

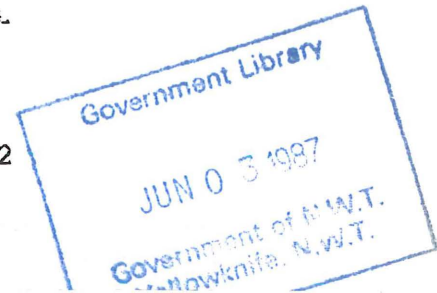
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PRIME MINISTER · PREMIER MINISTRE

Ottawa, K1A 0A2
June 1, 1987

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Dear Mr. Sibbeston:

Thank you for your letter of May 8, 1987, in which you expressed your views on the question of unanimous consent to constitutional amendments and the participation of the territories in federal-provincial discussions subsequent to the Meech Lake agreement.

With respect to the unanimity provision, I would point out that the Constitution Act, 1982 now requires unanimity for a number of matters of fundamental importance to the federation, including the monarchy, the composition of the Supreme Court and the amending formula itself. Furthermore, unanimity has not proved to be a road-block to progressive measures in the past. It was achieved in the unemployment insurance amendment of 1940, the old age pension amendment of 1951 and the supplementary benefits amendment of 1964. Indeed, if unanimous consent could be reached on the six difficult issues before First Ministers at Meech Lake, I believe that full agreement could be realized when the time is right for the territories to accede to provincial status.

In any event, a formal amendment to the amending formula now requires unanimous consent, so it would seem appropriate to require the same procedure

The Honourable Nick Sibbeston,
Leader of the Elected Executive,
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for the creation of a new province which would change the nature of the federation, and alter both the numerical operation of the amendment procedure and fiscal relations among governments. The creation of a new province would also provide it with an equal voice in subsequent changes to national institutions.

Turning to the question of territorial involvement in federal-provincial discussions pursuant to the Meech Lake agreement, you may be aware that the June 2 meeting is a private meeting of First Ministers. The practice has been to restrict the attendance at such meetings to the Prime Minister and the Premiers of the ten provinces. Moreover, I would point out that only Parliament and the legislative assemblies of the provinces exercise the necessary constitutional authority with regard to the amendment procedure under Part V of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The agreement holds the promise of a new federalism based on national reconciliation and mutual respect, and it reflects a delicate balance among various interests. This rediscovered harmony has been acknowledged by the three national political parties in their support of the agreement and I have no doubt that it also enjoys wide support among Canadians everywhere.

I would nonetheless assure you that the federal government recognizes the importance of the issues you raise and I will ensure that the viewpoints of the peoples of the territories are fully considered.

Thank you for your comments on these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

