

*Oral Questions*

I am as conscious as anyone in this House, perhaps more conscious than others, of how much progress we have made in public opinion since the low point in November when party differences made Canadians begin to wonder if this would all come apart.

It would be the worst possible signal for a Parliament that has achieved so much agreement on so many important issues to appear unable to keep its deadline tomorrow. That would be a very, very major problem to the cause of Canada and to the interests of federalism.

My strong inclination would be, knowing the strain everyone is under, to urge the parties to continue in the spirit that has marked most of our discussions so far.

They should continue to try to find agreement and to meet our deadline. If we do not meet tomorrow's deadline, we are forced back on other deadlines that the country faces.

Canadians want us to get on with this matter. They know there is remarkable agreement and they want us to continue on that path of agreement. I believe that if we have the will in this House we can do that and we can do it tomorrow.

**Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the minister that I have been one of those people who has not advocated a delay of the report of this committee.

At the same time people want us to resolve the Constitution, do it expeditiously and deal with the very important matters of the economy as the minister has said as well as other issues.

Surely Canada is worth one week's time. I also want to be very clear that we are not talking about it because people are under stress. We are all under stress. We all agree with that. That is our job.

Does the minister not think, in the interests of trying to send a positive and, I hope, unanimous message to the country, that one week would not be worth considering?

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs):** There is no question I made the decision back in April that this country was worth everything I could give to it. I have been trying to proceed in that spirit since that time.

I am extremely worried about the signal a delay would send. I know, as the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party knows and the Liberal Party knows, there has been progress on aboriginal issues, on issues of institutional reform, on issues of powers for Quebec, potentially on issues of 121, the economic union.

There has been extraordinary progress made in this committee and the country is taking heart from it. Federalists in Quebec are taking heart from it. This is a fragile thing, a very fragile thing.

We saw that three or four months ago when this Parliament looked as if it was going to let the country down. This Parliament cannot let the country down again. It would seem to me that the best thing for us to do would be to realize that this country has to be the preoccupation of all of us. It is better for us all.

It sends a better signal to Canada and to our future if we respect the deadlines we have all known for months that we have had so that we can go on to meet the other deadlines that we all know we have to meet.

If we do that, we can then get on to deal with the other issues that all of us believe this country should be free to deal with.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon):** Mr. Speaker, the signal will be clear: the country comes before everything. It comes before the parties; it is Canada that counts and, in my opinion, Canada deserves an extra week. The minister does not seem to agree.

I have another question. Would the minister consider, with his caucus and with the Prime Minister, the fact that it is more important to take time to examine carefully everything that goes into the search for unanimity?

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I am always reasonable and flexible, but I believe there are certain realities here. There is right now, in Quebec and elsewhere, a momentum in favour of Canada that we do not want to jeopardize. It may be a difference of opinion, but I believe that the signal sent by Parliament if we cannot meet our own deadlines will be perceived as a bad signal that could discourage federalists in Quebec.