

Government Orders

These provisions are fair and do not restrict the participation of Canadians nor the expression of their point of view. However, they also make it possible for Canadians to know who is providing financial backing and guarantee that no one will be able to influence secretly the results of the referendum through massive contributions and spending. They are important because they ensure the public has confidence in the results.

I would now like to comment on an aspect of the bill I think is admirable and extremely fair. Free broadcast time will be available to both sides, so they can send their message to the public, at no additional expense, during prime time. Three hours during prime time will be allocated equally among registered referendum committees on both sides.

A broadcast arbitrator, an impartial officer appointed under the Canada Elections Act, will allocate the time available to registered referendum committees on both sides which applied for registration before the 27th day before a polling day and indicated that they wished to be considered for the allocation of free broadcast time.

As a guide to the broadcast arbitrator, the bill provides certain criteria. The arbitrator shall consider whether the allocation of broadcast time would be equitable, having regard to the different views expressed on the referendum question. The arbitrator shall consider the public interest and fairness, in the manner broadcasting time is allocated to the referendum committees.

Furthermore, fairness is included among the factors the broadcasting arbitrator must consider when determining the broadcasting time to be allocated to the referendum committees.

Section 24(4)(b) of the bill provides that the arbitrator shall take into account the fact that any broadcasting time shall "—be made available fairly throughout prime time".

On the same topic, I think it is also important to note that the bill requires names of any person or group making referendum advertisements to be indicated when the messages are broadcast.

All the measures I mentioned as part of this bill are intended to reflect and, in fact, achieve fairness and thus allow Canadians who wish to take part in this referen-

dum, if it is ever held, to make a free and informed choice.

[*English*]

Bill C-81 is a law that will entitle the government to hold a referendum or plebiscite or a general consultation throughout Canada on the question of the renewal of the Constitution.

This bill is a straightforward bill. It is a bill that should enable the government to have consultation. It is a bill that is important in the process of constitutional renewal and I feel that it is important for the House, important for all members of Parliament to support it at this time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on the government's referendum bill this afternoon.

I think it was on May 13 last year that parliamentarians and all Canadians found out in the Speech from the Throne that we would have a referendum bill. I must tell you that it is unfortunate that a year went by, more precisely, a year and two days, before the House was even presented with that bill. Nevertheless, I must say that I intend to support it on second reading. Why? First of all, the hon. member for Beauséjour in a speech that he made in April 1991 was the first leader of a national party to call for a referendum to ratify a future constitutional agreement. I take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. member for Beauséjour, the Leader of the Official Opposition, on the initiative he took at that time.

[*English*]

I must say that more than one Canadian at the time was asking: "Why are you as a parliamentarian, why is your leader, and why is your party asking for this referendum?"

Our position remains the same. We are in 1992 and Canadians expect in this modern age to be consulted as to the ratification of a constitutional deal. It is the right thing to do. Our parliamentary system has evolved to such a stage that this is what is expected of all of us.

Of course some are going to ask: "Isn't that scary?" Well, probably the Magna Carta was scary at one time but we have evolved beyond that.