

The Constitution

It is important that all Canadians understand that. I use a personal experience: "You never win an argument but I have always been able to negotiate a good arrangement". I truly believe that is the basis of whatever we will be able to resolve.

I believe that the future of my country is not only in the hands of the joint committee, it is in the hands of the government, members of this House, the premiers in the legislatures and all Canadians. It is my sincere hope that all Canadians will take the time to understand and respect how the other citizens of our great country feel about themselves and about each other.

I look forward to standing in this House in the very near future to debate the legislation that will come forward on behalf of the government.

• (2120)

Mr. John E. Cole (York—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to speak tonight in the House of Commons on behalf of the York—Simcoe Constituents Committee for Constitution Change.

These people from the riding of York—Simcoe have dedicated virtually every Saturday morning since the end of September to study, to understand, to question, to challenge the proposals brought forward by the Prime Minister and the government on September 29 last.

These people began this with the dedication and the belief that their contribution to this country, a few hours a day spoiling virtually all their weekends for other activities, would make a difference. They were prepared to make these kinds of sacrifices. They believe very strongly in a united Canada.

Seventeen people started the end of September on this particular committee. They took the challenge to focus the debate that was out there in the country on the various proposals that the government had put forward. They took as part of their objective a need to foster a broad discussion among various groups in the community. In addition to those Saturday morning meetings they had five or six public meetings spread throughout the riding.

As part of their objective they were going to attempt to facilitate the achievement of consensus. They were going to try to get an understanding among people as it related to those particular proposals. They were going to make changes. They were going to propose changes and

refinements and alternatives to the proposals that had been presented.

Of course, they were going to concentrate their efforts on the three main areas, defining Canadian identity, change and more responsible government and economic reforms to encourage growth and prosperity, all very laudable objectives.

Who are these people in my riding? They are people from throughout the riding of York—Simcoe. They are from Bradford, Georgina, Tecumseh, Newmarket, just a wide selection of people. They are teachers, students, business people, municipal leaders and representatives from minority groups. There are even a couple of lawyers. They all get along. They had their differences, they argued and debated, and debated very strongly and were able to come up with proposals and recommendations on virtually every one of the proposals the government brought forward. I am very pleased to be able to present this document to the House tonight on behalf of these people.

I want to talk a little bit about some of their comments concerning the process and what they went through. I am going to quote a few things from their report. One of the things they said was that during the course of these hours of work—reading, researching—, preparing for the public forums, preparing to hear neighbours' opinions—these members became more—aware of what Canada means to all of us. "We came to appreciate the richness of our French—English heritage, the cultural diversity new arrivals contribute to our national fabric, the things we share in common as well as our differences". Most of all, this group of people in York—Simcoe believe that they are representative of the people from Halifax to Victoria, they are Canadians who are very proud to be Canadians and they want to make Canada work.

The committee felt that its mandate was to consider a Constitution which must serve Canada for many years to come and so requires a long-term view. They were not looking for quick fixes. The committee endorsed the recognition of the French speaking society of Quebec as distinct from the rest of Canada. They felt very strongly about the provision for self-government for our aboriginal peoples because they felt it was long overdue. These Canadians felt that this constitutional debate and the wrangling and everything else that has gone on, whether it be in the media or in this House even, has long focused