

Government Orders

That will be the process the committee in our riding will use. We will have the "Campaign for Canada" bus and we will have it operating seven days a week. As time goes on, if it has enough appeal, we may even attract or influence other colleagues to do the same thing if it works well for us. We have to get Canadians excited again. We have to get Canadians feeling good.

If there is one thing that I feel positive about in terms of this legislation, it is that this is not going to be a situation where the Conservative operation is running with a particular point of view and the Liberal operation with another.

There is one campaign once this enabling legislation is put through. It is a campaign for Canada. It is a campaign to blow out of this place anyone who wants to divide, split, or harm the economic fabric, the social fabric of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this referendum legislation. I hope this can be an experience where we galvanize as one force and have a profound effect on the spirit of all Canadians.

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise and speak this afternoon on this referendum legislation.

Like the rest of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party, I agree with the concept of consulting with the people. Therefore, we agree with the concept of a referendum in principle, if the concept of a referendum is to consult with the people, to hear their ideas, but also to consult with them so they may have the opportunity to influence the decision-making of their government. It is a method of ensuring that they are heard and heard clearly where they stand on constitutional issues.

The constitutional debates in this country in the last three years particularly have been such that they have driven people apart instead of pulling them together. They have created distrust in their governments and in their politicians instead of giving them more confidence that there is leadership. I am hoping that the concept of a referendum can be used in a manner that not only enhances the feeling for Canada but the feeling that Canadians have a stake and a say in their country.

Prior to being elected I was involved in senior management in a number of organizations. Often we had to make decisions that affected employees. We could go through a consultation process with the employees, but we found out very quickly that we had to be clear with them as to what was the process: were we there to hear their ideas but still make the decision, were we there to receive their direction and incorporate it into our decision, or were we there simply to try to convince them of our position? If we were not open and honest with our employees, the consultation process could backfire. It could do more harm than good, and we could end up with employees who were angry, disgruntled and felt that they had been manipulated.

There is great danger in this referendum bill that that is what will happen with the Canadian public. If the referendum goes forward and Canadians feel that it has not been fair, that it has not been open, that it has not been an honest process on which they were consulted or on which they were allowed to make a decision, they are going to be disillusioned and angry.

I am concerned that this referendum process has had a very rocky start when one judges it against the concept of fairness, honesty and openness. We have had a last minute introduction in the House and now an insistence by the government that it be pushed through without proper opportunity to debate or to take a look at it. It is only reluctantly that it has even agreed to allow it to go to committee next week.

We have had the government withholding legal opinions that it says is the basis for its spending decisions. There is no openness or a sharing of trying to involve all members of the House.

The House leader stood this afternoon to try to make sure he was not backed into a corner where the committee would be televised. Those are the various things that make Canadians wonder whether this referendum is in fact a method of true consultation or if it is just another attempt by this government and a cynical Prime Minister to manipulate the public.

There are three or four specific points about which my colleagues in the NDP have made motions and that must be changed in this legislation if it is to be viewed by the Canadian public as being an open, fair and honest process.