

# 44TH PARLIAMENT, 1ST SESSION



## House of Commons Debates OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2023

### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

#### Polish Heritage Month

**Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)**

moved:

That:

- (a) the House recognize the significant contributions Polish Canadians have made to Canadian society, economy, politics and culture, and the importance of educating Canadians of all ages about the core values that Polish Canadians have imparted to the strength and diversity of Canada; and
- (b) in the opinion of the House, the government should reflect upon Polish heritage for future generations and designate May 3 of every year as Polish Constitution Day, and the month of May, every year, as Polish Heritage Month.

He said: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Etobicoke Centre, for seconding this motion. I know that he has a large Polish Canadian community in his riding.

*Witam. Dziękuję.*

I stand before everyone today with a heart full of pride and gratitude, as we embark on a significant journey together. Today, I propose a celebration of heritage, a recognition of history and a dedication to unity. I stand and ask for everyone's support to

declare May to be Polish heritage month and to designate May 3 as Polish constitution day in our great nation of Canada.

Motion No. 75 transcends mere acknowledgement of the historical bonds connecting Canada and Poland. It also serves as a heartfelt tribute to the flourishing Polish Canadian community, which is celebrated for its substantial contributions to our nation.

The historical roots of Polish immigration to Canada reach back to as early as 1752, when the first documented Polish immigrant set foot on Canadian soil. Today, the Polish Canadian community numbers over a million strong. Polish migration to Canada has a long history, with the earliest waves of immigrants arriving in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Many Polish immigrants sought better economic opportunities and escaped political unrest in their homeland. The subsequent waves of migrations occurred after World War II and under the Communist regime in Poland. These historical events shaped the size and composition of the Polish Canadian community.

The Canadian Polish community is widespread across Canada, with significant concentrations in cities such as my hometown of Mississauga, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Windsor, Calgary and Edmonton, just to name a few.

According to the most recent census data, in 2021, there were approximately 1.1 million people of Polish descent in Canada, making up close to 3% of the total population. These statistics provide some insights into the distribution and growth of the Polish community within the country. Their valour, unwavering determination and tireless efforts spanning 271 years stand as a testament to their unwavering commitment to enriching our nation with the essence of Polish culture, a robust work ethic, deep faith and unparalleled resilience. The profound impact of our Polish Canadian community on Canada's social, cultural, political and economic landscape cannot be overstated.

Their dedication and perseverance have left an indelible mark on our nation. From the arts and music to entrepreneurship and academia, the Polish Canadian community has made boundless contributions to our society.

The proposition to designate May 3 as Polish constitution day and dedicate the entire month of May to Polish heritage goes beyond symbolism.

Like Canadians, Polish people have ardently pursued freedom and democracy, bringing Europe its first modern constitution on May 3, 1791; it is the second oldest, after the U.S. Constitution.

On the walls here in this Parliament building, one will see all the names of the MPs. To find the first member of Parliament of Polish descent, one must go all the way back to the first Parliament of Canada, in 1867. Alexandre-Édouard Kierzkowski, MP 1867, was born in Poland, immigrated to Canada and represented the St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, riding in Canada's first Parliament.

Today, in our 44th Parliament, we have a number of MPs of Polish descent. This includes my colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who is the chair of the Canada-Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group.

This motion is a tangible and deeply sincere expression of our gratitude for the remarkable achievements and contributions of the Polish Canadian community. This proposal represents our heartfelt homage to their history, a celebration of their present and an inspiration for their future.

I have had many opportunities to speak with countless numbers of my Canadian Polish constituents about their immigrant story, including friend and Olympic coach Bogdan Poprawski and my friend Ziggy Pigiel. My good friend and neighbour, John Solarski, has enriched my life, I can tell everyone, with his stories of Polish businesses, such as his dad's pharmacy in Roncesvalles, or sports, such as the Polonia baseball team he coaches. From his words, I can feel the great pride he has as a Canadian of Polish heritage.

All Poles feel joy when their Canadian-born children learn new Polish words, like *babcia*, which means grandmother, or *Dziadek*, which means grandfather; or when their kids ask about what their grandparents' and parents' early lives were like; or when children research for themselves their Polish history. They are truly celebrating their past.

It is my hope that Motion No. 75 will provide another opportunity for the community and families to recount their lives on the farm and in the village, their ancestors, the food, the traditions, the language, their journey to Canada and much more. Despite being half a world away from their original homeland, in some ways those in the Polish community are more connected to it than when they left. Today, their new-found heritage grows through their children and grandchildren as Polish Canadians.

Keeping Polish culture and heritage alive does not only happen at home. It also happens in the broader community through cultural centres, churches and schools. It happens through organizations like the Canadian Polish Congress, the Polish Teachers Association, Polish scouts, the Canadian Polish Business Association and veterans associations.

We have great festivals, like the Mississauga Polish Day festival, whose founders and leaders are Anna Gulbinski and Anna Mazurkiewicz, and the Chopin Society festival. I want to thank Henry and Anna Lopinsky for sharing their love of music. There is Mississauga's Carassauga festival, with its Polish-Canadian director Marek Ruta. That is just to name a few.

Allow me to highlight Canada's strong ties with Poland and its representatives here. I want to thank Polish Ambassador Witold Dzielski and the embassy for their support of the Polonia community in Canada and for this motion. Ambassador Dzielski is no stranger to Parliament or to Mississauga, a city that is home to one of the largest Polish populations in all of Canada and has a mayor of Polish descent, Mayor Bonnie Crombie. The community organizes various events and initiatives to celebrate Polish heritage and to promote cross-cultural understanding.

I am so proud to represent Mississauga East—Cooksville, as it has the largest Polish community in all of Canada. Also located in Mississauga East—Cooksville is the John Paul II Polish Cultural Center and The Maximilian Kolbe Foundation. The Maximilian

Kolbe Foundation was founded in 1982 and is the heart of the Polish community in Mississauga and the GTA. It established a cultural community centre for the Poles in Mississauga. After years of hard work and collecting funds, the centre was opened in the fall of 1994. Both the foundation and the centre are closely connected with the largest Polish church, the St. Maximilian Kolbe parish, in Canada, and we thank Father Bogdan Osiecki for his service.

Adjacent to the church is where the John Paul II Polish Cultural Center building is situated. The centre consists of a concert hall, stage, library, bowling room and club. Almost every day it hosts various cultural events, as well as classes for education and integration for adults, children, youth and seniors. It serves as a central gathering place for the Polish community in Mississauga, offering various programs and events that celebrate Polish culture, including language classes, art exhibitions, music performances and dance groups like the Radosc-Joy vocal dance group and the Lechowia Polish Canadian Folk Dance Company.

The Canadian Polish Congress is an organization that acts as a voice for the Polish-Canadian community, advocating for its rights and interests. It has shown great leadership in advocating for and championing this motion, and I thank the congress. I want to give a big thanks and shout-out to its national president, John Tomczak; the first vice-president, Dominik Roszak; board member and friend, the district president, Leszek Blaszcak from Mississauga; and the entire board of directors. I thank the congress. I also thank former Toronto councillor Chris Korwin-Kuczynski for his support.

The Congress represents the Polish community's interests in the Government of Canada by providing a strong national voice in the decision-making around our government's policies and by promoting the rights of Polish Canadians to full and equal participation in all aspects of Canadian society. The motion before us is in large part due to their advocacy.

The Canadian Polish Congress promotes awareness of and respect for Poland's history and heritage and the contribution of Poles to the culture of Canada and the world. We thank them. The Congress is a unifying force, coordinating and supporting Polish-Canadian organizations, so those community organizations provide a wide range of programs, events and services to support the local Polish population. I want to commend the Congress for its focus on youth in particular and for hosting many youth leadership opportunities, such as the Polonia leadership summit we just had here two weeks ago on Parliament Hill.

Also, I thank the Polish Teachers Association in Canada for its mission to teach the Polish language in as many Canadian schools as possible, with teachers such as Irena Urbaniak and many others. Polish schools in Mississauga play a crucial role in preserving Polish language skills, culture and heritage among Polish-Canadian children. These schools provide language instruction, history lessons and cultural activities to ensure the transmission of Polish traditions to the younger generation.

Many of our Polonia youth are involved in Polish scouting in Canada. In my riding of Mississauga, it is one of the great ways in which hundreds of junior and senior scouts

learn Polish culture, Polish language and Polish scouting traditions while exploring Canada's great outdoors through all seasons, including the winter.

Polish Canadians have always rolled up their sleeves with a vigorous entrepreneurial spirit. I thank the Canadian Polish Business Association and its president and CEO, Mr. Eric Szustak, for their tireless work to enhance the business climate in the Polish-Canadian community and expand international trade. The ties between Poland and Canada have only grown stronger, and local small and medium businesses run in the Polish community continue to thrive, adding jobs and growth to our country.

Canada and Poland exemplify solidarity. We have continued, are continuing and will continue to stand together. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to also extend a heartfelt thanks to our Polish Canadians for Poland's unwavering support to Ukraine during these difficult times.

The Polish community has integrated into the Canadian cultural landscape by preserving Polish traditions, organizing cultural events, contributing to various sectors and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Polish festivals, food, music and arts have become part of the multicultural fabric of Canadian society, enriching the cultural diversity of the country.

I wholeheartedly implore members to support this endeavour. I call upon each member to join hands in making this motion a reality to pay homage to the remarkable legacy of the Polish-Canadian community and to reaffirm the enduring partnership between Canada and Poland. Let us, as a united House, recognize its invaluable contributions and celebrate its enduring spirit.

*Niech żyje Polska. Niech żyje Kanada.*

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):**

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague and commend him for his initiative. We know that Polish culture is extremely important in our society. The same holds true in Quebec. Quebec is endowed with a strong Polish cultural component. In fact, my favourite performer, Lydia Képinski, is of Polish origin. If members ever want to dance, I encourage them to go see one of her shows. They will not be disappointed.

On May 3, Poland celebrates Constitution Day to commemorate the promulgation of its Constitution in 1791. On the same day, the Constitution marathon takes place in Warsaw. I know that my colleague, the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, is a superb long-distance runner.

If this important motion passes, would he be interested in organizing a marathon to celebrate Polish culture?

**Mr. Peter Fonseca:**

Madam Speaker, the hon. colleague and I sit together on the finance committee. His words regarding this celebration really relate to freedom, democracy and the first constitution in Europe, which is the second-oldest constitution in the world.

I will say, with respect to the challenge of a marathon, that I will walk with my colleague. We will do it around Parliament Hill the day this passes. I thank my hon. colleague for his support.

Yes, the Polish community has great talent in music and the arts. To know that one of the first parliamentarians of the first Parliament here was from Quebec, from Saint-Hyacinthe, is something we all cherish.

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):**

*Uqaqtittiji*, I did my undergrad at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and I know there was a wonderful Polish community there.

I wonder if the member could respond to what would happen if this motion was not passed.

**Mr. Peter Fonseca:**

Madam Speaker, like in Thunder Bay, at Lakehead and right across our great country, from coast to coast to coast, we have Polish in all of our communities.

I know this House will embrace this motion because all of us support our diversity and our unity. What brings us together is the richness of the many cultures that we have in this great country of Canada. It would mean so much to the Polish community if we were to give them the opportunity to be able to again celebrate May 3 as *Trzeciego Maja*, as they say, which is constitution day, here in Canada, for years to come.

Again, I implore all members to support this motion for the Polish community.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this motion to the House. I have had the opportunity to work with the community. Edmonton is home to a large Polish community. As well, I had a neighbour from the Polish community.

My question is this. During Polish heritage month, what types of activities would the community be looking to host in the month of May?

**Mr. Peter Fonseca:**

Madam Speaker, of course, they are in Edmonton and in all communities right across our great land.

The one thing I did not talk about was the great food. We have pierogi and sausages. I have to say that I love the beer. We have festivals, which are an opportunity to celebrate culture and history and bring everybody together. It is also a time to talk about our democracy and what Poland has brought to Canada.

This motion would be the impetus for bringing the community together in a way to celebrate not only within the community, but to share with others all the great things about Polish heritage and culture. It will be a great time. I look forward to going out with the member and eating some nice pierogi and great Polish sausage.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):**

Madam Speaker, I am joining the debate. I will read the parts of the motion that I want to talk about the most. First is “the importance of educating Canadians of all ages about the core values that Polish Canadians have imparted”. The second part I want to draw the attention of the House to is “the government should reflect upon Polish heritage for future generations”.

I have a Yiddish proverb, as I always do. Yiddish and Polish are very closely connected, as many members know. “I am not asking God for an easier burden; I am asking for broader shoulders”, when I speak with respect to this subject.

The previous member who spoke talked about the wave of immigration to Canada. Those waves were caused by events happening in eastern Europe. From the first partition of Poland in 1772, the member spoke about the constitution, *Trzeciego Maja*, May 3, 1791. It is the second-oldest written constitution in the world. The constitution was then abolished by a future parliament of dubious distinction. The final partition of Poland was in 1795, where Poland disappeared.

Poland's greatest contributions are not institutions and organizations. They are its people; those people all over the world who have fought for freedom in the name of freedom, from the American Revolution to those who came to Canada and built a new life for themselves, but also many who then returned to Poland or to continental Europe and fought in the different wars of independence so that Poland could be free again.

Another thing I want to draw the House's attention to is the Statute of Kalisz, signed in 1264 by another great Pole, Bolesław the Pious. The people of Poland were the first people to give legal rights to the Jewish people in continental Europe, so I want to draw the attention of the House to that as well.

One other great Pole I want to recognize is Zbigniew Gondek. At 99 years old, he passed away. He was a Polish veteran of World War II. He fought at Montecassino, earned the *Virtuti Militari*, Poland's highest military decoration. He was a great Polish Canadian.



Another Pole I want to draw the attention of the House to is Jan Karski. Jan Karski wrote *Story of a Secret State: My Report to the World*, where he described the horrors of the crimes committed by the Nazis, and by the Soviet Union of course. He was born in Łódź in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I. He was a proud Pole who fought Red Army soldiers because the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, invaded Poland with its allies in Nazi Germany and crushed Poland's armies after a few weeks. He was made a POW and deported somewhere into Siberia. In his book, he tells the story of the abuse he suffered at the hands of Soviet soldiers. He was also later captured by the Gestapo as a courier for the Polish Underground. In his book, he also relates the story of meeting the U.S. president and relating all the crimes that were committed by Soviet and Nazi soldiers against Jewish people, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians and many others.

I have the book and I want to read from it because there is mention of Canada. Jan Karski had never come to Canada, but when he was being smuggled through Spain, his handlers told him this, and I am going to read from it: "He turned to the conductor and slapped his chest. 'Canada', he said triumphantly. 'Canada', his son echoed. 'Canada', I added weakly. 'Bravo, bravo', the conductor beamed at us." It was obvious then, if they got captured, to say they were Canadians because Canadians in Spain would be deported to Britain and Britain was their destination of choice.

I wanted to make sure that I mentioned that, when speaking of Jan Karski who was one of those great Polish patriots.

Another person I want to mention is Captain Witold Pilecki, who is credited as the only man to have volunteered to go to Auschwitz. It takes a certain type of human to volunteer to go to a concentration camp. He spent 947 miserable nights there so that he could then relate it back to the Polish Underground and the Polish Underground could then inform the western powers, including Canadians, of the crimes being committed against the Jewish people, Poles, Ukrainians, Slovaks and all those who opposed the Nazi regime.

Witold Pilecki fought in the Polish-Lithuanian war. He fought in the Polish-Soviet war. Like many Poles of his era, he was actually born in Russia. His family had been deported from Vilna to east Karelia, and that is where he was from. He is also one of many Polish Underground members who would be later murdered by the Soviet Union in show trials. He was arrested in May 1947, sent to Mokotow prison, which many Poles know very well. After a show trial that lasted barely a few weeks, he was sentenced to death and he was executed, as were his so-called co-conspirators. Many Poles remember him as one of those great freedom fighters.

I want to mention one thing about those events. Among the Poles in Canada, the Katyn massacre is remembered as a great crime committed by communists in the Soviet Union. Secret order number 001177 was issued by the politburo for the execution and murder of 25,568 people. They were called victims, but these were Polish generals, soldiers, members of the clergy and professors, proud Poles who were murdered by the Soviet Union. The truth only came out in the 1990s and was then shared more broadly



with the world. It is one of those crimes that the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union, have never been made to pay for, with more public criticism of it.

Closer to home, there was mention of the first Polish member of Parliament, the member for St. Hyacinthe from 1867 to 1870, Alexandre-Édouard Kierzkowski. Those at Hansard do not have to worry; I have written down all the names. If they want to get the notes from me afterward, they can figure out how to spell them correctly.

Some of the community centres were mentioned. I want to draw attention to Maximilian Kolbe. He is a very well-known priest who was in Auschwitz and gave himself in place of a Jewish man. He volunteered himself to be executed before somebody else. That is why so many community centres are named after Maximilian Kolbe. It is also why if someone Polish names their first son Maximilian, the way I did, they will forever be asked the question by other Poles, "Did you name him after Maximilian Kolbe?" It takes a special type of person to volunteer themselves for death for a member of another faith community, because it is right thing to do. That is their calling in life.

The Canadian Polish Congress is a long-running institution. I said I would not talk about organizations, but I want to talk about one gentlemen from this organization, Wladyslaw Lizon, who was a member of Parliament, a Conservative who represented this place proudly. He is a former president of the congress. I also want to note Sir Casimir Stanislaus Gzowski, who was Lieutenant Governor of Ontario between 1896 and 1897. He was personally knighted by Queen Victoria.

To get back to more history, the Trial of the Sixteen is a well-known event about Polish underground leaders who were invited to Moscow after the war officially ended for western European powers, although not so much for Polish people in eastern Europe. In the Trial of the Sixteen, the Polish underground leaders were kidnapped by the NKVD, and most members were then either executed or imprisoned for long lengths of time.

Closer to recent history, the Solidarity movement is well remembered. Many members have family members who were in Solidarity, some whose parents were arrested. My father was a member of Solidarity, but he was never arrested. He did leave Poland a week before my younger brother was born, much to my mom's infuriation.

With Solidarity, everyone thinks of Lech Wałęsa, but we should really draw attention to the woman who kicked off the protests. Anna Walentynowicz was fired five months before her retirement because the communists could not stand that she was simply drawing attention to the fact that people were stealing from and mistreating the workers. She was tired of the communists oppressing the trade union workers. She deserves credit for the kickoff of the protests, which eventually led to martial law in Poland. Many of us in my generation were made to leave during that time period.

I want to talk very briefly about the new brotherhood we have between Poles and Ukrainians, because I think it stretches beyond just the region. It stretches to the diaspora communities in Canada.

For centuries, hundreds and hundreds of years, Poles and Ukrainians have not always gotten along. We are the same ethnic group. We have a different language. We mostly share the same faiths. However, never before has there been such a march of darkness in eastern Europe, where people are struggling and fighting for their own freedoms. Now two people who historically have fought wars and have done terrible things to each other are standing side by side.

I have a Ukrainian intern. I have hosted them in years past. I want to say this, after she gave me a book and I got to read a bit more about Ukrainian history: Without a free Ukraine, there is no free Poland, and without a free Poland, there is no free Ukraine.

I will draw the attention of the House to this, because I know my time is running short. I did get in my Yiddish proverb. The Polish national anthem, *Dąbrowski's Mazurka*, has two lines in it that speak to what Polish people truly care about. The two lines, in English, are:

Poland has not yet perished,  
So long as we still live.

The most important contribution Poles have made is the people, the freedom fighters, who have fought for freedom wherever we have been in the world.

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):**

Madam Speaker, before getting to the heart of the matter, I too want to join my colleagues in expressing my full solidarity with the artisans from TVA who were laid off as part of this restructuring. People are now unemployed, the national news media is in crisis, and a culture is under threat. We must take action and be proactive by translating solidarity and compassion into meaningful action.

I am pleased to rise in the House today with my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois to support Motion No. 75 to establish Polish heritage month. I am just as pleased that the first Polish person to sit in this Parliament where, in my opinion, we should no longer be sitting, was one of my predecessors. He was there when this Parliament was first created in 1867. The first Polish member of the House was Alexandre-Édouard Kierzkowski, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe in 1867. That makes me especially pleased to rise to speak today. Mr. Kierzkowski was once the MNA for Verchères in the National Assembly of Quebec with the Parti Rouge, a successor to the Parti Patriote. It is a movement that really resonates with my republican values.

The Bloc Québécois would like to highlight the exceptional contribution made by Quebecers of Polish origin to Quebec society and to Quebec culture. One cannot say for certain that the history of Polish Canadians is the same as that of Quebecers of Polish origin, particularly since the Quiet Revolution and the adoption of the Charter of the French Language, precisely because of the special bond that unites Quebecers of all

origins and that makes our identity our common history. I am talking, of course, about our common language, French.

It is interesting to note that the first Polish immigrant to settle in Canada arrived before the British conquest. He was a fur merchant from Gdansk named Dominik Barcz. I hope the the Polish Quebeckers and Polish Canadians who are glued to their screens right now will forgive my occasional mispronunciation. Polish is not my first, second or third language. I actually do not speak Polish, so I apologize for that. As I was saying, this gentleman settled in Montreal in 1752. He was joined there in 1757 by Charles Blaskowitz, a deputy surveyor-general of lands. New France was therefore the first home for Polish people in Canada.

The Bloc Québécois is pleased to join its voice to that of the author of the motion to acknowledge the history of great Quebeckers who are of Polish origin, such as Wanda Stachiewicz, to whom we owe the founding in 1943 of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in Canada. This was a very important contribution. Quebec and the Quebec Polish community has strong institutions, such as the Institut canadien-polonais du bien-être, a health institution whose first centre was inaugurated by René Lévesque in 1966 when he was the health minister. Then, a new centre was inaugurated in 1984 by Dr. Camille Laurin, the father of the Charter of the French Language, when he was health minister. The ethnolinguistic nature of the institute, its independence and its specific mission for Quebeckers of Polish descent was recognized by the National Assembly of Quebec in May 2004. Quebec has been recognizing this immense contribution for a long time.

The destiny and life stories of Polish immigrants have also left their mark on Quebec's culture and literature. In her famous novel *Ces enfants d'ailleurs*, the great storyteller Arlette Cousture, author of some of Quebec's favourite novels, introduced us to Élisabeth, Jan and Jerzy, who, with their parents Tomasz Pawulski, a history teacher, and Zofia Pawulska, a musician, flee the war in a Europe so sad that “even the birds have fallen silent”. That is a beautiful turn of phrase. In 1939, they travelled from Krakow, Poland, to Quebec, “near a large river, in the colourful [and welcoming] city of Montreal”. That is how it was described.

We are pleased to be a part of designating May 3 as Polish constitution day and the month of May each year as Polish heritage month. Every year we celebrate the national holiday of May 3, which commemorates the day the constitution was adopted, that is, May 3, 1791. It was signed 20 years after Poland was partitioned by Russia and Germany, which, as we know, was a tragic event. It is one of Europe's first modern constitutions.

At least the hereditary monarchy it enshrined was a constitutional monarchy. Inspired by the French Revolution, the constitution ushered in free elections. It was based on the spirit of the Enlightenment and founded on the principles of reason, freedom and the rule of law. At the time, it also stood as a symbol of hope for the eventual restoration of the country's sovereignty. We hold these same concepts dear. Throughout the ages, May 3 has remained an inspiration to Poles in their quest for independence.

During the same period, our ancestors in Quebec were just beginning to experiment with the parliamentary system as the first elections were held and Quebec's first Parliament met in 1792. French Canadians, and later Quebeckers, have also been seeking political freedom ever since. As we tirelessly pursue our own quest for national independence, Quebeckers will joyfully draw inspiration every May 3 from the resilience and commitment of their fellow Quebeckers of Polish heritage.

I would just like to mention one other point. By referring to “Polish Canadians”, the text of the motion portrays Polish people in Quebec and Canada in a way that does not reflect reality. It suggests that the Polish diaspora forms a uniform community across Canada. That attitude is not surprising, of course, since it is in line with English Canada's multiculturalist vision, which depicts Canada's population as a vast cultural mosaic that is supposedly not influenced by the nations that exist within Canada. However, Quebec and Canada's respective national realities have absolutely had an impact on how successive waves of immigrants have been welcomed over the decades.

The linguistic and cultural factor is enough to preclude equating the journey of Polish Quebeckers with that of Polish Canadians. In fact, they do not integrate into the same society. Immigrant populations that settle in Canada outside Quebec integrate into Canadian society, in other words, into the English-speaking majority. Immigrant populations that settle in Quebec integrate into Quebec society, that is, into the French-speaking majority. It is quite possible, and even desirable, to recognize the cultural heritage of Polish people in both Quebec and Canada.

Simply put, to do so does not require that we assimilate Quebeckers and Canadians into a single, solitary nation, as the motion erroneously seems to suggest. We intend to support the motion while highlighting as much as possible the special contribution Polish Quebeckers have made to Quebec society and the key role that the French language has played in their successful integration.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP):**

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased today to rise to speak to Motion No. 75 regarding Polish heritage month.

It is no secret that in Edmonton and right across Treaty 6 land and much of the Prairies, Polish Canadians have not only found peace and prosperity, but have also found, in many ways, the steps, materials and time to build relations with so many other groups. It is a great day, particularly for me, to speak to the unique history Canada has, a history that has welcomed newcomers as early as the 1600s and that also includes when the first Poles arrived in the 1880s. This has been something I think most Canadians may not be aware of, and I think it is incumbent upon all of us to remind them that there are so many folks, including the great many Polish Canadians right across the Prairies, who have contributed to the very early building of Canada. This history is what so many Canadians may take for granted in this very difficult time for our country. When it first started to be built, there is no question that many of those people sacrificed much of

what they needed, and made sacrifices with respect to whom they brought with them. There was also immense work and sacrifice to rebuild and restart, coming from so far away.

Canada is a relatively new country to the west. Many indigenous people, including my family, have been here for millennia. In 1867, the Crown, by way of Queen Victoria, asserted jurisdiction over huge swathes of land here in Canada. Indigenous people took the opportunity to find peace and prosperity with our Crown partners by way of treaty, and it was not until the question of treaty, and particularly the historic numbered treaties, was answered that other folks could come to Canada. The Crown had to do a really big job. It had to delineate who could be present in North America, at that time known as “British North America”. British North America, for a long period, did not occupy much of western Canada, so western Canada was devoid of many persons of European descent other than those who entered the fur trade.

Later, in 1876, Treaty 6, on which land most Polish Canadians now find themselves, was signed. It was signed at Fort Pitt and Fort Carlton on the North Saskatchewan River. That treaty is so important for Canadians and, in particular, members of Parliament. We must understand how important these treaties are in order to better understand why Canadians are here, why we have the great mosaic we have today and why we celebrate and lift up Polish Canadians and so many others. It was in 1876 that our indigenous ancestors and many Canadian forebears came together at those places on the North Saskatchewan River, and we signed an agreement. I will read a portion of Treaty 6, and I hope many members can take an opportunity later today or in the many months to come to read some of the historic treaties here in Canada, because they directly relate to how many peoples, including Polish Canadians, found themselves in our Prairies.

Treaty 6, in the preamble, states:

that it is the desire of Her Majesty to open up for settlement, immigration and such other purposes as to Her Majesty may seem meet, a tract of country bounded and described as hereinafter mentioned, and to obtain the consent thereto of Her Indian subjects inhabiting the said tract, and to make a treaty and arrange with them, so that there may be peace and good will between them and Her Majesty.

Today, indigenous people right across our country, here on Turtle Island, continue to lift up and acknowledge our obligations to treaty, and one of those obligations is to continue to ensure that those seeking peace, those seeking freedom and those seeking prosperity can continue to find those things across our country. Those historic treaties are so critical to the founding of this country and continue to be aspects on which many new Canadians rely in order to gain access to Canada.

Noted earlier today were some of the remarkable contributions made not only to this place, the House of Commons, by Polish Canadians, but even to the very founding of the prairie provinces much later on. Today, the diaspora of Polish Canadians is right across our country, and most particularly in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The first Polish immigration to Alberta was in the 1880s, and it followed those historic treaties I mentioned, four years prior to their first settlement.

I grew up with many stories, and with many Ukrainian and Polish folks in the northeast part of rural of Alberta. We traded and discussed. Today, for example, in the indigenous communities in Alberta's northeast, there are still artifacts and stories of those times of first settlement, including the trading of textiles and goods. There is no question that Polish Canadians have done not only so much to ensure the future of the provinces that we enjoy today but also the very hard work it took to ensure that there could be places for all of us to enjoy.

In the city of Edmonton, for example, many Polish Canadians pray and worship at the Holy Rosary church, where many of my own constituents attend and pray in peace. It is by the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Edmonton. There is also The Canadian Polish Research Institute, an immense and extensive library of archives and history. It publishes excellent data that is driven by important research.

In addition to all of that, there is also the Canadian Polish Historical Society, which was established in the city of Edmonton. It is a great Canadian organization with the primary mission to promote the understanding and exploration of Polish history, customs and culture. It gathers and preserves significant historical documents that highlight the achievements of individuals of Polish heritage in Edmonton, and in all of Alberta, maintaining records of many Polish-Canadian immigrants.

I encourage members of the House to look to some of these organizations, in particular the Canadian Polish Historical Society, to see how they have contributed in so many ways to the communities we all know and love, specifically the members' own communities. For Polish Canadians, however, there is much more work to be done to ensure the promotion of their unique language, heritage and culture here in Canada. We have to urge the federal government to not only recognize Polish heritage month but also make sure we go further by ensuring there are tangible resources that promote Polish culture, heritage and learning among all Canadians.

Our country is truly great. It is great because of the qualities of diversity it holds so near and dear to its soul and its being, as manifested in the history of our country, as promised by first nations, Métis and Inuit persons to that of the Crown, to continue to ensure that new Canadians can find peace and prosperity here and that their histories are never forgotten.

Canada is a young country, and because Canada is a young country, it is so important that we lift up and hold sacred those stories that created the foundation that we all enjoy today. Following their immense work of building farms, townhomes and eventually villages and cities, Canada is a prosperous place because of those sacrifices. We need to fully acknowledge the immense contributions of many Canadians in the early settlement period, particularly those of Ukrainian, Polish and other eastern European individuals. Without them, we would not have a Canada.

I am so grateful and honoured to rise in support of Motion No. 75 on behalf of all New Democrats. We need to ensure that we continue to lift up Polish heritage and strive to ensure that their stories, unique perspectives and what they have to offer to Canada can continue for many more years to come. I am excited for us to vote on Motion No. 75

and to, hopefully, see swift and unanimous passage of Polish heritage month here in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.):**

Madam Speaker, as a proud Polish Canadian, I am so honoured to rise in the House of Commons to speak to the rich history, heritage and contributions of Polish Canadians to Canada and to the rich and vibrant multicultural tapestry of our country.

I will begin by giving a heartfelt *dziękuję*, or thanks, to my friend and colleague, the MP for Mississauga East—Cooksville, for bringing forward this historic legislation that will establish the first-ever national Polish heritage month in Canada.

There are 1.1 million Canadians of Polish descent living in Canada in communities in every corner of our country, including major centres such as Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg and Calgary, as well as my community of Windsor—Tecumseh. Polish Canadians are business leaders, teachers, nurses, engineers, electricians, artists and athletes. They drive trucks that deliver goods. They are as resilient and determined as they are generous and kind, and they have been a blessing to this country, just as Canada has been a blessing to us.

The story of Polish immigration to Canada is remarkable, and it provides insight into a community that prides itself on the values of service above self and that prioritizes family, community and faith. The first Polish immigrant, a fur trader, landed in Canada in 1752, but the first wave of Polish immigrants to Canada arrived in 1858 from the Kashub region of northern Poland. They made their home in Renfrew County in the Town of Wilno, the oldest Polish settlement in Canada. For two centuries, subsequent waves of Polish Canadians arrived in Canada, at times to flee conflict and persecution, and always to build a better future for themselves and for their children. The Polish-Canadian story is a quintessential Canadian story, and it is one I want to tell from the perspective of my family and our Polish community in Windsor.

Back in Poland, my father was an electrical engineer and a leader in the solidarity movement, which fought for the rights of workers against the Communist dictatorship. Minutes past midnight on December 13, 1981, martial law was declared, solidarity leaders were rounded up and the police arrived at our door to arrest my father. After his release, Canada offered us safe harbour; in April 1983, we landed at Pearson airport. We spent the first year in Scarborough, in an apartment block with Polish families who arrived the same way we did. My parents took English language courses at George Brown College during the day. My dad laid tile during the evenings to save up for a car and to buy his boys their first Christmas gift in Canada: hockey sticks. Within a year, my dad landed a job in the auto industry in Windsor, so we barrelled down the 401 with hearts full of hope, gratitude and a little trepidation about the road ahead.

For Polish Canadians, like so many immigrants, their gratitude finds expression in an enormous sense and need to give back, to volunteer, to help build our Canada and the



communities that have become our homes. I see the expression of this in my community of Windsor—Essex, which is home to a vibrant community of 12,000 Polish Canadians. The heart of our community has always been Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church on the corner of Langlois and Ellis. It is where my brother and I were quickly enrolled as altar servers. It is where we celebrate *Pasterka*, or midnight mass, and where I married my better half, Shauna.

Saturday mornings were spent attending Polish school at St. Angela Catholic Elementary School, with wonderful teachers, such as Pani Bochus, Pani Zechaluk and sisters Mary and Urszula from the Ursuline Sisters. They made sure we kept the Polish language alive. They taught Polish history, telling us about Copernicus, Marie Curie Sklodowska and the Battle of Grunwald. We learned about Janusz Zurakowski, the test pilot for the Avro Arrow and the first Canadian to break the sound barrier. We learned about Sir Casimir Gzowski, an engineer who helped build the Grand Trunk Railway and the Welland Canal, whom Canada Post put on the five-cent stamp. We learned about Stanley Haidasz, a doctor, a member of Parliament, the first minister of state for multiculturalism and the first senator of Polish descent.

After Sunday morning mass at Holy Trinity, we would stop by Blak's Bakery for fresh rye bread and strudel. Blak's is the oldest bakery in Windsor. It opened in 1918. On Fat Tuesday, there are lineups around the block to get a box of their famous plum-filled paczki. At the same time, we would head over to the European Market or Polish Village Deli to pick up deli meats, pierogi or kielbasa for the barbecue.

Polish Canadians are incredibly industrious and entrepreneurial. In addition to shops and restaurants that brought colour and flavour to Ottawa Street, there were Polish-owned factories that provided thousands of jobs for local residents for generations. Companies like Victoria Steel, White Eagle Press, Gorski Transport and NARMCO started by the Bas, Polewski, Rodzik and Gorski families who gave back to the community in many ways. Just last week, I attended the reopening of the University of Windsor law school building that underwent generational renovations, funded in part by the generous contribution of the Rodzik family.

Indeed, Polish Canadians are known for their honest and hard work as skilled machinists, electricians and engineers. Many rose to positions that shaped local industry especially our vital auto sector. Mr. Puklich as the plant manager of the Windsor-Essex Ford engine plant and Mr. Frank Ewasyshyn as the vice-president of Chrysler are just two examples.

However, outside the business world, the Polish community made tremendous contributions through the arts, culture and sport. Dom Polski, or the Polish Hall, was the hub of cultural life in our community, the place where theatre productions were held, where the Tetry dance ensemble performed, and where weddings and celebrations took place. Dom Polski is also where each year the Polish community throws open its doors, hosting a Polish village that draws thousands of local residents for live music, dancing and great Polish food as part of the annual carrousel of the nation's celebrations.

This year, the Polonia centre sports club celebrated its 40th anniversary, thanks to the dedication of volunteers like Mr. Kowalczykowski and Mr. Sak, who coached players of all ages and backgrounds from across Windsor-Essex.

The incredible spirit of volunteerism drives the Polish community. It is who we are. I am proud to say my parents, Marta and Richard, were part of a long tradition of volunteers and leaders who gave their time and energy to organizations like the Polonia Centre that organized and raised funds for educational and cultural events that brought community together.

The Polonia centre set up annual scholarships for students from all backgrounds attending post-secondary school. An annual fund was set up to help the University of Windsor purchase books for the Leddy Library. That sense of solidarity extends far beyond the community. When natural disasters like floods hit Canada and around the world, the community quickly mobilized to raise funds.

When 9/11 hit, the community even sent a letter to the mayor of New York with a cheque for \$5,000 to support victims' families. Two years ago, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the community quickly organized a pasta and pierogi dinner and raised over \$30,000 for Ukrainians and Ukraine.

Solidarity and hospitality go hand in hand. There is an old saying in Polish.

*[Member spoke in Polish and provided the following translation:]*

That means when a guest is in the house, God is in the house.

That is why we saw hundreds of thousands of Poles opening their apartments to 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. It is the Polish thing to do when their neighbour calls for help.

A terrific example of the combination of solidarity, and hospitality was the building of Polonia Park in 1980, a neighbourhood containing 342 affordable and attainable townhouses that the Polish community constructed thanks to Monsignor Lawrence Wnuk and visionary volunteers like Jan Partyka, Jan Armata, Stan Niec, Mitch Puklicz and the Bas and Polewski families. It was pioneering, decades ahead of its time, and it went a long way to make sure all Canadians in Windsor could find an affordable place to live in dignity and with pride. I know, because Polonia Park afforded my family our first home in Windsor.

Service to community is a huge part of our Polish heritage; so too is service to our country. The same Dom Polski that hosted weddings and Polish theatre was also the home of the Polish army in North America during the Second World War and a recruitment centre for Polish volunteers heading to Europe. In 1917, the Government of Canada opened the Polish army training camp called Camp Kosciuszko in Niagara-on-the-Lake, under General Jozef Haller where 2,200 volunteers were trained to fight as the Polish Blue Army in the First World War.

Throughout history, Poland and Canada have been brothers in arms in major battles like the Battle of Britain and Montecassino where Polish and Canadian soldiers now rest together in cemeteries of honour.

Last week I had a chance to reflect upon my family's story and how our single thread weaves itself into the beautiful fabric of the Polish Canadian story in Canada. I attended a citizenship ceremony for 49 new Canadians who arrived in Canada from 18 different countries. I saw in their eyes their happiness, hope and promise and, above all, their incredible feeling of gratitude. It fills people's hearts knowing that they are Canadians, knowing that Canada is their home.

I am proud of my Polish heritage. I am proud to be a Polish Canadian. With everyone's help, my dear colleagues, we will have a Polish heritage month to celebrate a long-standing and colourful piece of that beautiful Canadian mosaic together.

**Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC):**

Madam Speaker, I, like many other members of Parliament in the House, have Polish heritage. There is my last name, although I cannot say it in the House, as it is not appropriate, but my mother's maiden name is Zatorski, which does sound very Polish with the “ski” at the end.

My great grandparents came to Alberta in 1906. I know, for a lot of other family members, that is not that long of a time, but for Albertans, that is actually quite a while that my family has been in Canada. I want to talk about how Jakov and Ann Zatorski came to this country from Poland because they wanted to have a much better life. That is the whole purpose of why they came. From that date, they had many children, 13 to be precise, which included my grandfather, Paul Zatorski, who was born in 1913. In some ways, I am already a third-generation Canadian and Albertan from that side of the family.

It is nice to see that we are supporting this heritage month for Polish people and people of Polish descent. It is very important to many Canadians for this history that we have with each other.

I know that, when they came to Canada, they did not have much with them. In 1906, very few families had much for any possessions.