

any government but are created with the individual human being as inalienable rights. The people always have these rights regardless of how different governments approach them.

● (1600)

We have inherited a strong heritage in our system that respects and enforces rights and freedoms and, whether written down or not, we must ensure that we continue to observe these in the future. We must guard against those whose ideologies are suspect and who want to change Canada, whether for their own self-interest or the interest of a larger over-all philosophy in opposition to that of our traditions.

This can be done gradually under a smokescreen of rhetoric and charisma and that is exactly what Canadians must not be fooled by. Look back and look ahead and then look at the last 12 or 13 years our country has been under the spell of the present Prime Minister. Think of the self-imposed rush to change our time honoured Constitution and ask, "Why?"

Mr. Speaker, we cannot be in a blind rush to let the present government do any more real or potential harm to the future of our country. I am pleased to be part of a system which wants sincerely to maintain and build a better Canada by building on our present system and its strengths, not by unilateral and divisive change for the sake of change.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Douglas Fisher (Mississauga North):** Mr. Speaker, I strongly support this resolution and I am very pleased that we are, at long last, bringing our own Constitution under our own control inside Canada. I believe that most of my constituents support this course of action as well. I am, therefore, honoured to take part and to make my contribution in this debate today. I believe in a strong Canada and I believe we need a strong federal government to have a strong country.

During Quebec's referendum campaign almost a year ago, a most impressive array of prominent people made pledges to people there about Canada's future. Members of Parliament, provincial premiers, municipal and local leaders, volunteer associations and service clubs, churches and schools, and private citizens all joined together to tell referendum voters that Canada is a vibrant country, a country ready to change, a country ready to remove irritants and a country ready to restore to everyone the full benefits of national unity.

Our debate today is a natural continuation of that campaign and of those pledges. We are acting on those promises. We are recognizing in these initial steps that we need the symbolism of self-control in our political life. We need the protections and the limits contained in the charter. We need the flexibility and the promise for change represented by the amending formula.

People in my part of Canada do not automatically associate this Constitution with that referendum, but, once reminded, they recognize we did indeed make promises that we must now fulfill. We know that honest people who voted with the majority for Canada now want us to hold up our end of the bargain. We also know that there are others who voted with the

minority against Canada who are waiting in ambush in case we stumble or fail.

In a broader sense, people everywhere know that our work now is summing up a long and sometimes tedious history, a history of debate going back 50 years. Let us look at this summing up. Let us look at what we are offering. Our governments will continue to follow the guidelines contained in the old BNA Act. We need to alter these relationships very soon to get rid of the irritations created by an old fashioned document. We are not doing that, however, at this stage. Those refinements can come in the future after specific concrete negotiations. It is enough for now to settle on these familiar foundations.

These needed changes will happen soon, however, because we will be able to negotiate knowing that amendments are possible. The formula we are proposing offers everyone adequate safeguards. On the one hand, changes will be so politically challenging that the federal government will be forced to find suitable compromises. On the other hand, we will have enough flexibility to ensure that every provincial government sticks to the point during the negotiations and seeks the same compromises and the same balances. This gives us the chance to focus our future negotiations and to know that change is possible. Each side has some clout, so neither side can risk negotiating in bad faith. We have the opportunity to bring renewal and progress to our federation, to adapt to the future in good faith.

I believe in a strong central government for Canada. The alternative proposal for an amending formula put forward by the official opposition would greatly weaken the federal government.

Our formula allows debate, decisions by each province, regional and provincial approval, and then approval and application right across the country. Their formula would allow different proposals to have a different impact in different provinces, the famous checkerboard effect. Some critics have made a strong, emotional case for this idea and have argued that everything from traffic laws to pension reform is already in a checkerboard across Canada. That argument, especially with those kinds of examples, avoids the real point in this debate.

There are some rules that have to apply to everyone in Canada. We are looking at the fundamental rules of the game, not at minor regulations like automobile speed limits or negotiable government programs like pensions. The constitutional rules are so important that everything else stems from them. They must be the same everywhere. They cannot be ignored anywhere.

I cannot support, for example, any checkerboard or any opting out plan that can turn on or turn off my personal rights in different provinces. My freedom to worship is not a light switch that can be flicked on or flicked off by a provincial legislature. A handicapped person needs protections just as much in Ontario as in Manitoba. A woman's rights do not change just because she happens to be on the west coast instead of the east coast.