

The Constitution

I think also, Madam Speaker, there is a prevailing mood for the concept of aboriginal participation in our constitutional reform and for the principles of aboriginal self-government. There are concerns about the means by which those principles will be established but most Canadians in Fredericton—York—Sunbury would encourage us to move forward expeditiously and constructively.

I have also detected support for measures to improve the objective and constructive operations of the House of Commons and to convey a stronger perception of responsible and accountable representation by members of Parliament. For my own part, I must say I have not felt inhibited in that regard in any way and personally subscribe to the principles of parliamentary democracy, to the party and to the caucus process where I feel that I have been able to advance the cause of my constituents to their benefit in a manner that reflects the great traditions of this Parliament and of this country.

• (2000)

There was a surprisingly large body of opinion which would have been quite content to see the Senate abolished. I would say, however, on balance—this one a much closer balance—there is support for the concept of a Senate which is elected for sure, which is effective and which has function and powers and one which is equitable in the context that most people do not really believe that we can achieve equality in the true sense of numbers except perhaps by regional representation which I and my constituents would also support.

The citizens of Fredericton—York—Sunbury are very significantly concerned about a strong economic union. As original founding partners in Confederation, we have been the beneficiaries of dividends of that Confederation for many years to the extent that at this point in our history the benefit of those dividends amounts in a fashion in our favour to almost \$8 billion per year throughout Atlantic Canada or almost \$3,600 per citizen. It is extremely important that that participation in the equalized financial life of our country be maintained.

There are two other significant items that citizens advanced which I would like to put on the record.

First is the thought that the concept of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms should be enhanced to include also

the sense of responsibility which we as Canadian citizens must share in the affairs of our country.

Second, the Constitution should reflect the concept of economic and financial integrity. By and large we should be a society that pays our way, that remains free of debt in the normal course of events and except for the cyclical flexibility which is required in any kind of economic planning, we should in effect practice that kind of economic integrity.

I know that I am running out of time but I would just like to finish very quickly by saying that it is with a great sense of pride and responsibility that I have worked with my constituents to understand these constitutional proposals. I believe that there is a majority consensus view among the citizens of Fredericton—York—Sunbury which by and large supports the initiatives put forward by the government and which certainly, above all else, supports the efforts being made by all members of this House and by all citizens of this country, I would hope, to achieve the unification of our nation.

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak this evening during this special debate on the Constitution and how this important issue is being viewed by my constituents in Stormont—Dundas.

Last month I conducted a series of constitutional forums in my riding in the communities of Iroquois, Finch and Cornwall. I wanted to discuss with my constituents in an entirely non-partisan and informal manner each of the 28 constitutional proposals that have been put forward by the federal government.

In devising these constitutional forums, I wanted to provide my constituents with an opportunity to have their views and opinions heard. I believe it is vital that Canadians have the opportunity to become a part of the constitutional reform process. It is equally important for their voices to be heard, as we know all too well the dangers involved in proceeding with constitutional reform without full and open public consultation and participation.

Aside from the three constitutional forums I held in my riding, I also placed a constitutional questionnaire in my last householder to my constituents. I believe it is incumbent on all members of Parliament to take an active role in finding out what their constituents think on