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## Quebecers demand recognition Mulroney's proposals scare off English Canadians

TORONTO (AP) — Prime Minister Brian Mulroney launched a new round in Canada's decade-long constitutional debate Tuesday with proposals to recognize Quebec as a distinct society, create an elected Senate and allow Indian self-government.

The Conservative prime minister presented a 59-page document to the House of Commons that also gives provinces a greater say in the national economy, but gives Ottawa more power to pull down intraprovincial trade barriers.

The proposals were primarily intended to derail Quebec's plan to call a referendum on sovereignty next year. They also contained other changes to the 1982 constitution intended to sweeten the package for English-speaking Canadians and native groups.

Quebec, which refused to sign the 1982 constitution, has long struggled to protect the French Canadian language and culture in a North American sea of English speakers. The Quebecers demand their distinctiveness be entrenched in the constitution and that they be provided with the tools to protect and promote the French way of life in Quebec.

But many English Canadians fear any special considerations given to Quebec would mean that all Canadian provinces would not be equal. Last year's Meech Lake accords, the most recent effort at reforming the constitution, fell short of the required ratification by all 10 provinces.

Mulroney said the purpose of the new constitutional overhaul is "to build a stronger, more prosperous Canada where all Canadians can feel at home."

"These changes add up to a renewal that is long overdue. And renewal is what Canadians everywhere seek for our country — not confrontation, not division, not rupture."

The government's proposals

were turned over to a joint committee of the House of Commons and Senate that will tour the country for the next five months gathering the public's ideas. The committee's report is due Feb. 28.

Opposition reaction to the proposals was guarded.

Liberal leader Jean Chretien welcomed the principles for reform outlined by Mulroney, but added, "Our first impression is that the proposals of the government need a great deal of work."

Audrey McLaughlin, head of the socialist New Democratic Party, said "there are a number of things we can look favorably upon in an initial reading of these proposals. But there are

**'These changes add up to a renewal that is long overdue. And renewal is what Canadians everywhere seek for our country...'**

— Brian Mulroney,  
Canadian Prime Minister

also elements that are potentially disturbing."

Among those elements were what she called the government's right-wing view of the country and "no mention of the need to entrench social rights" in the constitution.

Under the proposals, Quebec would be recognized as a distinct society because of its French-speaking majority, its unique culture and civil law.

The failure of the Meech Lake reform 15 months ago was viewed by many Quebecers as a rejection by English Canada

and led to an outburst of renewed Quebec nationalism.

After the failure of Meech Lake, Quebec's provincial government passed a law providing for a referendum on sovereignty not later than October 1992 unless the federal government came up with a new deal satisfactory to Quebec.

The Quebec provincial government of Robert Bourassa said it would not comment immediately on the proposals. But Lucien Bouchard, leader of the nationalist Bloc Quebecois, which bolted Mulroney's Progressive Conservative Party, called it "a very dangerous package for Quebec."

He said the distinct society element was "very much diluted" from last year's proposal.

The government has tried to convince English speakers that "distinct" does not mean a superior Quebec, and its new package includes self-government for Indians and Inuits, and an elected Senate — something sought by western Canada, which feels underrepresented in Parliament because of its small population.

The current Senate is appointed by the government and is weak. The new Senate would have to pass bills before they could become law, but would have limited veto powers over national issues such as defense and foreign affairs.

Mulroney called self-government for the Indians a matter of fairness, justice and equality of opportunity. Canada's population of 26 million includes about 500,000 Indians and Inuits.

He said native representation also should be guaranteed in a reformed Senate. Natives already claim an inherent right to self-determination based on centuries of occupying North America before the Europeans showed up.

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