

*Supply*

As I say, all of us must look at what we see this country to be. The consensus that is going to be absolutely essential is the consensus that must come from all Canadians, from all parts of this country. Without that consensus, we are not going to be there.

• (1710)

We must talk about some of the fundamentals of this country. We must talk about the best way to reflect things that have historically been important and, to an extent, have given us some definition in terms of process and in terms of substance in this country, our parliamentary democracy, our representative and responsible government, our tendency to look upon the provincial governments as the best way to provide programs to our people and that, by the nature and the definition, they are closer to the people who depend upon government.

What is it that a national government in this country must have to be a national government? What is it that a federal government must have so that we can be properly represented internationally, so that we have the broad control of the economy that is so essential for a central government and, I think, at least from my point of view, the ability to redistribute wealth in this country so that those individuals and regions of the country that need the help from others that have the capacity to help them can be properly facilitated?

I think it is fair to say that the problem of Meech Lake, as we have come to call it, is a problem of process. I am not one who completely accepts the argument that some of the fundamental, substantive issues in the agreement and some of those issues such as distinct society really were the things that, in the end, cratered the process.

I do, however, accept the argument that the Canadian public was concerned that perhaps they were not part of the process. I think it is fair to say that no process of amending our Constitution has been as open. There were public hearings sponsored by a number of provincial governments, and certainly the Government of Canada, but there is no question that Canadians believed that they were being asked to discuss something that they did not feel they were a part of or that they did not feel they could have an affect on.

Be that as it may, that is past history, but there are lessons to learn. There are things that we can take from that and that we must take from that. But what kind of participation do Canadians want? What role do Canadians perceive that they can play or should play in the development, in the acceptance and in the changing of our Constitution?

I do not think we know that, and I think it is probably unsafe to make assumptions. I look forward, as the Edwards-Beaudoin committee travels across the country starting next week, that we talk to individuals about their perception. I get the sense that Canadians want to know that they have the ability to express an opinion on the Constitution, have their leaders listen to it and have the ability to have it changed.

What is it that Canadians expect of their leaders in this process? We have a democracy where elected politicians, as we are, are accountable for our decisions, for our actions and, ultimately, to provide some leadership and some focus on how we deal with issues, be it energy policy, fish policy or constitutional development and that accountability is ultimately the thing that ties this country together in a political sense.

How do we change our Constitution? One way or the other, all Canadians must feel that they are part of that process. We talk about amending our Constitution and I think that is an unfortunate choice of words. Technically, amending our Constitution is a legal process and, I think, a process that, quite clearly, is one that has to be addressed in a legal point of view. But the question of changing our Constitution talks more about public participation, talks more about how all Canadians can be part of the development of the initiatives, can perhaps be part of the development of the words around the Constitution and, perhaps, can be part of the ratification process around the Constitution, but all Canadians must feel they are part of it.

The Charter of Rights had an interesting impact. Somebody here in this House today talked about ownership. Canadians felt that they had an ownership of the charter. I believe that the charter gave a number of Canadians the feeling that there was a recognition in some very fundamental and important institutions in this country and the charter is one of them. Status has been conferred and as a result those that are not there feel that status is to be conferred to them.