

Government Orders

Mr. Ouellet: Although today, the Prime Minister has decided to let a group of citizens take over part of his responsibilities, I hope that following the work done by this group of eminent Canadians, the Prime Minister will be able to take a more enlightened approach to the kind of solutions he will put before Canadians and the provincial Premiers, in the interests of our country. Nevertheless, I applaud the action taken today. I have the greatest regard for Mr. Keith Spicer whom I have known for a long time, and I think he will do an excellent job as chairman of the forum. I wish him the best of luck. On behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, I want to congratulate those who have agreed to serve with Mr. Spicer on this forum, and I think that although what they do will not provide the final answer to Canadian problems, the forum will most certainly provide a vehicle for as many Canadians as possible to express their views in the interests of unity, which I think is essential for the many Quebecers who, I am convinced have not lost confidence in Canadian unity.

[English]

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to reiterate once again that my party and I are absolutely committed to doing what we can to leave to our children the country that we inherited.

That does not mean it is the same country and the same *status quo*. It means that we can find new ways to relate to one another, that we can find ways and probably better ways to recognize and respect one another.

I am proud to participate in that process. The initiative of the Prime Minister may not have been the one that I would have taken necessarily, and as I pointed out in my speech, it could have been done in some other ways. We have begun the dialogue. It is important now for all parliamentarians of goodwill who want to work for this country to support that process.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I rise to take part in the debate. May I say on behalf of my colleagues in the government how pleased I am at the support that has been expressed by the leaders of the other parties in the House for this initiative.

As we all know—no one knows it more dramatically than those of us who are in politics—we live in a cynical time. There have been some expressions of doubt about

how this commission will proceed, how this forum will affect debate. I think it should be judged by its work.

It has been established by this government in recognition of some profound changes in the attitudes of Canadians towards Canada, and based upon a determination to do what we can at this critical time in the country, to ensure not only that Canadians participate, because that is simply a question of process—an important question but a question of process—but also to ensure that as we move forward from what I believe is genuinely a turning point in the history of this country, we all of us have the benefit of the best and considered advice of people across the country whose concern about their country we should never underestimate.

When I go home to my constituency or when I speak to Canadians across the country, I am always encouraged by the evidence that I find of the degree to which men and women, who have other things to do, think about this country, value it, have dreams and aspirations as to what it can become.

The question was raised as to the public nature of this process. It will be very public, very open. That is its design. The Prime Minister spoke quite accurately when he said that our purpose here is to put in place a system. I think this is the first time something like this has ever been done by any country anywhere, a system that will encourage people everywhere in the country, communities across the land, to speak and work together about what we want to make of this nation.

I think it appropriate to make the case that in times of great trouble in the country, and obviously we are facing times of great trouble in this country, the easy thing is to retreat to nostalgia or to simply put one's head down and say, "There is nothing we can do about that". The other easy thing, of course, is to attack other Canadians. I remember the words of a distinguished former leader of my party, former Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Robert Stanfield, who observed once that nothing is easier in Canada than to unite most of Canada against some of Canada. That of course is easy. It has always been easy and it has never been worthy. That temptation may be there for some in the country. It is a temptation that I think the great majority of members of this Parliament, and certainly I believe the great majority of the citizens of my part of Canada, in western Canada, will want to turn aside.