

Government Orders

I want to stress two points. First, I am personally not in favour of spending limits. I believe these are restrictions on freedom of speech. However the government has indicated it would have spending limits similar to that of a national election. That might be a compromise in the interests of equality and fairness so I am prepared to go along with it.

In my view this freedom on spending should be extended to broadcasting. If people want to buy broadcast time to air their views on an issue they should be able to do it.

I would like to read a quote of U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist who examined this issue and wrote in a judgment dated June 18, 1986:

To restrict political spending is much like allowing a speaker into a public hall to express his views while denying him an amplifying system.

In a modern democracy we must be able to spend money to do things like direct mailings and reach out to a lot of people. People lead very busy lives. It is not as it once was where people would have a lot of say without spending the money.

We must not muzzle the free voices of our nation. Canadians are mature enough to make their own judgments. Canadians can see through who is spending money and what they are saying. Canadians are mature people. They can make their own judgments. What we do need and where we should concentrate, if we are speaking about spending limits, is on disclosure. I am pleased to see the government has tough disclosure rules on this issue.

On the subject of freedom and involvement I would also like to quote John Stuart Mill:

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.

Once again that reinforces the notion of freedom of speech and public discussion.

I applaud our government for moving in this democratic direction, yet Canadian legislatures must make sure this bill is fair. We are doing that by having our disclosure rules and other rules.

This legislation puts in place a Canada round and we want to achieve success in a Canada round. This legislation does not mean that a referendum will be held but is enabling legislation so if at a certain time the govern-

ment decides to hold a referendum it can decide with consultation on a national question.

I will close by saying I endorse this legislation. I am prepared to make a compromise on the spending limits although I believe we should have increased disclosure rather than spending limits. People want to know where a message is coming from. We acknowledge that in order to get a message out or a point of view across, people or committees need to spend money and that is perfectly legitimate.

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill C-81, as it is the means by which Canadians will be consulted on the amendments to the Constitution of Canada.

On numerous occasions the Liberal Party has stressed the importance of having within the Canadian Constitution the ability and the right to go to the people. Logic dictates that if one province has the opportunity to express its views on its constitutional future, so should all other provinces.

I believe the pinnacle of our democratic system is the holding of a referendum. It is a process which gives Canadians the opportunity to express their views on their future. My colleagues and I are very pleased to see this process being utilized as it was proposed by the Leader of the Opposition in April 1991. The simple fact of the matter is that all Canadian citizens participating in a national referendum will be brought closer together.

I totally agree with the concept of a national referendum but Bill C-81 is flawed. This bill contains absolutely no provision for capping spending limits. These should apply to either side of the referendum question. The proposed bill should provide for a yes and no umbrella committee that would follow realistic spending limits. In other words, no corporation, no financially powerful individual, no group or political party can buy the Constitution of Canada because it is not for sale.

Furthermore the polls indicate that Canadians want a referendum. At this point in time, I believe that the Canadian people deserve a fair and honest question. This would enable each and every Canadian to express their views on this matter once and for all. The wording of the question is the key, the key to a new life for this magnificent country of ours.