

*Private Members' Business*

Freedoms. Seven proposals concern more specifically the recognition of our common citizenship and of this country's diversity. The government suggests amending the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to include property rights. It also proposes to restrict the legislative power of Parliament and the provincial legislatures to opt out of certain provisions of the charter.

The votes necessary to invoke the override clause would be changed from a simple majority to 60 per cent of the members of Parliament or the provincial legislature. However, the government realizes that all Canadians should have their say about any major changes being suggested. The government is taking steps to encourage the participation of the general public and, more specifically, contributions by Canadians to the work of the Special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada. To broaden the scope of the committee's work, the federal government has initiated a series of national conferences on four major components of its proposals for shaping Canada's future.

Each of the first four conferences is sponsored by an independent institution and focuses on a specific group of federal constitutional proposals. Three conferences have now been held, the third one in Montreal, on the weekend. Canadians have told all of us what they think about the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, the reform of institutions, especially the Senate, and last weekend, about the importance of economic union. Next weekend in Toronto, the Niagara Institute will sponsor a conference on Quebec as a distinct society and on the proposed Canada clause and the charter.

At the fifth conference, sponsored jointly by the institutes and the government and to be held in Vancouver, incidentally, the results obtained in the four previous conferences will be summarized and an effort will be made to arrive at a general consensus which will help the governments act. As I just said, this conference will be held in Vancouver.

By attending the conferences and taking part in the committee hearings, Canadians show what they mean by freedom of opinion, expression, assembly and association.

By encouraging the public to participate and citizens to contribute to the hearings of the joint committee, the

government is showing its deep attachment to the spirit and intent of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that almost all the aspects dealt with in our national dialogue—those in the government's proposals, those that will be discussed by the joint committee and those that will no doubt be presented by the public—have an impact on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Recognizing Quebec's distinct character, recognizing native peoples, affirming the Canadian identity, making political institutions more receptive, streamlining government operations and preparing for a more prosperous future all directly or indirectly affect our Constitution, our rights and freedoms and our future as Canadians.

The government presented 28 proposals to foster open, animated, informed and productive dialogue with reasonable Canadians all across the country. It openly invited everyone to take part in this great enterprise of establishing a new common goal, defining the Canada of the 21st century. It proposed a partnership in peace and prosperity, a partnership in which all citizens, regardless of their age or social status, can achieve their potential and benefit from a society that today is the envy of much of the world. But for all Canadians to have their say in guiding the future of the country, hon. members should respect the spirit and intent of the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In our debate this morning, Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt that members of all parties in this House respect the spirit and intent of the proposal submitted to us by the hon. member for Hamilton West. Nevertheless, before the House considers the proposal to amend the oath of allegiance found in the Constitution, I would like to ask the hon. member the following questions: Would he agree that in the spirit of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, all Canadians should have an opportunity to participate in constitutional renewal? Before the solemn oath that members of Parliament and senators must take is put in the Constitution, would he allow us to discuss this proposed amendment as part of the public debate now under way on constitutional renewal?

In that way, Mr. Speaker, to conclude, we would know for sure what reform and what changes our fellow citizens consider most appropriate.