

Government Orders

I remind you that Quebec has grown within the Canadian context. Is it logical, Mr. Speaker, for Quebecers to suddenly renounce this country because the current Prime Minister has failed in his Constitutional reform project?

[*English*]

Ours is a large and diverse country. It is understandable that, from time to time, some Canadians may question the values that unite us. That is why throughout our history it has been the duty of prime ministers to remind us of our shared values, to inspire us, and to motivate us to work together.

There is nothing wrong with Canadians and their values. What has been missing has been the right kind of national leadership right now, the right kind of national leadership based on building and finding consensus. Regrettably, this Prime Minister has too often failed to appreciate, to communicate, and to build on our shared national values. As a result, there is now division and disarray in all parts of our great country.

This Prime Minister has abandoned his duty to provide leadership built on consensus. When the all-party special committee, the Charest committee, tried to find a way out of last spring's constitutional impasse, the Prime Minister hesitated and then simply rejected its findings out of hand. He did not have a solution that reflected the concerns of Canadians. This Prime Minister was not interested in what Canadians thought. This Prime Minister rolled the dice with Canada's future. He even bragged about it. His way was secret deals, brinkmanship, and more brinkmanship, but certainly not leadership.

In short, this Prime Minister has failed to show any leadership in one of our country's most desperate hours of need and in the past months we have all been paying the price of his failure.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): He and his government have been dismantling the institutions that have made Canada among the greatest nations on earth. Our social safety net, our national transportation system, our shared values of compassion, sharing, tolerance and equality of opportunity—all are slipping away under this government.

This is a dramatic departure from the great prime ministers of our past. Those prime ministers all understood that Canada is more than the sum of its parts. It is more than a community of communities. A strong national government has always been necessary to meet the great challenges of the day and to work for the benefit of all the regions of the country. A strong national government is essential to meet the challenges now before us as a nation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Today, the Prime Minister has finally admitted that his past approach to constitutional reform was fundamentally flawed. By this motion, the Prime Minister has finally admitted that rolling the dice just does not work when the future of our country is at stake.

The Liberal Party of Canada is encouraged to see that the government is committing itself to listening to Canadians for once. The commission he announced that will travel the country to seek out Canadians' views on the state of the nation must, however, be more than simply a public relations exercise. Canadians who appear before the commission must be given ample opportunity to give full expression to their views. There should be no more insiders or outsiders. When the very fabric of the nation is on the line, the views of every Canadian do matter. Every Canadian has a right to be heard and, this time, all Canadians have to be insiders.

Meaningful constitutional reform is not accomplished behind closed doors with only a few select participants. If it is to be successful, reform must be built upon the shared values of all Canadians.

We do have some concerns about what we know, so far, about the government's proposal. One is a concern that the commission may hear only from well organized special interest associations or elite groups with special access. Who will speak for the ones who have no collective voice? Who will speak for the single parents, the poor, the sick, the workers whose jobs have moved to the United States or Mexico, and those Canadians in remote parts of this land?

Liberals are also concerned that once it has listened to Canadians, the commission should be able to work to present a comprehensive final report to Parliament. The commission should have enough time to do its deliberations properly and to prepare its report. That report