred other "distinct societies" from membership.

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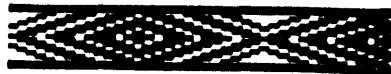
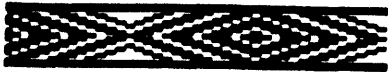
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We are asking for your support, and that of the Prime Minister and the other Premiers in securing a place at the table in the upcoming discussion of these matters. If these meetings are to lead to fundamental changes to Canada's Constitution, it seems only just that all Canadians be represented equally in that process.

Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable John Buchanan
Premier of Nova Scotia
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Premier Buchanan:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. The approach taken by your Government towards constitutional change has always struck me as being open and understanding of groups whose rights are not fully recognized in our Constitution. As a veteran participant in the Canadian political scene, I am sure you are aware of the distinctiveness of our developing northern society. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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The April 30th Agreement was negotiated without any representation of the NWT and Yukon. While the Prime Minister is "technically" the representative of the people of the federal territories at such a conference, his first priority quite properly must be to bring a genuinely national perspective to the deliberations. As such, the special interests of the NWT and Yukon are not given a fair hearing in matters which are of legitimate concern to them. It is the position of the Government of the NWT that the two territories must be represented at all future constitutional conferences. The injustice of totally excluding Canadians (even as few as 75,000) from Constitutional talks that will determine the future of Canada must be obvious to everyone. Any achievements in constitutional development that result from such conferences will inevitably be clouded by the fact of the effective disfranchisement of all northern Canadians.

We are asking for your support, and that of the Prime Minister and the other Premiers in securing a place at the table in the upcoming discussion of these matters. If these meetings are to lead to fundamental changes to Canada's Constitution, it seems only just that all Canadians be represented equally in that process.

Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Joseph Ghiz
Premier of Prince Edward Island
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Dear Premier Ghiz:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. I know from our conversations at previous meetings of First Ministers that you are sympathetic to the aspirations of northerners. Like Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories has a small population but we are no less distinctive and deserving of recognition than your own province. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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As well, because the NWT is composed of a majority of aboriginal people and because aboriginal people comprise a solid majority in our Legislative Assembly, there is a special sense of betrayal here with respect to this "historic accord." Where Canada's aboriginal people were flatly denied any such recognition exactly one month ago, the Prime Minister and the Premiers should not be surprised if the Inuit, Dene, and Metis of the NWT do not rejoice as much as other Canadians over the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society within Canada." The irony they see here is that in the process of bringing one "distinct society" into the federation, the first ministers of Canada may have permanently barred other "distinct societies" from membership.

But there is a second irony here as well that is felt by Northerners. In view of the recent discussions in Canada on sovereignty in the Arctic and the strong position taken by the Canadian Government on that issue it seems inconsistent that the Meech Lake Agreement would entrench a status for Northern Canadians which is somewhat less than that enjoyed by Canadians living in the Provinces. Divided sovereignty is a feature of all federal systems. If Canada wishes to affirm that the Arctic is indeed a part of Canada, nothing could strengthen that case more emphatically than the fact of sovereign provincial governments delivering their programs to northern peoples in the same way the original ten provinces do for their own residents.

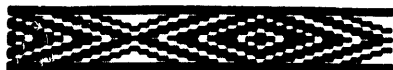
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Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Richard Hatfield
Premier of New Brunswick
Fredricton, N.B.

Dear Premier Hatfield:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. Your long-time support of northern aspirations is recognized and much appreciated by the people of the Northwest Territories. As you know, we have been working hard to develop responsible government that will encompass the many diverse cultures and languages of our Territory and will create a truly unique society within Canada. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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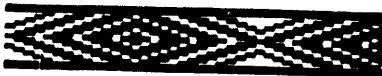
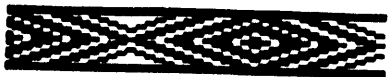
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Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable David Peterson
Premier of Ontario
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Premier Peterson:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. I know from our conversations at the First Ministers' Conference last November in Vancouver that the North holds considerable interest for you. This interest, I am sure, includes an awareness of the distinctiveness of our developing northern society. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

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Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Howard Pawley
Premier of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dear Premier Pawley:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. The approach taken by your Government towards constitutional change has always struck me as being open and understanding of groups whose rights are not fully recognized in our Constitution. I know that, through your close contacts with Mr. Penikett in the Yukon Territory, you are aware of the distinctiveness of our developing northern societies. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will effect our future constitutional development.

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As well, because the NWT is composed of a majority of aboriginal people and because aboriginal people comprise a solid majority in our Legislative Assembly, there is a special sense of betrayal here with respect to this "historic accord." Where Canada's aboriginal people were flatly denied any such recognition exactly one month ago, the Prime Minister and the Premiers should not be surprised if the Inuit, Dene, and Metis of the NWT do not rejoice as much as other Canadians over the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society within Canada." The irony they see here is that in the process of bringing one "distinct society" into the federation, the first ministers of Canada may have permanently barred other "distinct societies" from membership.

But there is a second irony here as well that is felt by Northerners. In view of the recent discussions in Canada on sovereignty in the Arctic and the strong position taken by the Canadian Government on that issue it seems inconsistent that the Meech Lake Agreement would entrench a status for Northern Canadians which is somewhat less than that enjoyed by Canadians living in the Provinces. Divided sovereignty is a feature of all federal systems. If Canada wishes to affirm that the Arctic is indeed a part of Canada, nothing could strengthen that case more emphatically than the fact of sovereign provincial governments delivering their programs to northern peoples in the same way the original ten provinces do for their own residents.

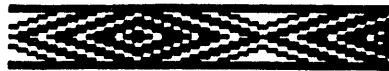
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We are asking for your support, and that of the Prime Minister and the other Premiers in securing a place at the table in the upcoming discussion of these matters. If these meetings are to lead to fundamental changes to Canada's Constitution, it seems only just that all Canadians be represented equally in that process.

Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Grant Devine
Premier of Saskatchewan
Regina, Saskatchewan

Dear Premier Devine:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. As leader of a province whose people had to fight for responsible government and a place in the Canadian federation, you will understand why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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As well, because the NWT is composed of a majority of aboriginal people and because aboriginal people comprise a solid majority in our Legislative Assembly, there is a special sense of betrayal here with respect to this "historic accord." Where Canada's aboriginal people were flatly denied any such recognition exactly one month ago, the Prime Minister and the Premiers should not be surprised if the Inuit, Dene, and Metis of the NWT do not rejoice as much as other Canadians over the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society within Canada." The irony they see here is that in the process of bringing one "distinct society" into the federation, the first ministers of Canada may have permanently barred other "distinct societies" from membership.

But there is a second irony here as well that is felt by Northerners. In view of the recent discussions in Canada on sovereignty in the Arctic and the strong position taken by the Canadian Government on that issue it seems inconsistent that the Meech Lake Agreement would entrench a status for Northern Canadians which is somewhat less than that enjoyed by Canadians living in the Provinces. Divided sovereignty is a feature of all federal systems. If Canada wishes to affirm that the Arctic is indeed a part of Canada, nothing could strengthen that case more emphatically than the fact of sovereign provincial governments delivering their programs to northern peoples in the same way the original ten provinces do for their own residents.

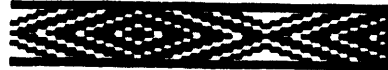
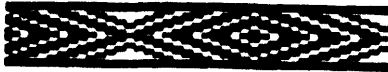
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We are asking for your support, and that of the Prime Minister and the other Premiers in securing a place at the table in the upcoming discussion of these matters. If these meetings are to lead to fundamental changes to Canada's Constitution, it seems only just that all Canadians be represented equally in that process.

Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Bill Vander Zalm
Premier of British Columbia
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Premier Vander Zalm:

I am writing to you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. Having seen our pavilion at Expo '86, you are aware, I am sure, of the distinctiveness of our developing northern society. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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We are asking for your support, and that of the Prime Minister and the other Premiers in securing a place at the table in the upcoming discussion of these matters. If these meetings are to lead to fundamental changes to Canada's Constitution, it seems only just that all Canadians be represented equally in that process.

Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed By
NICK G. SIBBESTON

Nick Sibbeston
Government Leader



Government Leader

MAY 21 1987

The Honourable Don Getty
Premier of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Premier Getty:

I am writing you to express some grave concerns that my government has regarding the Meech Lake agreement on constitutional change. Alberta has had close ties with the Northwest Territories over the years. Having had an opportunity to meet with you several times to discuss our mutual interests, I know that you are aware of the distinctiveness of our developing northern society. You will understand, therefore, why Northerners feel so strongly that they must be involved in any decision that will affect our future constitutional development.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to you and your colleagues on working out an agreement for a constitutional amendment that will see the Province of Quebec become, once again, a full participant in the federation.

It is clear that the main thrust of the Meech Lake agreement is to recognize the uniqueness of Quebec and to protect that uniqueness through requiring unanimity for constitutional amendments that might affect her rights. The Government of the NWT supports that principle and in fact can wholeheartedly endorse most of the provisions of the agreement. However, perhaps by an oversight the unanimity rule has been extended to the creation of new provinces as well as to matters that directly affect the distinct status of Quebec society.

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