

Private Members' Business

could give for special local events in our own constituencies.

I have underlined many opportunities for celebrating our heritage. As Canadians we truly have many reasons to celebrate in this beautiful and bountiful land.

Therefore I close by again thanking the hon. member for presenting to us this renewed opportunity to consider the best manner in which to set aside a time for celebrating our national heritage and I salute him for having this opportunity for us to discuss it.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, first let me commend the hon. member on his excellent initiative in introducing his Private Members' Bill, C-288, concerning heritage day.

Also I would like to take this opportunity to thank the speaker before me, the member on the government side for her wonderful words of appreciation of Canada and her appreciation for a day when Canadians can celebrate their heritage.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to ask me where I would like most to live in all the countries around the world, I would answer very quickly "Canada". Why? As someone who has a heritage other than those who have founded this nation, I have come to the conclusion that this is the land of opportunity.

Canada is where I was given everything that I have: my education, my first job, and the opportunity to bring members of my family together. As well, we have freedom of speech and expression, the freedom to say whatever I would like as an individual without fear of someone watching me from behind, or undermining everything I say.

In a way, Canada to me is a heaven on earth. I am sure it is the same for a lot of people who live in this country, especially those who come from a background other than the founding people. They knew it then and that is why they chose it as a land to settle in.

Mr. Speaker, I have yet to see a bill that has been introduced in the House where there has been so much consensus around it. As the member who introduced this bill has indicated, there has been discussion on this issue as far back as 1974 when it was discussed on October 15.

Also, on March 18, 1975, the then member for Winnipeg North brought up the issue. On April 10, 1975, there was a report from the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs where this issue was also discussed. Discussions took place on April 22, 1975, February 13, 1976, and October 31, 1977.

On March 17, 1978, the then Liberal member for Windsor—Walkerville, Mr. MacGuigan, the member for Hillsborough, as well as the member for Winnipeg North Centre, representatives of the three political parties in this House, spoke in favour of a heritage day.

As the hon. member has indicated, on May, 1980, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce spoke on the issue. On September 4, 1983, November 2, 1983, May 15, 1984, February 16, 1987, April 7, 1987 and December 18. Throughout these many years, there has been a discussion back and forth on the issue of Heritage Day.

• (1730)

We already recognize one day in February as Heritage Day. On that day, as the member who spoke before me indicated, the minister of the government who is responsible for multiculturalism makes a statement. There are other celebrations in other parts of the country.

Only in the province of Alberta do they actually celebrate a heritage day and look at it as a holiday. That is every first Monday in August.

I truly believe that recognizing this Heritage Day is a step forward. There is no question about it, but there are those who are opposed to declaring Heritage Day as a holiday because of the fact that we might lose one day of activity. I suggest that it is the opposite. I think productivity would improve if we had a day of rest in February, when we can reflect on what we have here in Canada as a country, when we can celebrate our differences as a people and when we can appreciate what has been given to us by this land and by this society as a whole.

I have done a little bit of research in order to discover productivity what happens around the world and if we are alone in trying to celebrate a heritage day in February.

In February, Mr. Speaker, for your information and for the information of the House, several nations celebrate their independence, constitution, or their founding. For instance, Sri Lanka celebrates Independence Day in February. Mexico has what it calls Constitution Day. Tanzania celebrates its founding. In Iran, they have a national day. Japan also celebrates its founding, and the