

*Constitutional Accord*

is so vague that no one really knows how to interpret it. No one knows according to that clause who is to set the national objectives.

One would hope that it would be the national Government, but it is not spelled out in that clause. It does not state clearly and unequivocally who is to set the national objectives. I would not want the Supreme Court of Canada to be faced decades from now with making a decision on this particular point.

Furthermore, I am not definite, but I have spoken to many people about the process of transferring powers which may make it impossible for the federal Government to stop payments to provinces which may decide in the future to introduce extra billing. Presently, the Government can stop payments, as we saw in a press release last week which stated that Ottawa refunded several million dollars to New Brunswick since it stopped extra billing. The federal Government must protect and retain that kind of power.

I do not know what will happen to universality as a result of this particular clause, but I know that it is a clause that is vague and unsatisfactory. It puts to shame those in the House who have fought hard for universal programs, national programs and social security of the same quality and strength from coast to coast.

I want to conclude by putting forward a subamendment as a result of the very unsatisfactory answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister in reply to questions posed by the Hon. Member for St. Henri—Westmount when he asked what will happen in provinces where the provincial legislature will not hold public hearings in that province.

The Deputy Prime Minister sloughed the question off as a kind of superficial question that has no relevance to the debate today. I submit that the question is very relevant and important, in light of the fact that only last week Premier Getty of Alberta was reported to have said that there will be no public hearings in Alberta. I hope he will reverse his decision and hold public hearings, but in case some provinces do not do so in their respective areas, it seems that this committee or a subcommittee of the joint committee ought to hold public hearings in that particular province.

Therefore, I move the following subamendment:

That in provinces where the Legislature does not hold public hearings or has not officially committed itself to hold public hearings, a sub-committee of the Joint Committee be given powers to travel and hold public hearings in such provinces.

There may be situations in which a province will not be able to hold hearings in the summer. Therefore, the subamendment is written in such a way as to take into account those provinces that will not hold public hearings in the summer months, but will make a public commitment to Canadians that their legislatures will hold public hearings. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne):** The Chair will reserve for a few minutes on the admissibility of the amendment. In the meantime, we will proceed with the question and comment period.

**Mr. Johnston:** Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) for being able to raise so many important questions in such a short period of time.

At the very outset he questioned the motion on the basis of the time frame within which the public hearings are to be held and report back, as I recall, by September 14. He, like many of us, feels that that time frame is inadequate.

Having had considerable experience in committee work over the years, could he suggest what might be an adequate time frame, so that we do not simply leave it open-ended, but perhaps discuss among ourselves what time frame would be appropriate? Should we wait until we see the representations that people wish to make on the basis of the fundamental principle that as many Canadians as possible should be heard?

I am glad the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) is here to witness the concern of parliamentarians that this is too short a time frame. Again, I would urge the Deputy Prime Minister to support this subamendment which will ensure that people from coast to coast will have access to that committee, without having to travel across the country to Ottawa at their own expense.

**Mr. Caccia:** Madam Speaker, I can understand the necessity and the desire of the Government to set a time frame. However, we should consider the length of time it takes us to examine other pieces of legislation. For example, we have been studying pornography for six months and we do not know how much longer we will be studying it. The House knows how long we could be studying capital punishment.

In light of that, on a fundamental piece of legislation like this, there ought to be an opportunity for ample hearings without such a limited time frame. I do not know whether a time frame should be set in this resolution, although I can understand the anxiety on the part of the Government to set a time frame. It has to be one that is practical. It seems to me, however, that as a minimum, there should be an examination of the Constitution, which is to last in its new proposed form—and I really hope there will be substantial fundamental amendments to the way it stands now—in order to give the public the time to absorb what is being proposed. We ourselves, who ought to understand it quickly and readily, have enormous difficulties. It should be given a time frame of six or even eight months and if, in the judgment of the members of the committee, that period of time turns out to be not adequate, then the time could be extended according to the best judgment of the members of that committee.

• (1350)

Since government Members would have the majority on the committee, they would be quite able to determine when that process ought to come to an end. It seems to me that it is not realistic and that it is—I hate to use such a heavy word but I cannot find a better one—undemocratic not to allow this examination. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister has his