

*Private Members' Business*

enhancing the understanding between native and non-native people.

This bill reflects the renewed and enhanced recognition, understanding and appreciation by non-native people of native people and native cultures generally.

The recent spate of movies has assisted this process. I do not think there is a single classroom that I visit in carrying out my responsibilities as a member of Parliament where young people do not raise questions about aboriginal peoples and cultures.

Young people ask questions regarding aboriginal aspirations within Canada. They ask questions in terms of an enhanced appreciation of aboriginal history within the Canadian context. It really moves me.

In a very short period of time we have made quantum gains in not only the advancement of aboriginal people but also the understanding, appreciation and recognition of that advancement by the non-native communities.

The day in the bill to be identified as the national solidarity day is June 21. First Nations people have identified this date as a day of celebration in terms of their own communities, accomplishments and aspirations.

I felt for our country as a whole it would be appropriate to set aside June 21. By definition, it is the day heralding the beginning of one of our seasons. It is the beginning of summer. It is the longest day of the year. It is the time for renewal and regeneration.

It is the perfect time out of the 365 days for all of us to say together, shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm that we move forward in solidarity in the best interest of the aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities of Canada.

Today I simply ask my colleagues to pass this bill on a voice vote to enable it to go quickly to a legislative committee meeting.

There may be other appropriate changes, but because it is a fairly straightforward bill the one suggested change would be to change First Nations day to the aboriginal solidarity day. That would make it more inclusive.

From the homework which has been done around this bill, it seems to have the virtual unanimous support of all aboriginal organizations and of thousands and thousands

of individuals from aboriginal communities, including reserves, Métis communities and urban communities.

People have asked: Does this bill mean that there will be a national holiday on this day? The answer is no, this would not be a staff holiday. It would simply be a day set aside to appreciate the occasion. It is not that we would not want to do this throughout the year every day. It means there would be one specific day of celebration, a day of coming together to celebrate how much we have achieved. It would be to acknowledge the continuous development of our aboriginal communities from coast to coast to coast.

I ask my colleagues to see fit before the hour is out to pass this on a voice vote and allow the bill to go to the next stage of development.

**Mr. Lee Clark (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-268 which proposes to designate June 21 as a national day for the recognition of aboriginal people in Canada.

Certainly, most Canadians are well aware that the contributions of aboriginal people to this country cannot in any way be underestimated.

I spent much of my life studying and teaching Canadian history. Quite frankly, one of the things we have not done well in teaching Canadian history is to recognize adequately the contribution of aboriginal people, or those we would probably call First Nations today, during the settlement period.

They played a vital role in assisting the survival of Europeans and in the fur trade. They were vital partners in the process and I particularly note the role women played in that process. The aboriginal people played a role in establishing the province of Manitoba in 1870. They played a role in the wars in which Canada has participated.

Certainly they play the roles as teachers, politicians, authors, athletes, business people, homemakers, et cetera. It has indeed been a very significant contribution and one which regrettably has gone largely unrecognized. Their heritage is a very important part of Canada's heritage and is one which should be honoured and valued.