

stand the constitutions and the loyalties was much more significant than it was growing up in Canada.

They all say: "Why are you continuing on with this quaint idea of taking an oath of allegiance to a foreign monarch?" Yes, as the mover said, lawyers can make the distinction between Queen Elizabeth, the British monarch and Queen Elizabeth, the Canadian monarch, but it is a distinction made by constitutional lawyers, not made by people who want to be clear and want to have things meaningful.

There is one other thing I want to comment on. I am not an immigrant. I have been here all my life. I do not see the logic in why we would swear allegiance to a queen who is not the symbol of Canada. If I do not see the logic, why are we so insistent that newcomers to this country do so, newcomers who want to truly feel that they are now part of a very strong democracy, who want to stand up proudly and clearly when they take their oath of citizenship and declare "I am a Canadian citizen and I will swear allegiance to Canada and to Canada's Constitution and laws". That is what they want to do. That is what I want them to do and that is why I support this bill.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound—Muskoka): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity of addressing the House with respect to private member's bill C-285, an act to amend the Citizenship Act (oath of allegiance), sponsored by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

Under the present oath of allegiance the applicant for citizenship swears allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors. It is my understanding that it is the intent of Bill C-285 to make the oath more meaningful by having the applicant swear allegiance to Canada and the Canadian Constitution.

The hon. member's amendment would substitute the current citizenship oath with the following declaration:

I swear or affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Canada and the Constitution of Canada and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfil my duties as a Canadian citizen.

To my way of thinking, citizenship does not apply to new Canadians alone. Citizenship affects those who were born here as much as those who recently became

Canadians and those individuals who will choose to become Canadians in the future.

Frankly, Canadian citizenship gives everyone, without exception, the same rights and responsibilities. Citizenship is not limited to the ceremony in which the oath of allegiance is taken, nor is it confined to our knowledge of Canadian history and our system of government.

The oath of citizenship reflects the commitment of Canadians to upholding their citizenship and working for a better society. Acceptance of Canadian citizenship as signified by the oath also acknowledges that Canada has a strong and rich history and heritage.

This brings me to the amendment to the oath of citizenship in the Citizenship Act proposed by my colleague. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, as I read it, would remove a strong link with Canada's heritage. The amendment, if accepted, would be an important symbolic change and I believe would not have wide public support.

Some of my colleagues have spoken and will speak to the divisiveness of such an amendment. Others will speak to this proposed amendment as being nothing more than a tinkering with the Citizenship Act when it would be more appropriate to have an open discussion and review of the act.

I wholeheartedly share these points of view and I am sure that on these points I stand in good company with many Canadians who share the same sentiments.

An open review of the Citizenship Act as a whole could be dealt with at the committee level and witnesses could be heard from all regions of Canada and from different groups within Canada.

• (1540)

This would be an infinitely more satisfactory way of dealing with the oath of citizenship rather than following a course set out by a very limited private members' bill, regardless of how well it is intended by its sponsor.

When you get down to brass tacks, citizenship is apparent in what we do every day to enrich our lives and those of others. One thinks for example of the Cubs, the Brownies, the Guides and Scouts who with their leaders come together with their committees and communities to clean up stretches of rivers.