

The Constitution

a provincial alternative for the general amending formula, a referendum will be held. The people will be asked to decide. They will be called upon to choose between the provincial alternative and either the Victoria formula or another alternative approved by the Senate and House of Commons. Two years in which to reach agreement is a very reasonable and rational position. If agreement is not reached and the provinces and the federal government each present one position, the people of Canada, in the most democratic way possible, will decide what the general amending formula should be.

I want to speak for a moment about referenda. One of the big arguments is that referenda are divisive, that they result in province battling province, father battling son, neighbour battling neighbour.

Mr. King: Your Prime Minister said that.

Mr. Tobin: I agree that referenda are divisive. Of course they are. Elections are divisive. There was a referendum in Newfoundland 32 years ago. I cannot talk personally about it because I was not there. I am not proud to say that I am 26, but being 26 I am proud to say that I am the only Newfoundlander in this House of Commons who was born a Canadian. Having been born after 1949, I was born a Canadian.

Let me say what a referendum means to me. My father, mother, grandparents, older friends and many of my constituents have told me about the great battle of confederation, and a great battle it was. There was a lot of debate and the result was very close. Only 52 per cent of the people of Newfoundland voted for confederation in the referendum. For many of the older people, the scars have still not healed. However, for the vast majority of those in Newfoundland, the scars have healed.

What does a referendum mean to me and what can it mean to future generations of Canadians? I know from reading history that previous to making the final decision on where its future lay, my province went from democratic government to responsible government to government by commission. There was a turbulent history because we, as a country or dominion, had not decided where our future should lie.

There was a referendum held. It was divisive and it hurt. What did it accomplish? It gave to my generation, those born after the referendum and those being born today, for the first time in history, stability for our province. It gave us a sense that we had a future, that we belonged, that we are part of a greater whole, a sense that we live in a land of opportunities and that five years down the road there will not be an appointed or delegated governor or commissioner to run our land.

Although the referendum was divisive, to those of my generation it was a great gift, given to us by our forefathers, our parents, and our grandparents. When they gave us that gift of liberty and stability, for the first time they gave it with the sense that we had a responsibility to preserve and project that new but rich heritage. I suggest that the way I can do that best as a young Newfoundlander, as a Member of Parliament and as a Canadian, is by ensuring that this gift passed to me is

passed on to my children. I can do that best by supporting this resolution before the House, with a charter of rights and freedoms which provides for the individual in society—not for provincial premiers, not for political parties, not for government and not for any particular language or racial group—those basic freedoms, rights and privileges that allow the individual to pursue happiness and a rich life in a rich and generous country.

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● (1700)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF GOVERNOR OF FLORIDA

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. At this point I should like to call to the attention of the House the presence of a distinguished visitor in our gallery from the United States, the Honourable Robert Graham, Governor of Florida.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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RESOLUTION RESPECTING CONSTITUTION ACT, 1981

The House resumed debate on the motion of Mr. Chrétien, seconded by Mr. Roberts, for an address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada.

And on the amendment of Mr. Epp, seconded by Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton)—That the motion be amended in Schedule B of the proposed resolution by deleting Clause 46, and by making all necessary changes to the Schedule consequential thereto.

Mr. Howard Crosby (Halifax West): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to join in the debate on the constitutional resolution now before this House.

Let me begin my remarks on the constitutional proposal of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) by stating in very clear terms that I, like others, have come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. I say this unashamedly and in good conscience because I made my views known to him in a letter delivered the day before Parliament reconvened and before this constitutional resolution was introduced in the House on October 6, 1980. I said to the Prime Minister, and I repeat it now in this House, that the greatest impediment to constitution reform and change is the Prime Minister himself.

Reform and constitutional change is not only a matter of principle but has become and continues to be a matter of personalities, indeed, a conflict of personalities—conflict between the Prime Minister and the majority of provincial premiers, conflict between the Prime Minister and parliamentarians in the United Kingdom, conflict between the Prime Minister and the British High Commissioner and other