

Statue of Monarch

monarch. She is intimately acquainted with the feelings and aspirations, not only of the Canadian people as a whole, but of groups of Canadian people. She understands the feelings of the people of the West, of the North, of Quebec and of the Maritimes. She has a sense not only of the whole but of the parts of the whole. Because she has spent time in Canada, she has become Queen of Canada not only because Prime Minister St. Laurent declared so in 1953, even though that was a very important declaration, but because she has experienced a sense of being Queen of Canada by participating in Canadian life.

I would like to commend the Hon. Member for Nepean—Carleton for the work he has done in bringing this motion forward. I look forward to the day when this statue will be erected to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Queen's reign. I hope all Hon. Members will participate in the celebration of that day when we will see that statue erected here on Parliament Hill.

Mr. Allan Pietz (Welland): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to enter this debate this evening. I thank the Hon. Member for Nepean—Carleton (Mr. Tupper) for bringing this issue forward.

As Hon. Members know, the Queen has reigned over this country for 35 years. Next week on Christmas Day, many Canadians will turn on their television sets and tune in to the Queen's Christmas message. It is a tradition for many families, many of whom do not have any British blood at all but may have emigrated here from other countries in the Commonwealth or from elsewhere. As Elizabeth II has visited Canada so often in her long reign, her message often mentions her visits to Canada and makes special note of those she has met with here.

The other time of the year when national attention is regularly focused on the monarchy is Victoria Day in May. On a superficial level, we all appreciate the holiday, but at the same time, we can appreciate the historic importance of the monarchy in our evolution as a nation. The day has significance as the day of celebration of Queen Victoria's birthday, but it is also a day to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II.

The Queen of Canada is in many ways a symbol for Canadians. Some people might say that she is just a symbol, she does not live here nor does she have daily input into the governing of this country. Young people and some new immigrants to this country do not always relate in a personal way to her role as the head of Government. Nonetheless, that which she symbolizes is very vital to understanding ourselves and the nature of Canada.

Canada has had a relatively short history, and some areas have had a shorter history than others. We are still busy writing our history rather than identifying very strongly with our nation's past achievements. But a sense of community and connectedness is vital to everyone.

• (1750)

We, of course, cannot deny our historical links to Britain and the monarchy. While the majority of Canadians do not have ancestors from the United Kingdom, as Canadians we have undeniable historical links with Britain as a one-time colony and one that chose a similar type of government. When Parliament passed legislation in 1953 making Queen Elizabeth the Queen of Canada, a strong link was forged between this country and the monarch. Historically, then, Queen Elizabeth II holds a unique and important place.

As head of the Commonwealth, Elizabeth II unites a great many different cultures and histories to work together toward a better future. That symbolic role on a global scale has a good deal of relevance to Canadians. In a real sense, that is what this country has done. It has united people from around the world to work together for the future of Canada.

In my riding of Welland in the Niagara Peninsula, we are culturally very rich. We have a strong French-Canadian community in Welland and a strong Italian community in Thorold. The St. Catharines Folk Arts Council is made up of some 35 ethnic organizations, all of whom are active and vital in the peninsula. Insofar as we, as Canadians, take pride in our diversity and ability to work together toward a common future, the symbolic presence of the Queen has a great deal of meaning for us.

It has meaning not merely in the historical context but in a living, forward-looking context. Queen Elizabeth II is the longest serving monarch we have had. She has always taken an active, personal interest in this country. Whenever she has visited, she has left a strong and personal impression.

In preparing to speak to the House today on this motion, I spoke with people in my riding who remember clearly the visit to Niagara made by Elizabeth II some 30 years ago. I remember meeting her myself in my capacity as the mayor of the City of Welland in more recent years. Her grace and accessibility are qualities which leave a lifelong impression on everyone she meets.

For the Welland riding, her visit to Canada in 1959, held special significance. She came to Canada to preside over the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, of which the Welland Canal is a very important part. All of her visits to Canada over the past 35 years have touched us, as ordinary Canadians, right where we live.

Her enduring interest in this country has been noted by all. Her command of the French language and appreciation of the special character of the Province of Quebec has provided an example of her sensitivity to this unique country of ours. She has shown a genuine interest in native peoples and their concerns. She has made a point of meeting with multicultural organizations across Canada. Her wide travels here have made her more familiar with this huge country than most of us will ever be.