

*Government Orders**[English]*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** Is the hon. member retracting his statement? The hon. member said "bullshit" in the House and so did the hon. member for Richelieu. Would they both please retract that statement?

**Mr. Lapierre:** I was not talking about you at all.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Plamondon:** May I have the floor, Mr. Speaker? I believe you referred to my using unparliamentary language. It was not directed to the Chair, nor to the member speaking on the other side of the House but was part of a private discussion here on our benches. However, if the Chair was disturbed by what it heard, I shall of course withdraw immediately, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Lapierre:** Mr. Speaker, if it is the same word, I can withdraw the term I applied to the leader.

**Mr. Charles A. Langlois (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Science and Technology):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today to take a few minutes to speak to Bill C-81, an act to provide for referendums or consultation on the Constitution of Canada.

This bill is an historic event, because its purpose is to help us reach a national consensus on the constitutional question. Let us consider the objectives of this bill. Clearly it is important to have legislation that allows this consultation to be conducted as effectively as possible.

The referendum process must guarantee the validity of the results while minimizing obstacles to the electoral process. The bill meets that objective by drawing on legislation that has already stood the test of time, the Canada Elections Act, and by making an independent party, in this case the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, responsible for the referendum process.

The bill's other main objective, which will be the subject of my speech today, is the fairness of the referendum campaign. Clearly, if the campaign on the referendum question is not fair, it will deprive the response to this question of any legitimacy it might have and make this an exercise in futility. Fairness is essential

to the campaign and must be reflected in the enabling legislation.

Fairness is a concept that is sometimes difficult to define but is always easy to recognize.

To our mind, a fair process is one that is not biased and involves equal opportunity. Of course the key to fairness is playing by the rules.

- (1530)

Bill C-81 covers all these aspects, for instance in its provisions on registration. No person or group other than a registered referendum committee shall incur referendum expenses during a referendum period that in the aggregate exceed \$5,000.

This means that although all Canadians are urged to take part in the referendum and no one is obliged to do so through a co-ordinating committee any person who intends to spend more than \$5,000 must register with the Chief Electoral Officer. This process, described in section 13 of the bill, is very straightforward.

The bill also contains provisions to ensure the fairness of the actual registration process. The Chief Electoral Officer shall examine applications for registration in the order in which they are received. There are provisions to prevent any confusion arising from the name of a referendum committee, as a result of similarities between the names of various committees or between the name of a committee and a federal or provincial party.

The rules for registration reflect two essential aspects of the referendum process: the obligation to report and transparency. The obligation to report sums of money over and above a certain amount spent by these committees is reflected in the provisions concerning auditors, chief agents and the keeping of books and records. Reporting includes providing detailed records of expenses incurred, contributions received and any other type of expenses.

Transparency is guaranteed by provisions in the bill that require disclosure of any contribution over \$250 received from individuals, companies, unions, political parties or other groups.

Registered referendum committees and those who contribute to these committees will know in advance that contributions and expenses beyond a certain level will be made public.