

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to respond to the Prime Minister.

Like the Prime Minister, I am delighted that in this country we were able to obtain an agreement which, though not perfect, reflects a broad consensus among the ten first ministers of the provinces, the Government of Canada, the three main parties in this House, the people and leaders of the territories and also our aboriginal leaders.

As a Liberal, I am also very happy and proud that today we rise in the House to speak on the eve of a national referendum, because ever since the beginning of this debate, our party has insisted that the time has come for Canadians to have their say on the Canadian Constitution.

[*English*]

It will be the first time in the history of Canada when all Canadians on the same day will have a chance to express their views about the future of this country.

Of course, some people predicted that this would perhaps create some problems, but I knew that there was to be a referendum in some parts of Canada. We wanted to give the same privilege to all Canadians. We never budged from that. We stood by that and today I am very proud that we are giving the Canadian Constitution back to the people of Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien: As we said, any achievement is not who wins or who loses. It is not that. The federal government is not to win or to lose. Neither are the provincial governments to win or to lose. It is not the federal bureaucrats or provincial bureaucrats who will win or lose.

The objective was to make sure that the people of Canada were to win. They will tell us that on October 26.

[*Translation*]

It is a tremendous responsibility for all Canadians, because it will be the first time they will be able to say yes to Canada. It will be the first time that all Canadians will be able to express their views on the same day.

I am convinced that on that day Quebecers will say yes to Canada and that the rest of Canada will say yes to Quebecers.

[*English*]

We cannot fail and we will not fail. This country is too great to let it go down. I am confident that everybody in this nation will realize how important it is. On October 26 we will close that page. I would like today to thank some members of this House who have worked particularly hard on this file.

[*Translation*]

I would like to say a special word of thanks to my colleague, the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel, who did an outstanding job. I remember when he was on the Bélanger—Campeau commission and spent long hours in circumstances which, at times, were somewhat uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he defended the principles of federalism and Canadian values firmly and with honour. He was the one to sit down and draft a minority report, because the majority report contained things that were entirely unacceptable to people like us who believe in a strong and united Canada. He deserves our congratulations and respect.

• (1610)

On this side of the House, we also have the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

[*English*]

He has worked very hard in many committees. As one of our friends from Saskatchewan, he has always tried to ensure that he understood the people of Quebec and all the other people who speak French in this nation. He has applied his goodwill and good personality to make sure that we can find a solution. I would like to congratulate him too.

I would also like to congratulate the minister for constitutional affairs. He has worked very hard in the last 16 months. He has a lot of political scars. I also have a lot of them. Some we inflicted on each other. But I wish to congratulate him too. I will always remember the day in 1980 when he was with me in Shawinigan sharing the same platform. One week later, he came with me to share the platform in Rimouski where we were again talking about Canada. I would be pleased to share the platform with him again for the same cause. When it is over, we will fight again.