

*Government Orders*

The government and all Canadians everywhere will eagerly await the recommendations of the committee, and wish them well in their deliberations across the nation because the government genuinely believes that their option is an important one in bringing about the final resolution of making Canada one Canada with all provinces, 10 out of 10, as a firm and inalienable part of our national identity once and for all.

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

**Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, for several months Canadians have watched as their political leaders have tried to deal with the difficult question of how to resolve the current impasse over constitutional change. Steps are now being taken by provincial governments and by the federal government which may lead to a solution.

[*Translation*]

First we had proposals from Premiers McKenna and Wells, followed by study groups set up by the Western Premiers, and finally, the tabling today of Premier McKenna's resolution in the House of Commons for consideration by a special committee.

[*English*]

We believe that constitutional change of a kind that is broadly acceptable to Canadians can only be achieved through dialogue aimed at reaching the widest possible consensus. We support efforts to resolve this situation through constructive dialogue. Therefore we will participate fully and actively in the committee that has been proposed.

We welcome the initiative of Premier McKenna of New Brunswick to advance the constitutional discussions. While it is not fully clear at this time whether or not Premier McKenna's proposal for a companion resolution will receive sufficient provincial as well as federal backing, I believe it is a constructive step.

At the same time I believe the proposed committee must also be a vehicle for studying other proposals for breaking the constitutional impasse. An example of what I mean is the proposal of Premier Wells of Newfoundland. For this reason I welcome yesterday's letter from the government House leader to our House leader in which he states:

The companion resolution sets out a number of proposed amendments to the Constitution of Canada. It can be amended, added to and/or subtracted from. In light of the above, I see no

constraint on any constitutional issue being raised and discussed by the Committee.

We expect this to be the guideline for the Conservative majority and all the members of this committee.

[*Translation*]

However, Mr. Speaker, I deplore the fact that the Prime Minister did not act sooner to seek a solution. As I said before, the fact that he is now intervening *in extremis* may have disastrous consequences for constitutional reform. The proposals drafted by the Premier of New Brunswick might provide the basis for an expanded accord. With Mr. McKenna, I believe that many Canadians are concerned about the lack of flexibility in the constitutional debate we have had so far. Mr. McKenna's proposal is basically very close to the amendments to the 1987 Constitutional Accord proposed by the Liberals in Parliament. I think it is unfortunate the government did not accept those amendments.

Mr. Speaker, I say this because at the time, we tabled several amendments, aimed at strengthening and improving the accord, which dealt with many of the issues raised by Premier McKenna, including protecting women's rights, protecting and expanding Native rights, the creation of new provinces and regional equality, while seeking broader public consultation in the constitutional reform process.

[*English*]

We know that Premier McKenna does not consider his companion resolution to be a seamless web, and in fact expects further proposals. One important area which many Canadians would like to see addressed, and which we raised in our amendments is the matter of Senate reform. In that connection we specifically called for an elected Senate.

I believe that if the Prime Minister had accepted our amendments in 1987, we might well not be facing the current constitutional impasse.

We agree with the motion to set up the special committee. However, in spite of the Prime Minister's speech today there are still issues connected with the motion on which further and more complete answers are likely to be sought by Canadians, issues about which Canadians have a right to receive clear explanations of the thinking and the intentions of the Prime Minister. Not least among them is the process by which any final companion resolution produced by the committee and