

Designation of Nova Scotia

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The point is well taken. I would like to wish the Hon. Member a very happy birthday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Hamelin: Thank you. I am sure that in time, I will have your experience, and as they say, a man's worth does not necessarily depend on his years, and I expect to have plenty of opportunities for learning the rules of the House, and learning by heart—

Mr. Prud'homme: They also say that silence is golden.

Mr. Hamelin: Well I hope to speak often in the House and be elected as many times as I can, a bit like you yourself, sir—

To get back to Bill C-201, Mr. Speaker, which is aimed at substituting for the word "Nouvelle-Écosse", whenever it appears in statutes, regulations, reports, contracts, leases, permits, licences or other documents, the word "Nova Scotia". I think the repercussions are far greater than my hon. colleague would have it seem. I think it would be a very significant change for Quebecers and for all Canadian Francophones. Some terms are easily interchangeable, but, as was pointed out several times in the House in the course of the debate on the Hon. Member's bill, the term "Nouvelle-Écosse" has become part of our vocabulary and our whole way of life, and frankly, I think it would sound very odd to say that we were going to spend a holiday in "Nova Scotia", a term which for us has become associated with English, a language we respect and for which I have a great deal of admiration as a Canadian. I think that is basically where the problem lies.

● (1630)

There are indeed a number of terms that in the course of time have become practically bilingual. Others, however, have become associated with one language rather than another. As far as French Canada in general and Quebec in particular are concerned, I can assure the Hon. Member that the term "Nouvelle-Ecosse" is as firmly rooted in our vocabulary as Nova Scotia probably is in yours, because as far as I know, Anglophones do not refer to "New Scotland". In fact, the Latin term, and Latin is in fact an off shoot of Sanskrit from which Greek is derived and so we finally get to Latin which has provided the basis for our two languages... I would remind the Hon. Member that in the English language, for which I have a great affection, about seventy or eighty per cent of the words are French, although pronounced differently. And so we have here a Latin name which as a result of history has to all intents and purposes become an English word.

I repeat to my colleague that as far as we are concerned, "Nouvelle-Écosse", in French is the official name. This is one of the things we learn in school. It is in our history books, and

there is nowhere any reference in our community or in our language, to "Nova Scotia". But there is reference everywhere to the beautiful province of "Nouvelle-Écosse".

I would ask my colleague to consider that, in effect, this is more than a simple semantic issue in Canada. If, in the past, in some of the English-speaking provinces certain geographical names have been in French, in most cases this has come about through a consensus, whether it is in the United States or in any English-Speaking province of Canada that such French names have survived. This has been done out of habit. It is part of the heritage of those communities in areas with such specific names.

Therefore, in our view, which surely is shared by all my French-speaking colleagues from Quebec, and probably from elsewhere in Canada, the name "Nova Scotia" could definitely never be substituted to the French name "Nouvelle-Écosse" in our language.

Let me stress that I appreciate the reasons why my colleague from Annapolis Valley-Hants introduced Bill C-201. I appreciate that it is important to him, in his language, that the name "Nova Scotia" be enshrined. However, it is my feeling that actually, in practice, it would be impossible for us to use in French the name "Nova Scotia", at least within the short term.

This Bill aimed at preserving the Latin name "Nova Scotia" is a little amazing to me. I would have no objections, my dear colleague, to using for instance another name in your language, were this to be the will of your constituents, of the people, in other words, or their tradition in your area. But as far as French-speaking people are concerned—on that Bill that points to the linguistic duality of our Canadian context and this is important—I must tell you that although I appreciate your reasons, and notwithstanding the use of other designations, either in French or in English, that may have been discussed in the past in this House, I feel that there are no grounds for suggesting that the name "Nova Scotia" might very easily be used in French. This would fly in the face of the historic evolution of our language and the name "Nouvelle-Écosse" is to us a commonly used name that we find in our dictionaries, in our tradition and in our ways of speaking.

However, I can somewhat understand the rationale for your presenting such a Bill. I believe that your intentions are serious, that this might be a way for your community and your province to assert their identity. I am quite certain of this, but in view of the basic Canadian duality and the absolute need to respect this French and English duality in Canada, I would invite you to reconsider your proposal and to be very noble about it. I also invite you to apply the principles which inspire our new administration, this new Government elected last September 4, responsible for promoting a spirit of cooperation and reconciliation. I believe that this major reconciliation will occur among French and English-speaking Canadians—