

*Government Orders*

• (1240)

[English]

**Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal):** Mr. Speaker, we are embarking on a discussion of probably the most important piece of legislation that we have brought before this House, legislation that will enable us to express our point of view on the constitutional changes that we want to bring to our country, on helping us implement a new vision for Canada, whether we are living in Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia or anywhere else within our wonderful country.

In a sense I regret very much that we have cut short the debate on this vitally important piece of legislation. I would sincerely hope that it was undertaken by the government with the expectation that by sending this to legislative committee the very important changes needed to make this a fair, open and workable piece of legislation will be undertaken there.

What is important to know is that the Constitution belongs to all of the people, not just to the bureaucrats and the politicians. All Canadians should have a final say on any constitutional reform package. This is not a foreign idea. This is something that has been undertaken in other countries around the world. This is an undertaking that we have done here in Canada. We know from the experience that we have had in the referenda in the past that the key, the vital and the important undertaking must be that this referendum be fair and acceptable to not only my people who live in Quebec but to Canadians everywhere else.

I do not see that it is a very difficult circumstance to realize that as a wife, mother and daughter I have a love for all this part of my immediate family. It is not difficult to extend it to the larger family, but we share this love in different ways. Where I have a sense of participation and belonging as a Montrealer and as a Quebecer, I do as well concern myself with what is going on in my larger country.

All Canadians want to have the opportunity to say this is right for me, this is how I feel as a Canadian and I have a sense of pride and belonging. Lord only knows that the rest of the world sees this as the most marvellous country. They see us as a bunch of little quarrelling children who have to find out how we want to play the rules of the game.

That national referendum which the Leader of the Opposition suggested as far back as April of 1991—and this government has finally agreed, as has the opposition, that this is a good way to go—really has to be right. I lived through the referendum in Quebec and I will tell you that it can be very divisive. Because it can be divisive and because there is heated passion about this, whether you are living in Quebec or in British Columbia or in Newfoundland for that matter, we all have a point of view. In the end we can all see how wonderful this country is.

In order to have that national referendum we first have to have the question right. There are a number of things wrong with the way this bill has been presented. I would sincerely hope that we will in the end fix those problems because they are fixable. The fixables that need to be attended to are the spending limits. The spending limits must be addressed because you cannot have the perception that any part of this country bought the election. It cannot be seen as belonging to the rich and powerful. It cannot be seen as belonging to either business or labour or interest groups. It has to be perceived as belonging to everyone with equal access to the opportunity to present their point of view so that when the point of view is expressed no one can be seen or act as a poor loser.

Second, there should be something done about some form of umbrella committees. Having worked in Quebec I can tell you that was a very effective way to use our energies and express our point of view.

The question of regional majorities comes very much to the heart of the matter as to whether we will be perceived to have been fair. We have put together a workable referendum procedure and it is transparent. There are no regulations in this piece of legislation.

We have no idea how a majority is going to be defined. We know there is not a provision for a double majority in there. Not only does it have to be perceived as being fair and right and acceptable for all Canadians as individuals, but we also have to see it as fair in our collective sense, in the regions in which we live.

Where in the past there have been differences, no one wants anyone to be able to go back and say, "you did not listen to me. You were not fair".

We wanted to be fair. We want Quebec to know that we are welcome as Quebecers within Canada, and Canada has to know that Quebecers welcome the oppor-