

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): It being 5:30 p.m., it is my duty to inform this House that under Standing Order 81(19) the time allowed for debate on the motion has now expired.

[English]

The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL SOLIDARITY DAY FOR THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP) moved that Bill C-244, an act respecting a national solidarity day for the aboriginal peoples of Canada, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, recognizing that the starting speaker is allotted up to 20 minutes, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to see if I could share this 20-minute spot with one of my New Democrat colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the generosity in allowing my colleague to join me in co-sponsoring the bill. In the Order Paper there are a number of co-sponsors. I refer specifically to the member for the Battlefords—Meadow Lake, the member for Regina—Lumsden and the member for Burnaby—Kingsway. Others have also indicated to me they are in support of the bill.

This is the second time I have actually tabled the bill. The first time it received the support of every aboriginal organization in the country. It received support from countless bands across the country and also from many urban organizations of aboriginal people and all the significant leaders of aboriginal peoples. To my knowledge no one has yet indicated their opposition to it, either among the aboriginal or the non-aboriginal communities.

We only have one hour for debate. In the closing moments I would hope either the debate would collapse, which would then allow a voiced vote to send it off to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, or simply unanimous consent to send this off to the appropriate standing committee for continuation.

The bill is fairly straightforward. I do not suspect it would take an awful lot of study and examination. There may be the will of the House to provide unanimous consent to move through all stages before the hour is out, which we have done on previous occasions.

Mr. Solomon: A great idea.

Mr. Riis: My hon. colleague from Regina—Lumsden suggests this is a good idea. We will see as the hour progresses.

The preamble of Bill C-244, an act respecting a national solidarity day for the aboriginal peoples of Canada, is as follows:

Whereas it is desirable that Canadians designate a day in recognition of Canada's original inhabitants;

And whereas Canadians seek earnestly to set an example of their commitment to honouring native cultures;

And whereas June 21, being the longest day of the year and marking the changing of the seasons, should be designated as a day in tribute of Aboriginal solidarity;

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

Therefore this act may be cited as the National Solidarity Day for the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada Act. If it passes it will be just that.

A point of clarification is needed. A number of my colleagues, particularly in the Reform Party, have asked whether this is a legal holiday. The point is not to make it a legal holiday but to designate it as a day when Canadians from coast to coast join with aboriginal peoples from coast to coast in acknowledging the tremendous cultural contribution First Nations and aboriginal people have made to this country. There is some question about who the first Europeans were who arrived on these shores. I take some pride in saying that my forefathers, the Vikings, were probably the first Europeans, although some people suggest it was the Irish. Some suggest the Chinese. Whoever they were it is important to say they arrived on the shores of North America and Canada to meet incredibly advanced cultures; cultures that had existed in some cases in rather hostile natural environments for hundreds and hundreds of years, thousands of years in many cases.

● (1735)

They had developed not only an incredible harmony in terms of working with each other and complimenting each of the organizations, tribes, clans and cultures in existence but they worked and lived in harmony with the natural environment.

When the first explorers from Europe arrived on Canadian shores they found by and large people who complimented their efforts and assisted them. They gave of all their own resources and so on to facilitate in the exploration of what we call today Canada.