

Saturday, January 19, 2008, p. A-10

## **Constitution? Who needs it when there's Facebook? Net provides social groupings: professor**

Kevin Dougherty

QUEBEC - The Facebook generation has no interest in enshrining Quebec's identity in the Canadian constitution or defining the federal spending power, says the dean of Osgoode Hall law school in Toronto.

Patrick Monahan was the first speaker yesterday at the Canadian Constitutional Affairs Conference and he said he can't see the reopening of the basic law defining Canadian federalism "anytime soon, notwithstanding Mr. Harper's musings."

The prime minister said in end-of-year interviews that the status of the Québécois nation, recognized in 2006 in a House of Commons motion, should be enshrined in the constitution.

But Monahan said he doesn't expect a new round of constitutional change "for another 15 to 20 years."

Monahan recalled the most recent round constitution building was largely driven by Quebec's desire to redefine the federation, to take account of profound changes in the province.

That process led to the 1982 constitution, which Quebec still refuses to sign, and two failed attempts, the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown accord, to bring Quebec into the constitution.

Monahan said that after Charlottetown was rejected he thought a new window would open but, more than 15 years later, he no longer sees that happening and points to the Internet.

Since 1992, the development of the Internet is comparable to the arrival of the telephone or the automobile, he said. "It changes the very nature of social interaction."

Young people in particular use the Internet for social groupings like Facebook, Myspace and consult Wikipedia. "Government has very little impact or relevance to this phenomenon."

**Daniel Turp**, the Parti Québécois MNA for the Plateau Mont-Royal's Mercier riding and a constitutional law teacher, disagreed with Monahan, saying young Quebecers are interested in their identity.

But, like Monahan, **Turp** does not see reform of Canada's constitution on the agenda.

Instead, he proposes Quebec adopt its own constitution within Canada, as British Columbia did in 1871 when it joined confederation.

Benoît Pelletier, Quebec's intergovernmental affairs minister and another constitutional professor, said he has no idea when the time will be ripe for constitutional change.

In the meantime, he proposes administrative arrangements, citing Ottawa's recognition in 2004 of asymmetric federalism in granting Quebec additional federal money for health care, no strings attached.

Similarly, the Harper government has given Quebec a seat with Canada's delegation at the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization, without changing the constitution, Pelletier said.