

the interests of giving other hon. members the opportunity to speak in order to express their views, I will just present a brief summary.

I have said in the past that I am favourably disposed toward the government's package and have in the past supported and still support a number of principles. My reasons are given in the text which is available to anyone who wishes to read it. I will file my speech with each of the committee members when the committee is selected.

First, I support unilateral patriation by Parliament with the unanimity formula, as per the motion I moved on May 9 and which was passed unanimously by the House. I also supported the motion of last night for unilateral patriation, with the Vancouver consensus. The constitution must be patriated quickly so that changes can be made sequentially to reduce increasing tensions in our nation.

Second, I support the process of finding a less restricting formula than the unanimity formula, but I reject the government's process as needing substantive revision, and indeed, revisions are mandatory.

Third, I support a people's referendum as a process for constitutional change. The people should be able to initiate such a referendum rather than the federal government only and a majority in each province should be required for passage, not only the majority in each of the four regions.

Fourth, I strongly support maintaining the equality of provincial status and the protection of existing provincial powers and rights with reduction in such powers being by consent only, particularly in regard to provincial lands, resources and boundary rights. In my main speech I have proposed an amendment to that effect.

Fifth, I support equalization and the entrenchment of a charter of rights and freedoms, but the resolution needs redrafting to provide clarity and interpretation of these matters. I would have preferred that such be done in Canada after patriation.

Sixth, I do not want to kill the government's constitutional package and, therefore, kill patriation. I want to improve it and effect patriation. Therefore, I support sending it to committee, but not under the process of closure. This is an unneeded action on behalf of the government. I am saddened by it. It is an unfortunate action after only two and a half weeks of sitting in this House to debate one of the most important issues to come before this House since 1867.

This is an action to limit the privileges of members of this House to speak on this vital issue. I know there has been some obstruction. There always is on both sides. However, another month of debate would not have been an inconvenience to this House or, indeed, to Canada. I must utterly reject the closure action by the government.

Thirteen years ago almost to the month, when I joined the Conservative party of Canada, I asked, what does this party stand for? Is it just a collection of individuals with a common purpose and a common view, or is it more? Has it got a creed and an unshakeable philosophical foundation, or is it just a

garment which we can take off and put on as the opportunity arises?

I searched and there were few answers to be found. I had resolved that this conservatism is an integrity of spirit and an orderly expansion of conscience that is genuinely important and not of the fleeting variety. It is on the basis of that individual integrity or spirit of conscience that I shall vote on this measure from here on, as it is a measure of profound gravity. I trust that each member in this House will do the same. I respect every member's right to do so on this fundamental issue. This is an issue for statesmen and not for partisan politics and partisan politicians.

● (1850)

It has taken me five minutes, effectively, to file my speech, or say that I am going to file it with the committee members, and present my summary. At this rate I believe many members will have—and they should have—the opportunity to speak on this resolution before it is sent to committee later on tonight.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Smith (Don Valley East): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in this historic debate, and I am proud, as are all hon. members who have spoken, to play a small part in it.

At the outset of this debate I thought perhaps I might be hearing from a few constituents as to why Parliament would be spending its time on a constitution when there are postal interruptions, clerks' strikes and obvious economic problems in this country, but I think that the constituents of my riding have shown great maturity. I think we have to recognize that something which may be important is not on any given day or week or month necessarily urgent, but the fact that it may not be urgent on one day does not mean it is not of vital importance to this country. I think that the voters and constituents certainly in Toronto and in the constituency which I have the honour to represent have appreciated the necessity for Parliament to come to grips with this issue at this time.

I think the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) have to be commended for the leadership they have shown in biting the bullet and being prepared to go ahead with this question and resolve something Canadians have not, unfortunately, been able to resolve for decades.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Smith: What is before the House is a resolution to appoint a joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons to consider and report upon the constitutional document which was issued by the government on October 2. There have been many speeches. Many of them have been excellent. But I think we have to recognize that we are beginning what will be a chapter which may last for several months and that the curtain is not being dropped on it tonight as if somehow the gong were going and this were the end of the show. I think that has perhaps not been pointed out by opposition members when