

Government Orders

• (1050)

In the interests of fairness, disclosure and openness, the bill provides that all committees intending to spend over \$5,000 be registered and the contributors and their contributions in amounts over \$250 be made public.

The bill also ensures free broadcasting time will be allocated equally to both sides of the referendum question. I pity the broadcasting referee in the Chief Electoral Office who is going to have to make those allocations because it is going to be very difficult. But this is a relatively simple thing compared to what would be required should anybody be insane enough to agree to umbrella committees.

There is nothing in the bill to in any way limit access of all sides to the purchase of broadcast time. As a result, I believe all sides of any question will be able to be put their views fairly to the Canadian public if a referendum was ever held.

I would like to draw attention to the other issue which was discussed in committee. Opposition members expressed concern about the issue of consultation with respect to any referendum question. Opposition parties wanted to ensure there was appropriate advance knowledge about the question. The government agreed with this request and accordingly the bill was amended to ensure leaders of the two recognized opposition parties in the House are provided with the proposed wording of the question and consulted on this wording at least three days before notice of the motion in the House is given. This will ensure a minimum of four days notice before debate begins.

I want to advise the House as well the government agreed to an amendment limiting contributions to referendum committees to sources of financing within the country. This change will alleviate the concern about contributions from non-Canadians including foreign governments, companies which do not conduct business in Canada, and trade unions which have no bargaining rights in Canada.

In another area the government agreed to an amendment which clarifies what is a referendum expense. The change will ensure the normal conduct and responsibilities of members of the Senate and the House of Commons will be specifically excluded from the definition of referendum expenses.

This recognizes the role of the MP must continue during any referendum.

The bill was also amended to respond to a suggestion that provision be made for the text of the question to be made available in aboriginal languages in appropriate locations at the discretion of the Chief Electoral Officer.

The bill as amended in committee addresses the issue for which it is designed. It enables the government to deal with any eventuality, but it should be repeated that no decision to hold a referendum has been made yet. Canada must have every appropriate means at its disposal to defend itself and promote unity.

This is a straightforward matter of prudent management.

Mr. Edmonston: By leadership.

Mr. Andre: I see the member for Chambly is again shouting from his seat. Frankly I do not think you promote the unity of this country by aligning yourself with the Bloc Quebecois.

We know why they want to destroy the country. We wonder why the members of the New Democratic Party would align themselves with them.

Mr. Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I think the government House leader knows better. We are not aligning ourselves with the Bloc Quebecois. We stated we are for a referendum. We do not agree with the legislation which is going to be in place for more than three years and can be used for any number of referendums in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. I think it is not a matter of privilege or a point of order. It is a matter of opinion.

Mr. Andre: We believe Canadians have learned a great deal about the constitutional challenges facing this country. The citizen's forum, the hearings of the Beaudoin-Dobbie committee, the conferences over the winter and the multilateral processes have yielded important and significant progress toward the resolution of the Canada round.

Perhaps most important of all Canadians are getting to know one another through this process and are coming to terms with Canada's vast and endearing diversity. We are all too familiar with those who want to destroy this country. They do not understand Canada's greatness and they do not want to understand. Even more, they do not want others to know the real Canada much less come to appreciate it.