

*Government Orders*

The Chair has asked that a revised version of the *Votes and Proceedings* be reprinted later today and distributed as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the printing and the distribution of the *Debates* are also delayed for the same reason.

We apologize for any inconvenience resulting from that situation. We now resume debate with the leader of the New Democratic Party.

[*English*]

**Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, I rise with pleasure to speak on third reading of Bill C-81. Certainly the previous two non-partisan speeches have been very interesting, as has the long series of non-partisan speeches on the Constitution.

It is very important to clarify what we are speaking about today. It is not whether Canada should have a referendum. It is not whether Canadians should have a voice. We are debating Bill C-81 which would set out the technical details of how that voice would be heard and how that voice would be interpreted.

I would like to deviate from the previous two speeches and speak about some of the substance of this bill. Throughout the constitutional process the New Democratic Party has supported a referendum. We continue to do so. What we do support is a fair referendum and a referendum where Canadian voices are truly heard.

On several occasions—first the Beaudoin-Dobbie report and second in the Beaudoin-Edwards report—we supported along with the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party that a consultative referendum should be held on constitutional matters. We stand by that position.

On second reading of Bill C-81 we voted in favour because in principle we wanted to vote for a referendum. It was our understanding that the government would be open to some substantive changes. As the government House leader pointed out, some changes were made, but in our view these changes were not the fundamental ones that would have made this a fair referendum.

Throughout this constitutional debate I am proud to say that the New Democratic Party has pushed for an open process and involvement of Canadians in a way that Canadians could have a really substantive role in constitutional debate.

We have argued that for the Constitution to succeed new approaches had to be taken. I proposed two years ago that a constituent assembly should be established to discuss constitutional matters. The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party rejected that suggestion. They said no, that the old ways would have to work and they were not prepared to look at new approaches.

I believe that was an error. The six constitutional conferences which were subsequently held at the encouragement of New Democrats proved when Canadians from all parts of this country came together and listened to each other that they can come up with sensible and reasonable solutions and that in fact the citizens of this country have much to offer, as they would have to offer in a fair referendum.

Throughout this discussion of a referendum I have raised, as has other member of my party, many questions because we believe that a referendum should have careful thought and consideration. We have never put it forward as a magical solution to the country's problems. I think that would be unrealistic. But we have accepted it because we feel that we can trust Canadians and that when Canadians speak and have the chance to do so fairly they will make reasonable decisions.

Our goal in expressing concerns and in raising suggestions has been to ensure that if there is a referendum it is to be a fair one. It must represent a genuine reflection of the people's will and at the end of the day withstand scrutiny as having been the result of a just process so that one cannot discredit the outcome. It is very important that we start at the beginning to ensure success, not to build in failure.

[*Translation*]

That is why my party supported this bill at second reading and supported the reports of the Beaudoin-Edwards and Beaudoin-Dobbie committees. We voted in favour of that bill at second reading because we thought the government had given its assurance that it would accept the recommendations and amendments made in committee.

Our constitutional critic, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, proposed several reasonable amendments in committee yet, all those amendments were defeated by the government without serious consideration.