justices. This is, after all, the court that acts as the ultimate referee in disputes about the meaning of the Constitution, including federal-provincial disputes. It is also the court that rules on the constitutionality of federal and provincial laws.

Much has been heard, in the shallow criticism of this Accord, about the so-called limitations on federal spending powers. I think that is a good political catch phrase. It is portentous and empty, perfect for those who want news coverage and to give the illusion of thought. The truth is that there has never been any requirement for provinces to adhere to shared cost programs initiated by the federal Government in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. For the first time we have entrenchment of federal Government power to be involved in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. We are talking about areas of "exclusive provincial jurisdiction". Those three words seem to have escaped the critics of this part of the Accord.

All the Accord does is to recognize the integrity of provincial jurisdiction by guaranteeing reasonable compensation to provinces that prefer to meet national objectives in ways tailored to the particular needs of their people.

Peter Leslie, Director of the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations at Queen's University, pointed out to the committee that this arrangement can be of positive benefit to Canadians as taxpayers and users of programs. Provinces, he points out, will have the latitude to find innovative solutions to problems felt across the country. They will be encouraged to devise means that are the most cost effective or most efficient in pursuing national objectives.

Professor Gerald Beaudoin, of the University of Ottawa Law School, told us that terms employed in the section dealing with national shared cost programs were unlikely to give rise to great difficulty because the concepts such as "compatibility" and "initiative" were already known to the law.

• (1710)

He emphasized that, in any event, the section would only come into play in the limited category of future programs that have the following characteristics. First, it must be a national program; second, it must be a shared cost program; third, the program must have been established after the section has come into force; and finally, the program must be in an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. Only if all four of these conditions are satisfied will the section be triggered.

Accordingly, the proposed Section 106A will have no impact on established national shared cost programs, nor will the section affect non-shared cost programs such as the family allowance program. If the Government of Canada establishes a regional rather than a national program, the section would not come into play either. The section will not apply to programs established in areas of shared jurisdiction such as agriculture, immigration, and perhaps education.

I suggest that some of the Members opposite are trying to walk both sides of the fence. They are afraid of taking a clear stand on the principle of national reconciliation so they posture, adopting positions they know will not work, stands they know will have no chance of implementation. They propose an amendment to the spending powers provision so they will look good on the evening news, so they will look as if they knew a constitutional principle when they stumbled over one.

This kind of posturing is the cheapest attempt to gain notoriety without taking responsibility for action. The proponents of this amendment know, as we all do, that this proposal has already been discussed by the First Ministers at length and has been rejected. What can be easier than proposing an amendment you know will not, cannot, be accepted or implemented?

Members opposite evidently believe that making the amendment will delude the public into a belief that the members of the Liberal Party are in fact capable of independent thought. Well, they are not. They have lost the fire and the vision necessary to build a country. All they have left is the pathetic posturing of a marginal Party which does not count any more because it does not care anymore. It does not care about our history, our culture, or anything beyond short-term partisan advantage. While they whimper in the corner of our national life, the rest of us will go about the business of building a nation secure in its diversity.

This Accord is both an end and a beginning. It marks the end of a profound and dangerous alienation of Quebec, its culture and its people, from the rest of Canada. It is the beginning of the rest of our national journey into the twenty-first century. This Accord provides us with the basis for a continuing exploration of the territory of constitutional reform. With a strong and stable national base we can afford to listen, and we must now respond to the legitimate calls for equity and reform which in other times might have threatened us. It is an exciting time to be a Canadian and I will be proud to vote in favour of the Accord.

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate. While I was sitting here I was thinking of the long history that my family has had in constitutional matters. I was talking to an uncle of mine who used to teach history in Alberta who reminded me that a distant forefather of mine, Peter Mitchell, was a Premier of New Brunswick and actually sat at the constitution table and was one of the Fathers of Confederation 120 years ago. More recently, another relative, whom I also did not meet, was the Premier of Prince Edward Island earlier in this century and was also involved in constitutional matters. Only five short years ago I was the spokesman for our Party on constitutional matters. Many of my old wounds from that lengthy process are still healing.

Mr. Siddon: Were they Liberal or Conservative, Jim?