

Bloc Quebecois and a full-blown separatist movement that threatens to split our nation in two.

Today, what do we find? Yet another amendment to the Constitution, virtually free of national debate, unfettered by consultation with anyone with Prince Edward Island, slipped under the noses of parliamentarians as if the last decade simply disappeared. It appears that the government has learned nothing from the mistakes of the past.

Not only that, but the government conveniently ignores the voices of millions of other Canadians who have said through their votes and through other mechanisms that they are demanding other changes to the Constitution, changes that they say are at least as important, possibly more important, than these.

We have long advocated changes like a reformed Senate, entrenched property rights over which there is already a lot of general national agreement, positive changes such as a constitutional ceiling on government spending, something that would ensure that undisciplined politicians could never again spend our children's inheritance.

Last year the ousted Conservative Party barged ahead with a constitutional change for New Brunswick, just after that very change was rejected as part of the Charlottetown accord. Reform voted against it. Now we see this government forcing us to accept changes on behalf of Prince Edward Island. Reform once again rejects the process that ignores the cries of millions of other Canadians. This process should be a source of shame to this government.

This small amendment is no small matter. It deals with an enormous principle. It brings back memories of how our Constitution has been mishandled over the past 15 years. The Reform Party of Canada opposes this amendment on three firm grounds. The first I went over at some length earlier in my presentation. It is simply unwise to glibly approve a permanent, unqualified commitment to the bridge.

• (1300)

The second ground is that of consultation. To satisfy voters and preserve the relationships of the federation, the government should proceed in a way which allows input from every province and, through a referendum, every citizen.

The third principle is that of common sense. It says: "First things first. We ought not approach the House lightly on such weighty subjects. There are other important constitutional issues that could be and should be dealt with at the same time".

To sum up, the Reform Party would be very pleased if one day at the end of a proper consultative process the House dealt with a

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balanced package of positive, popular constitutional amendments that included perhaps a re-worded amendment for the benefit of Prince Edward Island.

Today the Canadian people expect to participate in the most important decision that the House can make. It is foolhardy to push their patience once again regarding constitutional change.

I would therefore ask the Prime Minister to reconsider the process by which this decision has been brought to the House. I urge all members to carefully distinguish expedient choices from choices that are motivated by a concern for the future, a search for wisdom and a love for your country.

My concerns and the concerns of each of our constituencies deserve more of a hearing than a few short speeches given to a basically empty House.

This is not mere housekeeping legislation we are considering. Any changes we make now become a permanent part of our Constitution. The obligations we shoulder today will weigh on our grandchildren a century from now. Surely this law should not be sandwiched between bills on excise taxes and port operations. This process trivializes the Constitution of Canada, the foundation of our nation.

**Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency):** Mr. Speaker, just a comment then a brief question to my hon. colleague opposite.

I did not hear the full extent of his remarks but I did pay particular attention to some of his wording. If I quote him incorrectly I hope that he will do the honourable thing and advise the House that I have done so.

The hon. member made reference to this creeping into the House of Commons and somehow the guillotine will come down fairly soon on a decision which is of gargantuan importance to Canada, to the world and to other planets if you will. I am paraphrasing of course, but I understand the hon. member is new to the House. However new to the House does not give you the right to flagrantly abuse—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** I know the minister is a very experienced parliamentarian and that he would want to direct all of his comments through the Chair.

**Mr. Dingwall:** Mr. Speaker, as I was making my point through you to the hon. member, it does not give him the right to abuse flagrantly and selectively some of the discussions which took place in this Chamber not more than a year ago. He suggested in his remarks that somehow this evil thing that we put before Parliament today was concocted, if you will, in the back rooms. It has been around for five full years.