

Government Orders

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I want to acknowledge that none of us have a monopoly on the concept of parliamentary reform. There are members here who have advocated many of these changes for years and I certainly want to pay tribute to them.

With respect to the member's question, yes, I would say that what we are trying to do is to find a happy balance. We are not talking about going from excessive party discipline to a House of 295 independents whose voting and policy record would be completely unpredictable.

We are trying to get a balance among three things. There is the mandate theory of representation, that when members stand up here they represent the mandate they got from their electors. There is the trusteeship theory of representation, that when members stand up here they represent their own views and their own judgment that they bring to bear on public issues. There is also the delegate theory that when members stand up here they also represent the interests and views of the people who sent them here.

I am suggesting we have to get a balance among those three. If push comes to shove, in my view the will of the constituents should prevail over my personal view or my party's view, and the standing orders of this House should facilitate that kind of a balance.

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester): Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting the member would indicate that the recall mechanism is the highest priority of the public today. Coming from the east coast I would have to disagree.

However, I would like for him to explain from where he gets his statistical data that he dare make a statement that it rates such a priority.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I might not have made myself as clear as I should have. I was not saying that recall was the most important thing in the minds of Canadian voters. I was saying that if asked about these direct democracy measures, referenda, citizens' initiative, freer votes and recall, at either public meetings or through surveys we have always found recall to be the highest priority of those four direct democracy measures.

I think in a way it is a reflection of the public's cynicism and mistrust of our institutions and an attempt to do something to correct it.

• (1735)

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington): Mr. Speaker, to the Leader of the Opposition or who would like to be, that would be fair to say would it not, I would like to ask the leader of the Reform Party about the referendum idea. I am quite concerned. On the surface it sounds very nice and appealing to some people. However, on examination it is far too simplistic.

This is part of my question, but I must share a little of this rationale.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind the hon. member and perhaps other members as well that I am reminded by our boss that questions are to go through the Chair rather than directly to the member.

Mrs. Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, in a referendum we have very solid views from Canadians from different parts of the country but they have had no opportunity to debate as we do here. I believe that part of our reason for being here is to have the opportunity for dialogue and to exchange views, to find out the rights and wrongs about things we would not have thought about perhaps if we were sitting in our living rooms at home reading a newspaper, watching the TV and getting all kinds of media reports.

There are good and bad sides to everything. Without that debate we would get a very cold, clinical, solid view in a referendum. I am quite concerned about that kind of push driving referendums. I would like to hear the opinion of the leader of the Reform Party on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I think the question is clear enough.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and for that brief promotion to Official Opposition leader.

I agree with the thinking behind the hon. member's question that unless there is an educational component and intelligent public debate that goes along with referenda that they are not as effective a mechanism for decision making as they should be.

What most countries that have extensive referendum legislation provide for such as Switzerland and others is for the establishment of educational committees or promotional committees to thoroughly advocate the various sides of the issue. Certainly that ought to be part of any national referendum bill so that the decision made by people is an intelligent decision made on options that are presented not just something based solely on what they get from the media.

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, I will take a little longer than 15 seconds. As a member who has actually voted against my party on three separate occasions—actually my party voted against me once—I have always considered my votes in this House as a free vote and you will notice where I am sitting.

I know that when I am elected that approximately 80 or 85 per cent of the people elect the party and not the individual member. Every time I stand up and try to express the view of my constituents that might be a little different from that of the party I always keep that in mind, knowing I represent a group that has elected me as a member of a party.