

*Government Orders*

debate for a long time. I also see here today the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, who is a vigorous supporter of the unity of our country.

It is a privilege to take part in this debate because today, we are talking about the future and the unity of our country. Unity, a prosperous economy, strong social programs and a healthy environment are the foundations of the kind of Canada we want to leave our children and grandchildren.

[English]

In thinking about this debate today I thought if I look back in five years or in ten years on this constitutional debate, when I sit down with my grandchildren and we discuss what happened on October 26, 1992, I want to be able to say that I was a positive participant in this debate, that my party showed wisdom in its deliberations, that all members of this House showed wisdom in our deliberations, and that we did what we considered was best for the nation, that we took the possibility of Canada's future and made that possibility a remarkable reality.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Ms. McLaughlin:** Canada deserves nothing less from those of us in this House. That we are here at all discussing agreements is a testament to those men and women around the constitutional table who persevered through very difficult times and a testament to the Canadian people who, with many other concerns, such as jobs and making ends meet, have never allowed the prevalent constitutional fatigue to represent a loss in the interest of our country, the future of our country, the possibility of our country and the dream of Canada. Today we are here to say that we are taking one further step in realizing that dream of Canada.

What has been achieved in this constitutional accord is a step toward the future. Constitutions are road maps. They are living documents. I know most Canadians would like to put the Constitution to sleep for a while, but constitutions are living documents. Constitutions will change as our society changes, as our culture changes as our country changes, and that is as it should be.

I am proud to say that the New Democratic Party and this caucus endorse the Charlottetown accord because we feel this is a step to move us toward the 21st century in a positive way, to unite our country in a way that is in

the interests of all regions and all peoples of this country.

Let me begin the discussion with two fundamental questions that my party and I asked: First, why do we have a Constitution and what should it accomplish?

In my view a Constitution must recognize historical truths. It must comprehend current realities and anticipate future possibilities. It should reflect both the diversity of a nation and the common values which unite it. Through this accord Canada would be taking a major step toward such a Constitution.

• (1640)

In this accord, as has been discussed by the other leaders, the distinctiveness of Quebec is recognized and embraced. The alienation of the less populous, less powerful regions is recognized.

The exclusion of the north, Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and the restrictions on its self-determination are responded to. The inclusion of the leaders in Yukon and the Northwest Territories will be a very important part of future constitutional discussions.

The profound historical grievances of aboriginal peoples are met with the recognition of the inherent right of self-government and a real place in Constitution making and nation building.

In addition, we have put in place a social covenant which articulates the fundamental social rights of Canadian citizenship and the values that we share. This should not be overlooked as a minor achievement. It is a very important part of this constitutional accord.

Does the accord fall short of perfection? Of course it does. Each one of us in this House, I am sure, has reservations about one aspect or another. There are things we would like to see stronger in some cases or perhaps weaker in other cases, and I will address some of those issues in a moment.

When one looks at the package as a whole, respecting that this is a negotiation, not a negotiation of one person looking in a mirror and talking to himself or herself but a negotiation of many peoples and diverse peoples—and I believe it must be viewed as a whole—one sees that we have achieved a remarkable compromise. Different, often competing interests within our nation, indeed different visions of our nation, have been somehow brought together, acknowledged and balanced.