

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to confirm to the hon. member that I agree with his suggestion that these bills be included whether or not they are in the first 50 to be tabled. We have no objection to the subject of these bills being referred to the appropriate committees for study and consideration.

[English]

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, just so that the consent will be unanimous and silence will not be taken as a question, let me confirm that that was indeed the discussion we had, and I am delighted that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) raised the point.

Mr. Ron Stewart (Simcoe South): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank my leader, our House leader and then the members of our caucus for giving me, a relatively new member, the opportunity of being the speaker on behalf of my party in supporting this legislation. I should also like to congratulate the Secretary of State (Mr. Fox) for his very fine remarks.

The national anthem is a matter that is very near to my heart, as I am sure all members realize. As I intimated before, I intended to raise the matter in the Thirty-first Parliament when I learned that all copyrights of the Routhier-Lavallée-Weir version of "O Canada" expired on January 4, 1980, and at last rested in the public domain.

I should like to ask how many countries in the world today have no official anthem. There are very few. However, we in this great nation of Canada are in that unique position. "O Canada" is not officially ours and the song that our children proudly sing in school is not official.

In this august chamber, 282 members are dedicated to the principle of national unity and many moving speeches have been dedicated to that end recently. I ask, is it not sensible to begin a new spirit of unity, a spirit of confederation, by officially embracing the national anthem "O Canada"?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: On June 6 the Post Office Department issued a pair of commemorative stamps, the subjects of which were the music and stylized portraits of the composers of "O Canada". On each miniature pane was the message, "Issued to celebrate Canada Day 1980". Yet that anthem is still not official.

Can you picture the United States without the official "Star Spangled Banner"? Can you imagine the stirring "La Marseillaise" not being the official French anthem? We have "O Canada", a moving anthem in both languages but never recognized by Parliament in a statute. I believe this to be tantamount to sacrilege.

On May 23, 1980, during the debate on my private member's bill to designate "O Canada" as the national anthem of this land, the Secretary of State committed the government to the introduction of legislation which would accomplish this deed. Today this has come to pass. While the bill before us is

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not the same one I introduced as Bill C-220, I would hope hon. members might leave this chamber today with "O Canada" declared our official national anthem.

● (1240)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: I have received many telephone calls and letters from people all across this nation who are astounded to learn that the Weir version of "O Canada", which has been in common usage in English for nearly 100 years, is not official. We as members of this House would be derelict in our duty if we do not leave this chamber today with "O Canada" enshrined as part of our country's heritage.

I must state categorically at the outset that I champion the complete English words of Weir which we all know by rote and of which we are so proud. I should like to add that the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle) has his own opinion as to the word "native" which has been mentioned. I should like that to be in the record.

Also, the hon. member for North York (Mr. Gamble) is very keen on what was discussed by House leaders here today and the fact that the subject matter would be dealt with in private members' bills. I think the whole matter has been commendable and highly above board. I think we can all be proud of what is going on here today.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: Continuity with the familiar and well-loved words is essential. Tradition is more essential than quibbling over just a few words. We are all aware that there is not one national anthem which will satisfy all people, be it the sentiments, the words or the music.

The Weir version of "O Canada" is Canada's anthem in the hearts of Canadians. It has been sung and played too often in the past 100 years to be neglected. Using the Weir words would be by far the most realistic and simplistic approach, in my view. However, the government's Bill C-36 changes only nine of the original Weir version words. I hope the NDP members to my left will not be sanctimonious in their obstruction by being picayune in their interpretation of just a few words. I want it placed on record that the Conservative party is unanimous in its support that "O Canada" be declared our official national anthem.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: The French words and music remain the same. I think it apropos at this time to mention that Bill C-36 corresponds, as the minister of state pointed out, identically to the report of the special joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons of May 19, 1967. I might add that the committee held 12 meetings. It listened to many representative groups and perused more than 1,000 proposed lyrics. The unanimous recommendation of that committee was the version now before us as Bill C-36.