

I think it is a valuable experience for every one of us to know that it is through the pushing of good ideas that we can, in fact, persuade Parliament to change its processes.

There are some fundamental flaws in this legislation that are going to cause a great deal of difficulty. I would like to bring them to the attention of the House. We have four concerns from this side of the House with this piece of legislation.

First, there is the fact that the referendum is still only an option. The proposed legislation would still leave it up to the government to decide whether to hold a referendum at all. We believe that legitimacy in the constitutional package will come from a referendum, therefore a referendum must be held.

Second, there should be spending limits. We do not want to see an endless amount of money spent by the federal government or by other parties unknown to Canadian taxpayers. We do not want to see the participation of groups as we did during the last election when there were people campaigning for the pro-free trade vote. They were able to pile millions of dollars into the coffers of the governing party, causing them to win the election. We do not want that sort of feeling hanging over a referendum.

Third, we would like to see regional majorities. If people in one region of this country do not agree with the deal we do not want them to feel that they have been imposed upon by others. We want to make sure that each region is in agreement with the essential points in the package as they will affect each region differently. Those of us from the west are particularly sensitive to being cut off, to having a deal signed over us and leaving us in the same constitutionally weak position that we have been in since Confederation.

Last, who decides the question? We want a straightforward and open parliamentary process through which representatives from all parties have an opportunity to work on the question. The ownership of the question is with Parliament and not with the government. People must feel that everyone has contributed to it, that it has not been decided at a cabinet meeting which then comes in and uses its majority to push a question through. It has been an all-party meeting. Everybody would have had a

chance to look at it to make sure it is fair in both languages. It should be fair to all the different regions.

These are the central points that we want to put forward. We are hoping that the government understands the fundamental flaws in this legislation and that it is able to change them. This has been a very, very important debate. I only wish the government had not decided to close it down so quickly because Canadians do want to know about the new referendum.

• (1210 )

**Mr. John Brewin (Victoria):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the bill that is before the House. The bill will establish a procedure to hold a national referendum on a constitutional issue or amendment that may be worked out in the weeks or months ahead. I do so with full confidence that it is entirely appropriate for this Parliament to provide for legislation to consult the people of Canada on important constitutional changes because the Constitution of Canada is the property of the people of Canada and must ultimately be decided by and have its legitimacy based upon the consent of the people of Canada.

Our party has been at the forefront of calling for a new constitutional consultative process. We all saw the disaster of the process used in Meech Lake and before it in the 1981-82 round of constitutional changes. Back in 1981-82 the province of Quebec was ultimately left out of the national consensus, fostering further grievances which have led us to the situation we are in today where we have a whole range of truly important national issues besetting this country and we are required, because of the failure of governments back in 1981-82 to include Quebec, to deal with yet again the grievances of Quebec in respect of constitutional matters and because of other failures, including the failure of the Meech Lake process, the grievances of others across Canada and particularly the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Once again we are in a constitutional debate and discussion, a matter of great frustration to this Parliament and of course a great frustration to the Canadian people. The issue is now before us. We have to deal with it and it is appropriate that we should provide, as this bill does, a mechanism for consulting the Canadian people in the process.