

The Address

constitutional talks involves only the elected politicians and the senators here in Ottawa.

I make the plea that the government reconsider the wisdom of a parliamentary committee to negotiate the next round of our constitutional future, and expand that committee to include not only elected people and politicians, but turn it into a fully fledged constituent assembly representing the people of this country.

A second thing that is really important is that we have a broad process of public hearings and public input as we determine where to go and the future of our country. It is important that this Parliament make a commitment to have public hearings for constitutional change whenever there is a proposal made to the people of this country. All too often in the past we have not had adequate public hearings or adequate input, or we have had a proposition made by the government to a parliamentary committee and the committee has said: "Well, you cannot really change the proposition. You can look at it and you can have public hearings, but you cannot change it". That is not good enough.

We need mandatory public hearings, where a parliamentary committee would hear from the Canadian people, listen to the Canadian people and change the proposition before it becomes part of the Constitution of Canada.

I would also would like to see the provinces and the two territories of this country do exactly the same thing.

During the Meech Lake Accord, only about half of the provinces had public hearings. The other half never had public hearings at all. Many of the provinces just relied on their premier or a vote in their assembly to say yes or no to the accord.

Even Premier Wells, who likes to talk about openness and democracy, in Newfoundland and Labrador did not have public hearings at all before he rescinded his support for the Meech Lake Accord. Again, is that listening to the people? That is not listening to the people. The provinces in a federation should have public hearings and public input so people at the provincial level can have a say in what their MLAs and their provincial representatives are saying in terms of constitutional change.

The third area we should look at in terms of public participation is whether or not we should have a national referendum for constitutional change. I think that requires further study. A referendum could be very divisive in this country. We have to look at who would write the question and questions of funding for the yes and no side in a national referendum.

Then we have the question of what is a majority. In a federal state is a simple majority of 50 per cent plus one good enough? I suggest it is not. Perhaps a majority in the four great regions of this country: the west, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada. Is that even good enough? Is it right and proper to have a national referendum on a question of minority rights where we are dealing with the aboriginal rights or the land rights of the aboriginal people of this country? I am really doubtful.

I caution the government that when it tables legislation on a referendum procedure later on, it had better make sure we know where we are going before we use this tool. A national referendum could override the rights of minorities, override the rights of regional minorities, be it western Canadians, Quebecers, Atlantic Canadians, or northerners. It could override the rights of groups such as aboriginal people or ethnic minorities or, indeed, linguistic minorities such as the anglophones of Quebec or the francophones outside of Quebec.

That is an area that needs further study before we commit ourselves to having a national referendum.

It is more important to make sure that the people have a say in building a national consensus on what the constitution should be. At a time when that consensus is being built, it should be the people of this country who determine whether or not we should be enshrining more aboriginal rights or stronger rights for minorities or a charter of social and economic rights. The people of this country must have a say at the developmental process, at the proposal level and not be handed a *fait accompli* by bureaucrats, as has happened so many times in the past.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced, after spending several weeks attending public hearings throughout Canada, in every Canadian province, in the Yukon, in Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, that most Canadians want a united and strong Canada. We must have a Canada for all Canadians. We must find a compromise for the