

*Tribute***THE LATE HON. RICHARD BENNETT HATFIELD***[Translation]*

Hon. Gerald S. Merrithew (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the frailty of human life on this planet has been forcibly brought to our attention with the passing of a truly great Canadian, Senator and former New Brunswick Premier, Richard Bennett Hatfield. Just past his sixtieth birthday, Senator Hatfield crammed a lot into his six decades on earth.

Not only were Richard Hatfield and I about the same age, he had a profound effect on me during the last 20 years of my life, although I knew him much longer than that. Having served with him in the New Brunswick legislature for 12 years, ten as a minister and six as his Government House Leader, our political association continued after I moved into federal politics.

Few people were very close to Richard Hatfield, and this includes most members of his Cabinet. Over the 17 years in which he was premier of the province, wisely he avoided close friendships with his ministers, knowing that he could possibly have to fire them at some point in the future. His leadership style was certainly unique. Definitely not a "hands-on" premier, on a daily basis, he generally left ministers to guide their own departmental activities but was always available to support them if they got into trouble with the caucus, the party, or the public. Many a minister felt the reassurance of his formidable presence when it was needed and they were most appreciative of that. He did have a lot of friends and loved to entertain the backbenchers, (the private members,) the media, and friends in the cultural and political field.

Richard Hatfield was the consummate politician. He lived and breathed politics and really did not work very long in any other field of endeavour. He was extremely good at the game of politics! While no other Progressive Conservative government in New Brunswick governed more than two successive terms, Premier Hatfield led the party to four successive election victories covering the period 1970 to 1987. For those who know the politics and the history of politics in my province, this was no mean feat! With remarkable aplomb, he built the party from its Saint John River Valley base to every county in the province.

Richard Hatfield demonstrated throughout his life that he understood well the aspirations of the franco-phone community in his province.

Richard Hatfield worked very hard to ensure that his party be representative of all parts of New Brunswick.

[English]

I sincerely hope that Richard Bennett Hatfield will not be remembered solely for the 1987 defeat of the party. That would be a most unfair assessment for a man who engineered a whole series of spectacular victories at the polls. Even after the loss in 1987, it is my view that while the electorate voted against the man, they did not hate the man. Besides, how many parties in history in any part of Canada won five successive election victories?

Perhaps unorthodox in ways, certainly enigmatic, the best term I can think of to describe Richard Hatfield is an enlightened social reformer. In many ways his reform of the political system was years ahead of that in other jurisdictions.

He believed strongly in social reform and instituted changes in family law, judicial reform and child welfare legislation.

Much has been written about Hatfield's so-called special interests, his love of travel, his love of cooking and good food, late night discussions with his host of friends, his penchant for politics—anybody's politics—and his ever-present fight with weight control. Above all of this, he had a tremendous love for his country and for its people.

Richard Bennett Hatfield is now gone from our midst. New Brunswick and Canada have lost a man whose passionate Canadian views were legendary. He loved his country with an unparalleled passion. Above all, he desperately wished to hold his beloved country together in this time of travail. Alas, he would have been able to make a major contribution to our national constitutional debate if he had been spared.

[Translation]

His most durable legacy will be his contribution to national unity. Ever since the 1971 Victoria Conference and until his very last day as senator, Richard Hatfield has pursued national unity with an unrelenting determination and a firm resolve.