

paper will give rise to others and that Canadians will ultimately develop a consensus on the amending process.

In conclusion, the federal government also supports the initiatives of the provinces in their efforts to engage in dialogue; we have that dimension of dialogue occurring as well. All initiatives to revitalize federalism in this country and to prepare us for the 21st century are encouraged and supported by the federal government.

I was approached the other day by the mayor of the city of London who wanted to send a message to the people across Canada about his city's desire to hold Canada together. We should encourage that, just as we encourage other forums of discussion across the country. Once we have heard as broad a spectrum of views as possible, the federal government then will bring forward—and not before—a comprehensive proposal for a new and stronger Canada.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the question that all Canadians must answer is very simple: Do we still have the will to live together as a country? I am convinced that Canadians will answer with a resounding “yes” and will be ready to modernize our federation, to make it more sensitive to economic, linguistic and cultural realities. This is why the federal government has taken thoughtful actions to continue the effort of our forebears and develop a national response to a national problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister a question. He may not be able to answer it. He is not directly implicated in the constitutional issue, but I want to ask it anyway because it may be useful to the process in this country.

As the minister knows, we have a group of deputy ministers now working on the division of powers and other substantive constitutional issues. That work is being done, by the way it is defined, behind closed doors in the bureaucracy.

I wonder if the minister can explain to this House what the terms of reference are for those deputy ministers, what they are working on, what is their agenda, when will that report be made public or will it be made public? I wonder if he can tell us more about that committee.

Supply

It may be useful. One thing we have learned from the whole process is that people want the whole constitutional process open and up front. They want to be involved. They want to know who is doing what. They do not want secret meetings and they do not want closed doors.

Perhaps the minister can help the process by telling us what he knows, if anything, about the deputy ministers, what they are doing, what their timetable is and so on.

Mr. Hockin: Mr. Speaker, it is with a note of sadness that I listen to the cast of the hon. member's question which was about secrecy rather than about the country.

The comment was made before this debate began that this country does not want mindless partisanship to dominate this issue. What we want is the love of country to dominate. If that is going to work, we should not talk about marginal issues of secrecy, especially when the process is as open as it is.

I will answer the hon. member's question. He asks about the deputy ministers, and I will answer it. By the way, I hope that when the NDP has its discussions on the Constitution it has its discussions in public. If it does not have them in public, if it can explain to the Canadian people why not, and there might be occasions when it wants to try out some ideas and do some research away from the public, I want the NDP to answer clearly for itself the same questions it asks the government and other parties.

Let me explain here the mandate of the committee of deputy ministers. After the failure of Meech Lake, the Prime Minister made the following observations: The country needed a new process for going about constitutional change; there were serious misunderstandings that Canadians needed to work out in a way so that they could feel they were contributing to solving these problems.

He also said that the federal government will be bringing forward its own proposals once all of these reports were received and once any provincial government if it so wishes had stated its position.

The government also has made it clear since then that it is monitoring not only the initiatives referred to above, but also the provincial commissions that have been established. The Prime Minister has also make it clear that the *status quo* is unacceptable and that we must all