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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

SPEECH DELIVERED BY SEAN O'SULLIVAN

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ON INTRODUCTION OF BILL C-373, AN ACT TO PROVIDE

FOR THE RECOGNITION OF THE BEAVER AS A SYMBOL

OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA

HOUSE OF COMMONS, FEBRUARY 21, 1975

Mr. Speaker:

My first words in support of Bill C-373 must be those of appreciation to honourable members from all parts of this House who have kindly given the necessary unanimous consent for its presentation at this time.

In asking that it be called for debate, I hope to indicate my sense of concern that we quickly correct an oversight of history by recognizing the Beaver as one of the symbols of the sovereignty of our Country.

In the hope that the favourable and co-operative attitude demonstrated so far towards Bill C-373 will continue today, and that honourable members will advance this legislation I shall limit my remarks, although one could certainly speak at length in support of this positive and non-partisan measure.

Simply, I propose to explain just what this Bill attempts to do, to correct some mistaken impressions about it and then to entrust its fate to the wisdom of this House.

Bill C-373 seeks to give official recognition to a fact of our Canadian heritage, for it is a straightforward fact that the Beaver is one of our national symbols. This Bill neither creates a new national symbol nor does it replace or in any way lessen the Maple Leaf, the Coat of Arms, or any other symbol of our heritage.

Every man and woman holds dear certain memories and nostalgic reminders of his and her country which cannot be erased easily, if at all. These ties of home are among the most natural and enduring of feelings. In nature each creature has its own habitat, which it protects with a fierce love. In Canada, where people from so many different lands and cultures have come together, what can we all identify with if not those symbols adopted by Canadian pioneers and taken to our hearts, even if we be newcomers to this Nation? Search deep into the history of Canada and you will find that the strong, tireless and industrious Beaver has always been symbolic of our northern homeland.

The Beaver was a clan sign for Indian tribes and was carved on their totem poles.

The beaver was on the coat of arms of the Hudson's Bay Company, and as long ago as 1632 was used in Canadian heraldry when Charles the First approved its use for Sir William Alexander, the founder of Nova Scotia.

The beaver was on our first Canadian stamp to have a picture.

The beaver is depicted on our coins; and on the Coat of Arms of the City of Montreal.

The beaver was shown on the regimental insignia of no less than fourteen regiments of our Canadian forces; it was well-known to those young Canadians who fought in the cataclysmic wars of the twentieth century. Fighting far from home these men were at the Somme, at Vimy Ridge, at Passchendaele in the First World War. Some of them took part in the liberation

of Europe in the Second World War and some were in Korea.

The Beaver was on the badges of Lt. Brilliant and Cpl. Kaeble, both holders of the Victoria Cross won in France in 1918, and both members of the famous Royal 22nd Regiment.

The Beaver was prominent in the posters urging Canadians to buy victory bonds in that defence of our freedom.

The beaver was on the collar badges of the Royal Canadian Regiment whose proud motto is Pro Patria.

The Beaver was on the Calgary Highlanders' badge, when they valiantly put down at Dunkirk in 1944.

And so on it goes, to remind all of us, to quote Frederick Bodsworth: ^{Naturalist} "It is no coincidence that our national emblem is not a rising sun, a star, a hammer, a sickle, or a dragon, but a Beaver and a maple leaf."

The Beaver and the Maple Leaf. They go together, and to give due recognition to them both, as symbols of our land and its heritage, in no way lessens the importance of either.

There are those, Mr. Speaker, who might argue that we should forget the Beaver as a symbol, now that Oregon has it as a state animal and New York State has a private bill before its legislature to do likewise. Obviously, we cannot prevent others from sharing our esteem for this animal as an emblem, any more than we could stop others from calling the Maple Leaf their own. However

all the flattery by imitation in the world cannot change the feelings of Canadians; feelings so strong that they have become a fact of Canadian life. For us, the Beaver is not just an animal to be placed on the back of a flag like Oregon's, or declared a state animal as might New York, but a symbol of national significance, well-founded in history and honoured by generations.

I am, of course, hopeful that the legislators of New York State will find a more suitable alternative to the beaver as their state animal. The sponsor of that proposal, (a proposal of similar status to a private member's bill here) has even held back on his motion to see what action the Canadian Parliament will take. I think that this courtesy on the part of Senator Bernard Smith demonstrates the friendship which exists between our two countries, and the respect with which that neighbouring state will view our feelings and sense of heritage.

Those feelings are indeed strong. Since introducing this Bill, I have received hundreds of signatures of support, in the form of letters and petitions. Other members have indicated a similar favourable response from their constituents. What's more, officials of C.B.C. radio estimate that over 13,000 Canadians, from every province, both territories, and in both official languages have written to Barbara Frum and Alan Maitland of the "As It Happens" programme to support their contention that the Beaver is a Canadian symbol, and should be recognized as such.

This leads me, Mr. Speaker, to briefly touch upon another question that has been raised in connection with this Bill. As is evidenced by my questions and speeches in this House, I recognize and share the concerns of Canadians everywhere about the pressing economic problems we all face. However great these problems may be, I do not agree with some that our search for their solution should automatically exclude discussion of other subjects.

For, I would submit that a nation's true strength is most tested, and its unity most endangered, when individuals grow fearful of the future because of economic unrest. At such times of stress, it is all too easy to become overly introspective and it is a common human failing to place blame on those nearest at hand.

Immediate concern for economic problems can blind us to our long-term goals and aspirations. The suspicion and mistrust which result can make us forget those greater things we have in common.

It is precisely in such difficult times that Canadians need to be reminded of those things we share, and of those common strengths which will ultimately see us through troubled times.

To an individual, to a nation of individuals, there must be more to life than just financial facts and figures. There must be things that touch one's soul and heart and emotions, if we are to be complete persons and a whole nation.

That is the importance of symbols, and their special importance in times such as ours.

That is the importance of this Bill and the special importance of the Beaver to Canadians in our history, today, and for tomorrow.

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