

to balance the positive impact that it could have with the very real impact on productivity and the cost to Canadian employers.

Previous speakers have alluded to the specific problems that exist in my province of Alberta. We celebrate Heritage Day in August and last year the provincial government designated a new holiday, ironically on the same day that this bill proposes for Heritage Day. It is called Family Day. Perhaps it is not too ironic because Canadians have long recognized that the period between Christmas and Easter coming, as it does, during the coldest, darkest and least productive period of the year, could be enhanced with a designated holiday.

While we are looking at what Heritage Day might mean in the life of Canada, we cannot ignore the economic aspect. A new holiday will cost every employer, including the government, every municipality, every hospital, and every business, not only overtime costs for essential services, but lost work time as well. We have to balance this with the value of the holiday, the value of it for morale and potential improvements in productivity that I am going to concede will be there. With the possible exception of, perhaps winter sports enthusiasts, most Canadians do suffer the winter doldrums and would probably like to have a February holiday, like Albertans.

The date aside, I have talked to people in my constituency about a new national holiday to mark Heritage Day. Most people, in fact almost all, agree with the need to recognize and celebrate our Canadian heritage. Most people like the idea of having another holiday but there are many who raised the fundamental concern that I mentioned earlier, and that is the cost of such a holiday. Some even equate it to a national self-indulgence and question whether we have to provide Canadians with a paid day off in order to have them appreciate being Canadian.

It is my strong personal feeling that this country cannot afford at this time to impose, and I use that word deliberately, Mr. Speaker, because even though Canadians say they would like a holiday, I am not aware of any great, ground swell of support or public demand for this proposed holiday. It is not the right time for us to impose on Canadians a new paid, national holiday.

### *Private Members' Business*

Having said that, I want to add that there is merit in this bill. I think the hon. member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley has done the House a service in introducing Bill C-288. This is an important time in the life of Canada to be considering our heritage and to be discussing ways in which all Canadians can most productively consider it.

Heritage Canada first proposed Heritage Day some 17 years ago. I understand it consulted representatives of the Canadian tourist industry before suggesting a date for the holiday. The overwhelming response was in favour of the third Monday in February. They felt that that would encourage Canadian domestic travel at a normally low season; they felt that it would establish a market among people who lacked the time and money to travel abroad; they said it would also attract Americans to Canada for winter recreation and national celebrations. I question their conclusion in this case because my preference, when travelling, is to avoid holidays whenever possible.

Their conclusions also raise a question as to our ultimate objective. Are we trying to recognize heritage or encourage recreation? I think this is very basic to our debate. We all agree that it is a worthy thing to respect our heritage, but why do we need a holiday to do it? Could we not merely proclaim a special day?

• (1750)

As mentioned by previous speakers, we have done that now for about 16 years. There have been strenuous efforts by voluntary associations that have led to municipal proclamations honouring Heritage Day. There have been special events staged by groups of citizens and by government agencies here in the national capital. Environment Canada honours Heritage Day by, among other things, announcing the winners of its prestigious annual heritage awards. Some schools have even made Heritage Day a special event, with maximum student participation. Museums have special displays and concert halls stage special presentations.

This is good as far as it goes, but only a fraction of Canadians are touched by our unofficial Heritage Day. I believe that we could gain something very substantial for Canada with a Heritage Day for all Canadians.

We in this House are particularly aware of the trauma that Canadians have suffered in recent months with the hopes and disappointments of the Meech Lake Accord. We have seen too often a very emotional reaction to the news of the day. Now with the heartfelt wishes of this House behind them, a citizens' forum will soon be