

[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs indicated that he intended to table a bill to allow a referendum to be held on the Constitution. Yesterday's announcement, however, does not answer any of the questions that necessarily arise.

My question for the Prime Minister is this: what guarantees can he give that this referendum will unite the country, will not be a source of division and will not be used to impose a solution on the country?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I cannot give any guarantees to anyone.

The Leader of the New Democratic Party is asking me for a personal guarantee or a guarantee on behalf of the government. I can give no such guarantee. Of course we—the House of Commons—would use a referendum or plebiscite to consult the general public and seek their views on an important question, and this would be in an attempt to unite the country, not to divide it.

I hope my hon. friend realizes that much as I would like to do so, I can give her no guarantees.

[English]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): What I am asking the Prime Minister is whether in this enabling legislation that is proposed by his minister it is the government's intention to ensure that this legislation will include specific details such as what the question would be, such as what would constitute a majority. Obviously, minority populations in this country, which would of course include Quebec and would include aboriginal people, would want to be assured that any referendum and any legislation proposing a referendum would ensure that there was a fair and equitable formula for the result of the referendum and for what would constitute a majority.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Well, I think the Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs indicated yesterday in his comments to the media that in regard to this proposed piece of legislation, he would introduce it pursuant to intensive consultations with the leaders of the major recognized parties in the House of

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Commons. Of course, that involves my distinguished friend. As soon as draft legislation is ready, I am sure he will be by to see the hon. member, review things with her, and get the benefit of her counsel.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I think the important issue here is that the legislation we put forward, for the government in order to be clear to the people, is that it is not just simply blank cheque legislation but that it includes specific details about a referendum including the question, including the timing, including spending limits, and including what constitutes a majority.

The Prime Minister has said that there will be consultation. I want to ask him what kind of consultation will there also be with provinces and territories and aboriginal people prior to such a piece of legislation being put before this House.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Parliament of Canada speaks for all of the people of Canada.

An hon. member: Try an election. You'll see.

Mr. Mulroney: Well, my friends from the Bloc Quebecois say "Let's call an election." Believe me, it is only charity that causes me not to call one because I am thinking of their pensions. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to put them out on a snow bank without their pensions.

• (1430)

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Mulroney: The last and final gift from a grateful nation when they leave will be an indexed pension.

I say to my hon. friend, the Parliament of Canada speaks for all the people of Canada. After the leaders have been consulted and after draft legislation has been introduced and debated, voted up or down in the House, then that is the position of the Parliament of Canada. Pursuant to that legislation a consultation will take place.

I do not believe in this case that we can undertake prior to consultation with other party leaders to consult with everybody else in town. We are here to take our responsibilities. We are elected to the Parliament of Canada. This Parliament speaks for all the people of Canada and when this Parliament makes up its mind, that is the decision that affects the people of Canada.