



Following the 1995 Quebec secession referendum, Peter Goldring, became involved in public life for the first time with the Montreal-based Special Committee on Canadian Unity. His desire to work for a united Canada led him to seek public office in 1997 and has remained with him. With the 2012 election of yet another separatist government in Quebec, Mr. Goldring suggests it is time to revisit the question of Quebec's or indeed any provinces independence aspirations.

able Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes and establish relations abroad - in other words, sovereignty - and at the same time to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency; any change in political status resulting from these negotiations will only be implemented with popular approval through another referendum; on these terms, do you give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Quebec and Canada?"

IS THE CLARITY ACT NOT CLEAR?

In 1980, when the separatists held their first referendum on Quebec sovereignty, the question was so ambiguous that many people were uncertain exactly what they were being asked to vote for: "The Government of Quebec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations; this agreement would en-



Mr. Goldring joined with Stephane Dion (left) former Speaker Peter Milliken and Brian Lee Crowley of the MacDoinald-Laurier Institute at the Canadian War Museum, asking "Who Decides, Canada, Quebec and Secession."

While this introduced the idea of "sovereignty-association" to Canadian debates of the 1980s, the vote itself was sufficient to put the idea to rest for 15 years. With almost 4,500,000 registered voters, 59.56% voted "No" to the question, indicating their desire for Quebec to remain a part of Canada. The separatist government of Premier Rene Levesque accepted the will of the people and moved on - Levesque and his party were re-



elected in 1981 with an increased majority and the promise of good government with no referendum. But the issue remained part of separatist doctrine. In 1995 another separatist premier, Jacques Parizeau, felt the time was opportune to once again ask the people of Quebec if they wanted to become an independent nation. Once again the question, though perhaps clearer, far less wordy than in 1980, was also very ambiguous and disingenuous: "Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?."

The 1995 vote was much closer than in 1980. When the results were tallied on October 30, the result was 50.58% "No" to 49.42% "Yes."

I was in Quebec City for that historic 1995 vote. As a businessman who had done business in Quebec, I felt the need to see for myself what was happening in the province. While motor-homing in California in the summer of 1995, I noted that the polls were running 40-60 against separation, in line with

Rene Levesque's 1980's referendum results. However Parizeau's decision to enlist Bloc Quebecois leader Lucien Bouchard to head the "Yes" campaign changed the situation. Within two weeks of Bouchard's appointment the polls went to 50-50. I booked a week's holiday in Quebec City at the Château Frontenac to campaign for sanity, to campaign for Canadian unity. My wife Lorraine and I observed first-hand how close

we as a nation came to a break-up. I left Quebec City with a determination to somehow get involved, to do everything within my power to prevent the destruction of this country.

It was the beginning of a journey that would lead me to Parliament Hill and life as a Member of Parliament. After discussion with several people, I founded the Edmonton Chapter of

the Montreal-based Special Committee for Canadian Unity and was involved in a study group looking at Canadian constitutional documents. I felt I could make an important contribution by becoming politically involved for the first time in my life. After looking at the various options, I decided that the Reform Party offered the most intelligent views on the unity issue, and offered myself as a candidate in Edmonton East.



The Yes and No sides were only one percent apart in the 1995 Quebec Referendum, leading Parliament to pass the Clarity Act, setting out the steps necessary required if a province wishes to have a referendum for separation.



When I arrived on Parliament Hill, Reform Party Leader Preston Manning, who was the Party's Chief Critic on the unity issue and well aware of my work in that area, asked me to serve as Deputy Critic for Intergovernmental Affairs in 1997 and 1998.

In response to the near disaster of the 1995 Referendum, Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien recruited Quebec political scientist Stephane Dion to run in a by-election and appointed him to cabinet as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. In September 1996 Dion asked the Supreme Court of Canada for an opinion on the legal procedures that would allow Quebec to secede from Canada. In 1998 the Court released its judgment, indicating that Quebec (or any province) does not have the right to unilateral secession under Canadian (or international) law. In 1999 Dion then introduced the Clarity Act in the House of Commons, to spell out the conditions under which the Government of Canada would negotiate with any province that wished to leave confederation.

I supported the Clarity Act when it was introduced, though I had some questions as to whether the bill itself was clear enough. I did

suggest that it could incorporate a clear question for any future referendums: "Do you wish to become a citizen of an independent state with no special ties to Canada? Yes or No?"

Thirteen years after the Clarity Act became the law of the land, after a decade in which the separatists in Quebec were more or less quiet (with the federal Bloc Quebecois party being almost eliminated in the 2011 election), there is once more a separatist government in Quebec City. Premier Pauline Marois has promised she will hold another referendum, once she is assured of a victory for the separatist "Yes" side.



Peter came into politics to fight separatist's and to work for Canadian Unity. Daniel Turp was a Bloc Quebecois Separatist that Peter stood up to in Parliament and again this night.

It will be incumbent on our Conservative federal government to keep the separatists honest should there be another referendum. There is no doubt that the Clarity Act's requirements for a clear question on sovereignty and a clear majority make it more difficult for any province to leave Canada – which is as it should be. Every political party asks for a majority vote of at least 66% in order to effect even minor constitutional change, let alone to break up their party!

As someone who has worked in Quebec at

various times over the past 50 years, I feel I know how Quebecers feel about being part of Canada. If they are given an honest question on separation, with honest debate on the pros and cons of remaining Canadian, I am certain they will overwhelmingly choose to vote for Canada. Perhaps we should have one more referendum in Quebec on separation, one last one with a clear question, with an understanding that the results of the vote will settle the issue for good.

The forces of separation still hope to use duplicity and deception to convince Québécois they would be better off without the rest of Canada. They hope that yet another referen-

dum with a misleading question will mask reality. They want to divorce Canada, and force Canadians to agree to alimony and child support, hoping all along that Canada will not consult a lawyer first. The Clarity Act prevents that, and all Canadians, both inside and outside Quebec owe a debt of gratitude to Stephane Dion for this resolve in implementing this legislation. The separatists may whine, but they will be required to obey the law, if and when another referendum is held.

Update: On June 20, 2013, Stephane Dion debated former Bloc Quebecois Member of Parliament Daniel Turp at the Canadian War Museum, asking “Who Decides, Canada, Quebec and Secession.” The event was co-sponsored by the Special Committee for Canadian Unity, acting on a suggestion from Peter Goldring, and can be viewed at <http://cpac.ca/eng/videos>.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Q1: Do you think that governments should hold repeat referendums on separation or any issue if their side loses the first time?

Yes No

Q2: Do you think that if there should be a referendum question on independence, that it should be very clear: “Do you wish to become a citizen of an independent state with absolutely no ties to Canada?”

Yes No

Comments: _____

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