

Private Members' Business

international covenants and obligations to which Canada is a signatory.

Citizens encourage the acquisition of citizenship by all who qualify and invite such persons to become equal members of the Canadian community, thereby enriching the nation and sharing in the advantages that it offers the citizens.

Citizenship is a bond of faith among all Canadians. We share values; we share commitments; we share a unity of purpose. And we do this while enjoying the diversity of so many cultures. We believe in freedom, dignity and respect, equality and fair treatment and the opportunity to participate. We care for the disadvantaged. We prefer peaceful solutions, not quarrelsome disputes.

The government has recognized that as we approach the 21st century, Canadians want to discuss, articulate and reaffirm the principles of our citizenship. This is the reason the government has proposed a Canada clause for our Constitution, a clause that acknowledges who we are as a people and who we aspire to be. The proposed statement outlines such characteristics as equality of women and men; fairness, openness and full participation by all people without regard to race, colour, creed, physical or mental disability or cultural background; tolerance for individuals, groups and communities. These are just a few points to be included in the proposed Canada clause.

Certainly over the past few weeks, indeed past few months, at the various hearings that have gone on in Canada—one in Halifax, one in Calgary and, indeed, just this past weekend in Montreal—we have heard so much about Canada being a caring nation and how people all across our country want to expand the Canada clause to make sure it represents all of us and our true feelings.

Since we are in the midst of a major comprehensive renewal of our Constitution, I suggest to hon. members that it would be prudent to incorporate the major aspects of the bill before us today into a general discussion, into a review and into the renewal of our Constitution.

• (1150)

Many questions regarding citizenship which are raised by this bill of the hon. member today are already

encompassed by the spirit and the intent in the existing law concerning citizenship.

Before we proceed with this bill, I suggest that we consider the views of many Canadians who are not members of this House but who are truly interested parties.

The principles of citizenship which I outlined would prompt us to be responsive to the wishes and recommendations of all our fellow citizens. By introducing this bill, the member for Hamilton West has brought before us many, many important questions. I join with other people in this House today to participate in dialogue, not only with them but with constituents, my constituents in Calgary Southwest, and with many thoughtful people all across this country, all of whom greatly value the privilege of being a Canadian citizen and seeing what we do as we go into the next century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Tremblay (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. The bill before the House today raises a number of important questions about the roles, rights and obligations of the members of this House.

I would like to touch on certain aspects of this bill that are generally related to the renewal of our Constitution. I think there is ample evidence that many Canadians across the country are anxious to formulate our fundamental law, the Constitution, in such a way that each and everyone of us can be proud to be a Canadian.

Some of the media claim that Canadians are sick and tired of hearing about constitutional reform. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. Actually, 1,550 private citizens sent letters to the Conference Secretariat to reserve seats at one of Canada's five conferences. The fact is that many Canadians have the impression that the present Constitution does not recognize the kind of rights and status they should enjoy as citizens of this country; in other words, they believe they do not have everything to which they are entitled as Canadians.

I think the hon. member for Hamilton West is to be commended for explaining his position on this subject. The bill presented in the House today reminds us of the responsibility each and every one of us has to look at the