

should think again because it looks like it could use all the help it can get.

Mr. Scott Thorkelson (Edmonton—Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak on this bill today. I would also like to compliment the member from Etobicoke who introduced his own bill on referenda. I had the pleasure of seconding his bill when he introduced it.

In 1867 Canada was created by its people. Now 125 years later I am proud to see that the government will give people a final and concrete say in how their country should be rebuilt. This is truly a Canada round of constitutional negotiations.

The government is committed to ensuring public participation in the renewal of our Constitution. By tabling this legislation to enable a referendum on constitutional reform our government has reinforced this commitment.

Constitutional reform must be open, must be public, and must be transparent. We must provide every opportunity for the ideas of Canadians to be heard. It is not enough to have Canadians involved in the debate; they must also have a stake in it and they must also vote on it. Our government also must listen.

In the summer of 1991 I sent out a survey on the Constitution to every household in my riding. My constituents told me that they wanted to participate in constitutional renewal. Sixty-six per cent said they want to be involved in creating and reviewing constitutional amendments through constituent assemblies and public hearings.

Our government has responded to these demands by providing Canadians with opportunities to be heard at every turn. First there was the Citizen's Forum on Canada's Future in November of 1990. The forum was created to get Canadians from all across the country talking to each other about the values and characteristics which define this great country and which define us as Canadians.

Then there was the Beaudoin-Edwards special joint Committee on the process for amending the Constitution of Canada. It asked Canadians how our Constitution should be amended and who should be involved in the amending process. The Beaudoin-Dobbie committee

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toured the country to ask Canadians to discuss and improve upon the set of 28 proposals which had been tabled by the right hon. Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs.

The federal government, nine provincial governments, two territorial governments, and leaders of the four major aboriginal groups have now entered into discussions. There have been consultations and multilateral negotiations.

I hope that these groups and leaders will come to some sort of consensus on a constitutional package which will be truly national in scope, a truly national round.

My constituents told me that not only did they want to be involved in creating the constitutional proposals but that they wanted to be involved in a national referendum. Sixty-three per cent said it was important that our government hold a national referendum to improve any constitutional amendments.

I am happy to see the government move in that direction. I am an advocate of referenda when necessary on national issues. Referenda in the past have been used in different countries and different states to involve people in debate, to make the trade-offs in their own minds on issues, to get more fully involved in discussing what is at issue, what ramifications issues have, how it would affect them personally and how it would affect their country. In this way they become emotionally involved. It is less easy for citizens to say they do not like a proposal or to criticize it in a facile way when they have a personal stake in it.

It is very important that the Government of Canada consult with people. That is not to say that governments should use referenda at every turn on every matter or allow referenda to be used on issues that are not of national importance.

• (1140)

We do have elected representatives; we do have a court system. It is almost tragic that the more people seek to go to the courts, the more they want referenda, the less effective our political system may be in the future. This is something we must consider because we must have an effective political system to resolve matters in a democratic way to protect the interests of individual Canadians of every background.