

Government Orders

Mr. Strahl Mr. Speaker, I know the minister mentioned that he did not listen to all the earlier speeches. Perhaps this is the part he forgot.

I did mention that Madam Justice Reed's decision demands a constitutional change. I did not argue with that either. However, we are talking about process. Constitutional change affects all provinces and all Canadians when it is the foundational document that guides us. We cannot say it only affects Prince Edward Island. The federal government is obligated for \$43 million and change a year or maybe more. It involves all Canadians.

It is why we have talked repeatedly of the need to approve constitutional change through a national binding referendum. I am not afraid of referendums. The government has talked several times about referendums and how it enjoyed the referendum process in P.E.I., how it was a positive process and how it involved people and how it has grown from 60 per cent support to 70 per cent support today. I applaud it and I applaud the people of Prince Edward Island.

I am saying not to be afraid of consulting the Canadian people on constitutional matters. When you ask for their opinion they will give it to you as they did in the Charlottetown accord. They will give it again. If it is properly presented with a bottom up consultative process they will approve the necessary changes. They would probably approve this one. It is the process and the process is wrong.

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, unlike most of the members opposite I have listened to today, both from the Bloc and from Reform, I would like to do something interesting and actually speak to the motion that is on the floor of this House.

Mr. McGuire: That is a good idea.

Mr. O'Brien: I do not want to talk about the Senate. It might be a neat idea if we actually spoke to what the minister has put before the House, the actual motion that is up for debate and not hear threats from members of the Bloc about a referendum that is looming in their province and their opinion or use this, as has been done by several members of the Reform Party, to argue about the Senate and the need for constant, daily referendums.

We had a very decisive referendum on October 25, 1993. The Canadian people spoke very clearly about the vision they have for this country. They spoke so clearly that the government has had to occupy some seats on the other side of the House. Let us not be under any illusion about the authority of this government and of its ability to act.

I congratulate the minister for his cautious review of this project. It was very thorough as he explained the entire Northumberland Strait bridge. I applaud and congratulate him for the restraint he has shown in the face of comments from members

opposite which have, quite frankly, been largely irrelevant and very much off the topic.

I stand in my place today as a member of Parliament from Ontario, from the riding of London—Middlesex, to speak in favour of the motion. It is disappointing for me to hear members opposite, particularly the member for Calgary West who spoke earlier today, expressing very parochial views of regional self-interest. This is not a time for the narrow, petty objections we have heard so much today. It is a time to build this nation, not to tear it down. This is not an issue of the west versus Prince Edward Island or Atlantic Canada. This is a major project of national significance. Certainly it is going to benefit the province of Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canada. If it benefits that part of Canada then we all benefit and I am proud to support it.

As Liberals we are the only truly national party in the House at this time. Perhaps that is the reason there is a national perspective from this side and a very regional and limited perspective from the other side, be it from Bloc members or from Reform members.

• (1315)

We have heard this silly argument that if we are prepared to reopen the Constitution in this matter then indeed we have to be ready to reopen the Constitution on any matter. To advance that in this House as a serious argument is highly ridiculous. This is a technical amendment to the Constitution. It was ordered by a judge in order to make the project possible. It is a far different situation from reopening the entire constitutional nightmare this country went through over the past several years.

Frankly, my colleagues on the opposite side are making irrelevant comments or certainly are groping to hang their own particular hobby horse on this motion.

I would like to speak to the motion as it is before us. The government has used a very open and transparent process to build this bridge. There have been massive public consultations. It has been one of the most democratic processes on a major decision to be made that this country has undergone, yet we are still hearing objections.

There is a partnership in place with the private sector to build this particular project. The development company assumes the majority of the financial risks. The whole of the Canadian public will benefit from this particular project. The SCDI will own and operate the bridge for some 35 years. It speaks very much to the idea of partnership our government put forward in its red book which was so heartily endorsed by the Canadian people.

The process has been very open. The theme is a partnership with the private sector. Obviously there are myriad economic benefits to be achieved by this project.