

I believe all of us in this House want to build a better Canada. We all have the same objective. Some of us may have different ways we would take to do it. But at least today, let us give hope to Canadians by saying that we can come together, agree on basic principles, that we have learned from the errors of the past. Let us show Canadians that we really are committed to building a true Constitution that belongs to Canadians, that does not belong to one political party or one point of view.

This would be a start today and I urge all members of this House to support this motion.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Rob Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments of the leader of the New Democratic Party. I want to say that I am very disappointed she would use a subject as sensitive and as difficult as this one is for Canadians in a manner that encourages partisanship and, I think, encourages division within this House and within political parties.

Her comments, particularly, about the Prime Minister were very unfair. I think they were in fact quite wrong. The implication the leader of the New Democratic Party came back to again and again was that somehow the government is stifling public involvement or is not interested in public involvement, is both unfair and incorrect. The leader of the New Democratic Party knows or should know that the Prime Minister has launched initiatives in several areas.

I wish to come back to one other point that has been made again and again in this House. I see nothing wrong with the government, within itself, in terms of deputy ministers and others examining options. I think that is only logical. It would be irresponsible for any government department and individuals who work for the Government of Canada not to be thinking about this very difficult question.

What the leader of the New Democratic Party fails to mention is the fact that the government has a number of initiatives to involve the public. Of course, the Spicer Commission is one of those three different ways that the government is encouraging Canadians to come forward and give their opinion. She touched on that only very briefly. In fact, she and the members of her party should

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be getting behind that organization to ensure that it is a success. It is one of the ways in which this government is encouraging Canadians from coast to coast to get involved with this.

On the technical side, as well, the Edwards-Beaudoin joint parliamentary committee is one that will visit all ten provincial capitals, both territorial capitals and several other cities in Canada, and address some of the questions she mentioned; the constituent assembly referenda, and that sort of thing. We are encouraging Canadians to give us their opinions. That is something that all members, and members of her own party are involved with as well. This is another initiative.

I am proud, as well, that the Prime Minister has asked his own political party, the Progressive Conservative Party from coast to coast, every riding, every region of Canada, to get involved with the question of Canada's future.

In the next week or two, I will be participating in a forum for Ontario Progressive Conservatives, as well as a national forum. Again, the Prime Minister of Canada is asking Canadians to get involved and help with the future of this country.

I would invite the leader of the New Democratic Party to reassess the partisan view she has taken and get behind people like the Prime Minister who are doing their best to unite this country and keep it strong.

**Ms. McLaughlin:** Mr. Speaker, as I said in my remarks, the Constitution is a series of principles for our country and how we are going to enact those principles. We are talking about something beyond that. We are talking about national unity.

While many Canadians find it difficult to react to the amending formula of the Constitution or particular technicalities, as important as they are, they do know one thing. They know there are 1.3 million people unemployed in this country. They know that poverty is increasing, that the gap between the rich and poor is increasing, that the middle class is finding it increasingly difficult to even maintain the standard of living. Taxes, like the goods and services tax, have made it even more difficult for individuals and small business to survive in this country.