

only one room with adequate facilities for the committees, and this is Room 356-S.

I know that the chairman of the Committee on Internal Economy and Administration, Senator Graham, has already discussed this and that the situation is being reviewed, but I agree, Mr. Speaker, that you might confer with Senator Graham, and also with the Leader of the Government, if need be, to determine whether any improvement can be made.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, in reply to Senator Leblanc and to the other honourable senators interested in this matter, I would like to say that the Clerk of the Senate has kept me informed of the situation. The honourable senator has called on the Speaker to use his influence to correct the deficiencies which he mentioned.

The true powers of the Speaker in this regard should be analyzed. As you will see, they are very limited. I believe that the Leader of the Opposition was right to mention the Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration which has the power to act in this regard and to decide on the allocation of funds to correct the deplorable situation which has been described.

[English]

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, the Honourable Senator Leblanc has made a very persuasive case, and I know that the Chairman of the Internal Economy Committee and those who serve on that committee will undoubtedly give their usual fair consideration to any such request.

DOCUMENTS TABLED

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government) tabled:

Document entitled "The Role of the United Kingdom in the Amendment of the Canadian Constitution", dated March 1981, issued by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I suppose that what I have to say is not strictly relevant under Notices of Motions because I do not propose to give notice of a motion. However, I wish to take the opportunity to tell the house, as has been the custom recently, the present plans for our sittings so that honourable senators may make their plans accordingly.

It will be recalled that last week we decided to meet at the usual hours, namely, Tuesday evening, Wednesday afternoon and Thursday afternoon, holding ourselves ready to sit on Friday if the pace of the Constitution debate increases to the point at which extended sittings, in terms of both days and hours, appear to be necessary.

It seems to me that this situation has not arisen, and I have discussed the matter with the honourable Leader of the Oppo-

[Senator Flynn.]

sition accordingly. Therefore, it is suggested that we proceed next week as we have this week, and meet during our usual hours on Tuesday evening, Wednesday afternoon and Thursday afternoon, but holding ourselves ready to meet on Friday, should something take place that makes that appropriate. We would probably sit from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Friday, if such a sitting becomes necessary, although that is not settled.

• (1410)

I tell you this now, honourable senators, so that you can make your plans. At this time tomorrow, unless something dramatic occurs in the meantime, the motion I will put will be one to adjourn until Tuesday, March 31, at 8 o'clock in the evening.

Hon. W. M. Benidickson: Honourable senators, it has been my impression that the agenda for this week has gone rather well, with Tuesday having been utilized as much as possible for committee meetings. No comment was made with respect to Tuesday of next week. Is there a similar plan for next Tuesday? Do we still have a backlog of committee meetings?

Senator Frith: So far as I am aware, senator, there is no backlog of committee meetings, but, as a corollary to what I have already said, I presume that Tuesday will be available as usual for committee meetings.

QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE CONSTITUTION

MEETING OF PROVINCIAL PREMIERS—TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON AMENDING FORMULA

Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government, and, depending on his answer, I suppose the deputy leader might say that something dramatic has happened which has led to a decision not to sit at other than our usual hours.

It is reported that the representatives of the eight provincial governments opposing the constitutional resolution reached a tentative agreement on an amending formula at their meeting in Winnipeg yesterday. Is the government considering suspending the debate on the resolution in either the other place or this house in order to give the Prime Minister an opportunity of meeting with the provincial premiers to discuss the consensus that may have been arrived at?

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, there is no intention to suspend the debate.

Senator Flynn: Does the leader mean to say that, even if there is the possibility of reaching an understanding or agreement with all of the provincial governments, the federal government has decided that it will not change its stance?

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, the question, in its present form at least, is hypothetical. It presumes that some

sort of agreement has been achieved. The Leader of the Opposition is alluding to various news reports, but I must remind him that over the past 50 years or so a number of agreements have been reported which never came to fruition. For example, an agreement was reputed to have been achieved in Victoria in the spring of 1971, but that was a spring of doomed hopes, because the premiers ultimately agreed to disagree, one of the major provinces pulling out of the agreement just a few days after that conference had concluded. So, on the basis of the truncated news reports brought to this chamber by the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon, one cannot expect the government to be inspired to respond in a positive way.

• (1415)

Senator Flynn: The Leader of the Government speaks of several years of frustration and of the 1971 meeting at Victoria. However, it seems to me that, if the matter is so urgent, the government has missed many opportunities over the past ten years to take the action it is taking now. I suggest to the Leader of the Government that there be a month's delay to enable all parties concerned to come to a consensus. Such a delay would probably resolve a fairly difficult problem, and avoid division within this country.

Senator Perrault: To be fair to the Leader of the Opposition and to the premiers, if there is an official communication on the way to the Right Honourable the Prime Minister from the premiers, then perhaps we should await official receipt of that communication. Should this event transpire, Senator Flynn's question will be taken as notice.

Senator Flynn: Thank you. I prefer that answer.

ENERGY

NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM—ASSESSMENT BY CANADIAN GAS ASSOCIATION

Hon. Guy Charbonneau: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Minister of State for Economic Development. No doubt the minister is aware of the Canadian Gas Association assessment of the National Energy Program. The association has concluded that the program will hinder, rather than help, the natural gas industry to increase its share of the home heating market and, in some instances, will actually reduce the ability of that industry to retain the penetration it has already achieved in the commercial and industrial markets.

In view of the National Energy Program's aim to increase the use of gas as an energy source, would the minister advise us as to whether the government will take the assessment of the Canadian Gas Association into consideration and amend its energy program accordingly?

Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of State for Economic Development): Honourable senators, if Senator Charbonneau will read the National Energy Program carefully, he will note that the government intends to take a number of steps and, indeed,

provide significant funding to encourage the use of natural gas for domestic heating in Canada. The funds are also intended to support projects which provide for more penetration of the existing delivery systems and projects which provide for expansion of both main lines and lateral lines. We believe that this funding will be of major assistance in increasing the use of natural gas, of which we have a large, secure supply in Canada, and that it will help cut back on the use of oil in many places.

Senator Charbonneau: Honourable senators, if the minister feels that he is right in his reply, then I suggest that he write the Canadian Gas Association, because they do not seem to see the government program in the same way.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, it is often the case that different parties arrive at different conclusions after they have analyzed the same set of facts. If our conclusion is slightly different from the conclusion of the Association of Natural Gas Distributors and Producers, it will not be the first time it has happened. However, I am sure that my friend will agree that there is a very good foundation for our conclusion.

Senator Charbonneau: In other words, big brother knows best.

Senator Olson: No, that is not it.

Hon. Lowell Murray: Honourable senators, with regard to supply, the document to which Senator Charbonneau has referred makes the point that so long as the federal government continues to arrange for large imports of heavy fuel oil, and helps to create a surplus of heavy fuel oil in this country, there will be a disincentive to convert to natural gas. What is the position of the government with regard to that assertion?

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, the answer to that question is very straightforward. The National Energy Program provides for incentives through financial contributions to refineries to change their refining capacity so that it will result in a lower volume of that kind of residual oil being refined. This is probably a wise thing to do, whether or not greater volumes of lower-grade crude oil are coming into Canada, because even our own domestic supply projection would indicate that crude oil with a higher carbon-to-hydrogen ratio than formerly will probably be going into the refining capacity.

• (1420)

Senator Murray: I do not wish to enter into a prolonged argument with the minister about the merits of the case put forward by the Canadian Gas Association. It has made the point that the incentives referred to in the National Energy Program are not sufficiently specific to encourage the kind of conversion the government is talking about.

The exchange between the minister, Senator Charbonneau and myself, again raises the question of whether we will have an opportunity, in a committee of this house, to discuss the National Energy Program. I put a motion on the order paper some time ago in this regard, and I wonder if the government has yet decided whether to refer the National Energy Policy to a committee of this house so that we may have an opportunity