

44TH PARLIAMENT, 1ST SESSION



House of Commons Debates OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Polish Heritage Month

The House resumed from November 3, 2023, consideration of the motion.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC):

Madam Speaker, I will give a recap because I am sure everyone has probably forgotten what I stated a few weeks ago.

As I said, I, like many other members of Parliament in the House, have a Polish history. My grandparents on my father's side were Ukrainian, but my great-grandparents on my mother's side were Polish.

Jacko and Mary Zatorski came from Poland in 1906. It is quite a few years ago they came to Canada, and the main reason they came was to build a better life for themselves. It was a very challenging time to bring a family of four young adults with them, as well as the baby Mary was carrying. They did prosper in their life here in Canada, which they started on a quarter of land outside of Skaro, Alberta, which is northeast of Edmonton.

My great-grandparents had 13 children, which was quite an accomplishment back then because having so many children with none of them perishing at childbirth was quite spectacular. Life was hard, just like it was for anybody else farming at that stage. There were not nearly the mechanisms at that time that are now available. They had the ability to build a house. It is quite remarkable, but I was able to go to the their original homestead. Now, this was not the only house they built, as they built another house in I

believe the thirties. The house was still standing. It was in quite a bit of disrepair, but at least it gave me an idea of what the house looked like, and it was quite interesting to see.

My grandfather, who was born in 1913, Paul Zatorski, decided there was not enough land in that area. He also farmed and purchased a homestead near MacKay, Alberta, which is about an hour and a half west of Edmonton. He started his family life there, where he had four children, with the eldest being Lillian, my mother, and three sons after that: Lloyd, Leonard and Stanley.

The life of any farmer was hard because clearing land was not an easy accomplishment, yet they knew life was going to be far better in Canada than it would have been if they stayed in Poland. One of the problems they had over the years in Poland was the amount of wars that were happening in Europe at the time. Possibly, if we look back in history, they might not have even been in Poland at the time because the borders kept changing so much. One might have been in Germany, Galicia or whatever other country at the time because the borders did change. One of the main factors to it not being the most desirable place to raise a family was knowing they could be in upheaval at any time.

I will get back to what I was saying, which is that my grandfather started farming as well. We now had a generation of farmers in the family. At the time, in the early part of the 1900s, I think 92% of Canadians were farmers. It is quite the exact opposite now, where the majority of people live in urban centres and the farming community represents only about 2% or 3% of the population. With mechanization, we know how many more a farmer can feed now with the amount of land they have compared to back then.

With homesteads, almost everybody lived on one quarter of land. As generations grew into the forties, fifties and sixties, people started to expand a lot more and could create a better life. They knew one quarter of land was not enough anymore. Tractors cost more than horses, and tractors could also do a lot more than horses could ever do, and that was one of the reasons farms expanded over the years.

I look at the benefit of the heritage of the Polish community and how much it has contributed to Canada. My family, or part of my family, was very much part of the building foundation of this great country. We all pretty much became part of Canada around the late 1800s or early 1900s when we started to expand the west. Immigrants came earlier in the years, but it was quite the thing for my family to come to this country in 1906.

I actually had the opportunity to visit Pier 21 in Halifax. I wanted to see whether I could find my family heritage and whether my family actually came through Pier 21, which was the other thing.

The first question I was asked was how many years ago it was. If it was not within a set number of years, we actually were not allowed to look up the records, as there had to have been, I think, 50 or 70 years that had passed before we were able to look up people's records. I was quite fortunate as it had been well over 100 years, and I was able to look at the records. I was told not to be too concerned if not all the names are correct,

but to make sure the last name is right, make sure the parents' names are very close and, if they had children, make sure those names are right. I was actually able to find that, yes, they did come in April 1906.

The names Jacko and Mary were correct, although their sons' names were not quite right. The names varied a little bit, but still, I thought I had the right people because I do not think there were many Zatorskis coming into Canada at that time. To give members an idea of how much they have flourished, I have yet to find a Zatorski in Canada to whom I am not related. I cannot say the same about my last name, and I have had several people ask me whether I were related to so and so, but no, they were quite different families.

I thought it was quite interesting that we could look up the records, and they were not as close and precise as they could have been. There was only one page on what they had brought with them, some monetary information, and that was about it. However, when my other grandparents, Joseph and Doris Soroka, came in 1929, there were actually two pages. There was a lot more information, which was a little more appreciated because it gave a better sense of the things they had brought and what areas they came from. It was much more detailed, not near what is available now, but at least it gave a little bit of history of my family.

I think heritage and history are very important, and that is why we are celebrating this. It is to acknowledge Polish history month and what it would contribute. I also want to acknowledge that the members of the Canadian Polish Congress and its president, John Tomczak, do support this motion, which is great. I am not mentioning that they are here in the House, because I know that is not appropriate, so members do not have to worry about that. However, I am sorry if I erred in some way, and I do apologize for that.

As I said, it is very important to honour the heritage of our forefathers and recognize what they endured and how they helped build Canada. I just gave one small example of my family.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):

Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to commend the initiative of my colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville seeking to highlight the importance and richness of the Polish community's contribution to the Quebec nation. It is not every day that we have the opportunity to shine a light on this culture.

I would like to make it clear from the outset that I will be voting in favour of the motion. The Bloc Québécois is delighted to join the mover of the motion in acknowledging the exceptional contribution that Quebeckers of Polish origin have made to our society and culture. I would like to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to Quebeckers of Polish origin living in my riding and in the Lower St. Lawrence region. Some 79,000 Quebeckers identify themselves as being of Polish origin. Of all these

people, 23,550 are first-generation immigrants and more than 55,000 are from subsequent generations.

Polish people's contribution over the course of their long and tumultuous history is well established. In science, the first modern thinker to theorize the heliocentric model, in which the Earth revolves around the Sun, not vice versa, was none other than Nicolaus Copernicus, a Polish astronomer. Marie Curie was a Polish woman held up time and time again the world over as a symbol representative of women's significant contribution to science and dedication to a scientific career.

I do not have much time left, so I just want to add a few more. What would music be without Frédéric Chopin? What would Romantic painting of the 19th century be without Piotr Michalowski? What would 20th century poetry be without Krzysztof Baczynski? What would television series as a powerful art form be without Krzysztof Kieslowski's paradigmatic *Dekalog*?

Poland has a northern climate. Ice hockey is almost as popular there as it is in Montreal, the city where it was invented. No doubt that is why Quebec has always been a welcoming place for the Polish community. Canada's first Polish immigrant, Dominik Barcz, was a fur trader from Gdansk. In 1752, he settled in New France, specifically in Montreal, before the British conquest. He was later joined by his compatriot Charles Blaskowitz in 1757.

More recently, at the end of the Second World War, Quebec took in Poles scarred and devastated by the horrors they had seen and experienced. Seeking refuge and fleeing the communist regime, they made themselves a new home in our corner of the world. As the years turned into centuries, their culture blended and integrated with ours. Quebec and its Polish community therefore have strong institutions.

One example is the work of Wanda Stachiewicz, who founded the Polish Institute of Arts and Science in Canada in 1943. She arrived in Montreal on a Polish ship from London on July 13, 1940. She was a former member of the Polish resistance against the German invaders, a role she played while protecting her three children. She was instrumental in founding the Association of Polish Women War Refugees, which later became the Society of Poles in Exile.

Another example is the Institut Canadien-Polonais du Bien-Être. It is a health institute whose first centre was inaugurated by René Lévesque in 1966 when he was the health minister. A new centre was opened in 1984 by Dr. Camille Laurin, the father of the Quebec Charter of the French Language, when he was health minister. The institute's ethnolinguistic character, autonomy and special mission for Quebecers of Polish origin were recognized by the National Assembly of Quebec in May 2004.

The fate and life story of Polish immigrants have also influenced Quebec culture and literature. In her famous novel *Ces enfants d'ailleurs*, the great Quebec author, Arlette Cousture, tells the story of Elisabeth, Jan and Jerzy, with their parents Tomasz Pawulski, a history teacher, and Zofia Pawulska, a musician, who fled the war in Europe that was so sad that “even the birds stopped singing”. They travelled from Krakow, Poland, in 1939, to here “near a great river, in the colourful and inviting city of Montreal”.

It is important to note that Poland has had observer status at the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie since 1985. This interest in our language comes from the close ties between that country and France, both historically, because they have been great allies throughout history, and economically and culturally.

As a result, Poland has a special relationship with Quebec when it comes to language and culture. With nearly a million people who speak our beautiful French language, Poland is promoting the importance of French in the cultural, labour and tourism sectors.

We are therefore pleased to help designate May 3 as Polish constitution day and the month of May as Polish heritage month. Every year, we will celebrate the May 3 national holiday that commemorates the adoption of the Polish constitution on May 3, 1791.

It was on that day that the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth adopted one of Europe's first modern constitutions. Directly inspired by the French Revolution, it introduced free elections. The constitution was shaped by enlightenment and is based on reason, freedom and the rule of law.

By way of comparison, at that same time, in 1792, our ancestors were having their first experience with parliamentary life, with the first election and the meeting of the Parliament of Quebec in what was then known as Lower Canada. Since then, the French Canadian people, later the people of Quebec, have also been in pursuit of their political freedom.

At the time, this constitution was a symbol of hope for the restoration of the country's sovereignty. May 3 has always remained a source of inspiration for the people of Poland in their quest for independence.

It is worth remembering that, as a state, Poland has not had a quiet, peaceful existence. Throughout their long history, Polish men and women have shown unfailing strength and resilience. They fought for their independence for a long time.

Partitioned, occupied, invaded for centuries, then destroyed and ravaged by totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, Poland has been at the heart of conflicts due to its geographical location in Europe. In 1795, it was carved up and annexed by its Austrian, Prussian and Russian neighbours. It was against this backdrop that many of the first Polish migrants arrived in Quebec.

Despite a brief liberation between 1807 and 1815 during Napoleon's conquests, known as the Duchy of Warsaw, when Napoleon fell, the country was annexed once again. It was not until 1918 and the end of the First World War that Poland was again on the world map. However, that was short lived. As we all know, the Poles were the first victims of the Second World War.

When Nazi Germany invaded the country, the inhabitants experienced heavy losses despite their heroism and tenacity. For example, 50 Polish mail carriers defended the post office in the Free City of Danzig against 200 SS and SA troops for hours. The Polish cavalry charged German tanks at Krojanty on horseback. Despite the occupation of their country, Poles fought and resisted. The 1944 Warsaw Uprising is a perfect illustration of that resilience.

By the end of the war in 1945, Poland had experienced very heavy losses. The Nazis had exterminated nearly 90% of the country's Jewish population. Cities like Warsaw were almost entirely destroyed. Resistance was fiercely repressed. Seventeen percent of the pre-war population had been killed. These events led to a wave of pre- and post-war immigration. Refugees fleeing conflicts and anti-Semitism found safe haven in Quebec.

The country was then occupied by the Stalin regime, which once again annexed a portion of its original territory and again forced Poland to live as a vassal state under the Communist regime. It was not until 1989 that the regime withdrew, allowing the emergence of the Republic of Poland as we know it today, based on a semi-presidential system like the one in France.

Throughout all those years of occupation under the yoke of another country, the Constitution became an important symbol in the march toward regaining national sovereignty. For Poles, this charter fanned the hope that one day their vanished state would return.

In closing, I would remind members that we, as Quebeckers, are working hard to achieve our own quest for national independence. Our two nations are similar in so many ways: we both lost our independence following a colonial war of conquest, and our two peoples have always resisted the foreign invader.

Every May 3, we celebrate the resilience and commitment of our compatriots of Polish heritage and their fight for independence and sovereignty.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):

Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure and a delight to stand and represent the people of Edmonton Strathcona.

It is a pleasure today, as the foreign affairs critic for the New Democratic Party, to also stand and speak about Motion No. 75, with respect to Polish heritage month. I was in Poland less than a year ago, and it is a country I need to spend more time in. I am delighted to stand here and talk about the contributions Polish Canadians have made to Canadian society, our economy, our politics and our culture.

The Polish community began settling in Canada over 160 years ago. Many of those settlers were in Edmonton, Alberta, where we have a very strong and important Polish community. I remember being present for the unveiling of the strikingly beautiful and impressive monument celebrating the centennial recently. It perfectly captures the strength and determination of the Polish settlers who came to Alberta to build a better life for themselves and to help build a better life for all of us in Canada.

Polish settlers helped build our cities and institutions. Over the past 160 years, Polish immigrants and their descendants, who have been teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, business leaders and, yes, even politicians, have made Alberta the vibrant and prosperous place it is today.

Speaking of politicians, I have to think of my friend Thomas Lukaszuk. It is not often in this place that a New Democrat stands and talks about their friend who was a

Conservative member of the legislative assembly, but Thomas is a real champion for human rights, something I believe in deeply. I was so proud to know him not only when he worked so hard to get help for Ukraine and helped Ukrainians settle in Edmonton during the illegal war in Ukraine but also as he has stood up for Palestinians and has helped raise funds and support for them now as Gaza is seeing such a terrible humanitarian crisis.

I have to say that there are over 190,000 Canadians who cite Polish as their mother tongue. There are things that I humbly say I am quite good at, but pronouncing Polish words is not one of them. I do not come from a Polish background. My name, as I am sure members can all imagine, is Scottish, so my staff have written out a number of greetings they expected me to bring to the Polish community tonight, but I think my greatest gift to it would be to not say those greetings.

I can say, though, that one of the more selfish things I feel about this opportunity for us to celebrate Polish culture and the Polish Canadian connection is the ability for us to eat Polish food. In Edmonton, that is something we have a great opportunity to do on a regular basis. Therefore, knowing that each May would be designated Polish heritage month feels to me like an excellent opportunity for us to learn more about Polish cuisine, and I am very excited about that. It is one of the very rich and meaningful contributions that the Polish diaspora has made to our country.

However, on a more serious note, today allows us to take an opportunity to recognize the Polish people and the Polish diaspora for their resilience and determination. It was the resilience of the Polish people that got them through wars and occupations, including that by the Third Reich, which led many average Polish people to join the underground resistance. It was the organization of workers striking in the Gdansk shipyards that led to the emergence of the Solidarity trade union, a group that would later participate in talks that led to the fall of communism in Poland.

It is these hardy qualities that Polish Canadians bring to Canada, along with their kindness and their sense of community, things that I think all Canadians should embrace. I wanted to take today as an opportunity to thank the Polish people both here in Canada and in Poland for the kindness and the generosity that they have shown over the past two years.

After Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, millions of Ukrainians sought safety and comfort with their neighbours. I was in Poland, in March both last year and the previous year, and saw immediately after the invasion how Polish people opened their arms and welcomed Ukrainians into their community. We saw welcome centres where displaced Ukrainian women, mothers and children, and the elderly, were welcomed into those communities. We saw the support that was given by the community, how difficult it was for people in Poland to do that, and how they did it anyway.

Canada will always stand with Poland. Poland is our NATO partner. We will continue to fight to make sure that there is an end to Putin's illegal and unjustified war because we know that this is happening on Poland's doorstep.

The Canadian government must do everything possible within its means to continue to press for there to be a withdrawal of all Russian forces. I am also heartened to see the Polish people continue to embrace democracy. It is another reason that May 3 should be designated as Polish constitution day here in Canada. Recently, the Polish people voted in elections to restore political centrism to Poland after years of right-leaning rule and to vote in a government that will work to restore and strengthen Poland's democratic institutions.

New Democrats strongly support the recognition of Polish heritage month every May. We welcome Motion No. 75 and hope to be able to celebrate Polish constitution day and Polish heritage month this year in our ridings. We are calling on all parties to quickly pass this to ensure that this year, Canada will have its first Polish heritage month.

We are calling on the Liberal government to ensure tangible, stable and predictable resources and opportunities for the Polish community across Canada so they are able to share their rich, vibrant and delicious culture with all of us.

I congratulate the member.

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):

Madam Speaker, I am thrilled to stand in support of my colleague today in seconding Motion No. 75, recognizing the great contribution that Polish Canadians have made in building this country, naming May 3 as Polish constitution day and the month of May every year as Polish heritage month.

First, I want to congratulate and thank my colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville for this initiative. It has been a long time coming and I am proud to be part of this and I want to applaud him for that. As evidenced by my faux pas at the outset, I am proud of my Irish heritage. I am not Polish but I am hoping that by the time I sit down, people here today will understand why I am proud to have a strong connection to the Polish community not only in Etobicoke—Lakeshore but throughout my entire life.

The ties between our two countries are strong and they run deep. The profound impact of our Polish Canadian community on Canada's social, cultural, political and economic landscape cannot be overstated. Polish immigration to Canada reaches back to as early as 1752, over 100 years before Confederation, when the first documented Polish immigrants set foot on Canadian soil in Montreal.

While it would be naive to think that there were not struggles during the early decades after their arrival, like many immigrant communities who came after them, the Polish people endured and pushed forward to become an important part of the foundation of Canadian society.

Our friendship and companionship have grown over the years. Polish soldiers trained in southern Ontario for the First World War. We fought together at Dieppe.

Canada was the first country to approve Poland joining NATO in 1998 and our military co-operation continues as we work together to secure eastern Europe against

Russian aggression. Our soldiers train together in Latvia, and we both share a vision for a democratic, unified and independent Ukraine.

We are both adherents of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Together we fight and continue to work against tyranny. Economically, we are strong partners. In 2022, there was over \$4 billion worth of trade between our two countries, up from \$2.85 billion in 2018. The partnership is growing.

The Polish people's dedication and perseverance have left an enduring mark on our nation and continue to do so. Our history books are filled with the names of many people of Polish descent in every occupation.

Since the beginning of our Parliament, Polish Canadians have been in this House. I think of Alexandre-Édouard Kierzkowski, an MP from 1867 to 1870. I think of the Hon. Don Mazankowski, who served with distinction and honour as our deputy prime minister.

There was the Hon. Steven Paproski and my friend Jesse Flis, who also served in this chamber. We have him to thank, in large part, for flag day, which we will be celebrating on February 15. I think, too, of Ted Opitz, who served in this House.

Today, we have a number of Polish MPs or descendants of Polish families in our chamber, including four of my colleagues, one of whom sits just over there, from Windsor—Tecumseh and also the member for Calgary Shepard across the way.

Provincially, I think of Bonnie Crombie who is an effective voice for the Polish community. She, too, served in this chamber. Of course, in my own riding, there is Chris Korwin-Kuczynski, who served municipally in the city of Toronto and proudly calls Etobicoke—Lakeshore home and has worked forward in getting us here today.

Culturally, Polish Canadians have enriched the social and cultural fabric of our country. I think of pianist Janina Fialkowska, whose fingers have danced on piano keys for decades, entertaining people everywhere.

Who did not grow up listening to Peter Gzowski on CBC? However, he was not the only famous Canadian Gzowski. His paternal great-grandfather was Sir Casimir Gzowski, of Polish nobility, who was a prominent engineer in Canada and who worked on the Grand Trunk Railway and the Welland Canal. Sir Casimir Gzowski was knighted by Queen Victoria.

Canadian legend Geddy Lee, and I did not know this until recently, of Rush has been one of the biggest Canadian music influences in history, certainly in my lifetime, and has very strong Polish roots. His parents were Polish Holocaust survivors who emigrated to Canada.

Actress and activist Lisa Ray, who grew up in Etobicoke, has a Polish mother. Media mogul Moses Znaimer's mother, too, was from Poland.

Olympian Penny Oleksiak, hockey legend Wayne Gretzky and current captain of the Toronto Maple Leafs John Tavares all have Polish roots.

Today, Canada's Polish population is estimated at over 1.1 million people, 2.71% of the population and is concentrated mostly in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. I would like to thank the Canadian Polish Congress for all it does to promote awareness of

and respect for Poland's history and heritage. As my friend across the way indicated, I am pretty sure if I look around, I could see them in Ottawa today. I know the president is here in Ottawa today, and I want to thank him for all he is doing, along with all his colleagues.

I am proud to say the Polish presence and influence in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore is incredibly strong. Etobicoke—Lakeshore is home to the Consul General of the Republic of Poland. I would like to thank Magdalena Pszczółkowska, the Consul General of the Republic of Poland for all she does in Canada and in Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

The faith of Polish Canadians is strong and is an inspiration. I think of St. Mark's Parish, St. Theresa's Parish and the Polish Full Gospel Church, all located in Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

There are many other organizations: the Polish Association of Toronto, the Polish Teachers Association in Canada and the Polish Cultural Centre. There is a Seniors Polish Group that meets at the Stonegate Community Health Centre. We also have the Polish National Union of Canada, Branch 1 in Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I feel so incredibly fortunate to have such a vibrant Polish community at home.

It did not start there. I was born and raised in Thunder Bay, which has a proud Polish community. I spent my youth going to mass at St. Mary Our Lady Queen of Poland Church with my mother, father and my two brothers. I vividly remember going to seven o'clock mass on Sunday nights. I have fond memories of going and buying perogies, and eating that fine Polish food at the Polish hall in Thunder Bay. I sent my brother a text earlier, just before I got up, asking if the Polish hall had a name, and he said that it was just called the Polish hall. I remember it well.

Every year, I look forward to Polish celebrations, including in the neighbouring riding of Parkdale—High Park and the Roncesvalles Polish Festival, which marks its 17th anniversary this year. That is something to be very proud of.

My point is that Polish Canadians continue to, as they always have, make Canada a better place. Motion No. 75 goes far beyond acknowledging the historical bonds connecting Canada and Poland. It celebrates the importance of those contributions. When we look at people in the Polish community, we see how proud they are to be Polish and how proud they are to be Canadians. That cannot be overlooked. That is why this motion is so important.

To designate May 3 as Polish constitution day and dedicate the entire month of May to Polish heritage goes beyond symbolism. It recognizes and captures that importance. I want to thank every Polish Canadian for the contributions they have made to this great country. I look forward to supporting this motion. I know I do not have to ask, but I am going to do it anyway. I want every member in this House to join us in doing just that.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):

Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to speak to Motion No. 75. It is also a great pleasure to see you back in the chair and to see your smiling face again.

It is only right for us to adopt this motion. There is just one question we should be asking ourselves. Given how long the Polish people and Polish culture have been contributing strength and vitality to our societies, and given that they originated many of the institutions that exist in our society, why has this not been done before? It is never too late to do the right thing, so let us get to it. We will vote in favour of the motion to recognize the outstanding contributions the Polish nation has made to the Canadian and Quebec nations.

As members know, a lot of people in Poland speak French, which creates a special bond between Quebeckers and the Polish people. It draws us closer together. A total of 79,000 people in Quebec, 55,000 of whom were born there, claim Polish ancestry. That is a lot of people, and we share a history, because they have been here for a long time.

I know that sometimes my colleagues in the House get tired of hearing us talk about the history of Quebec and the important milestones, but we talk about it all the time because we know that, deep down, our colleagues really like hearing it. When we talk about the milestones associated with the Quiet Revolution, the Charter of the French Language, and so on, it should be noted that people of Polish descent were there with us. They have been living in Quebec since 1752.

At that time, in 1752, this land was still New France, not Canada. Dominique Debartzch, a fur trader, arrived in 1752. Charles Blaskowitz followed soon after in 1757. These people began contributing to our collective wealth in the New France era. That is amazing.

My colleague also mentioned one of the most remarkable individuals who founded the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in Canada, an important institution in Quebec, in 1943. I am talking about Wanda Stachiewicz. Before arriving in Quebec, she was a member of the resistance. I would also point out that she was a mother of three. I would like the members present, and anyone else who is tuning in, especially anyone who is a parent, to take a few seconds to imagine what that might be like. Even those who are not parents can still imagine what it must have been like to be a member of the resistance during the Second World War, while at the same time having three children to care for.

These people left their homeland to come here, not always by choice. We are pleased that they stayed, obviously, but it is important to understand the sacrifice, the burden, and to recognize this value. I do not think I am wrong to say today that the Polish people probably understand the value of independence better than any other people, because they have lost it several times, because it was threatened with violence, with occupation. It takes a lot of resilience to withstand that. I commend them for their strength, their courage and their tenacity. I tip my hat to them and thank them for participating in building a better society here and now.

The people of Poland are such a big part of Quebec culture that they are also part of our literature. I want to mention a famous novel by Arlette Cousture, *Ces enfants*

d'ailleurs, which tells the story of a family who flee their homeland to come live here, near a wide river, in the colourful and inviting city of Montreal. Some of that colour is supplied by the Polish community. At the end of the day, it makes for a beautiful mosaic.

I am very happy to contribute to making May 3 “Polish Constitution Day” and the month of May every year “Polish Heritage Month”.

I willingly promise to participate in the celebrations, and I invite everyone to join in. Obviously, they will commemorate May 3, 1791, the date on which the Polish constitution was adopted, some 20 years after the disgraceful partition of the Polish territory by Russia and Germany. The Polish constitution was inspired by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, which is based on the values of reason, freedom and the rule of law. I mentioned it earlier, but I want to reiterate that these people really know the meaning of independence.

Of course, at the same time, in Quebec, we were following a very different path. Far be it from me to compare Quebecers' experience with that of the Polish people. What we experienced was not as intense, but we share a common pursuit of growing, thriving and becoming independent as a nation. I am sure that when that day comes, we will get there with the help of Quebec's Polish community, which will continue to enrich our history and our lives.

We are going to vote in favour of the motion, but there is one small concern. It is about the wording, which I think has a Canadian slant. It refers to the idea of multiculturalism, as if we are drowning in it. Quebec's vision is not in opposition to that, it is just different. Our vision is interculturalism. We know that the people of Poland have contributed plenty of richness to Quebec, and there are aspects that we need to integrate into our values. They are generous and hard-working. We are happy to live alongside them, and I am very grateful to them.

Our respective societies, as Canadians and Quebecers, who share this Parliament for the time being, are more than happy to celebrate the Polish nation. The Bloc Québécois will be enthusiastically voting in favour of this motion and celebrating the richness of this culture. It is important to recognize other peoples.

Certain members may have been offended by my talk of Quebec's political independence this evening. It bothers some people, but others are used to it. Those of us hoping things might be different someday might have to talk to each other. Just today, in fact, a federal commission was struck pursuant to Bill C-40, and there is no requirement for its judges to be bilingual. I do not think that should happen in a country with two official languages, French and English, yet it does. I saw it on my news feed, and I could not help but talk about the words of my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, who represents the Bloc Québécois at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and who spoke out against that.

Anyway, we think celebrating people of Polish origin is absolutely fantastic. We are happy to live with them and grow with them because, now that we live together, we have shared lives, shared experiences. That is how we build a just and equitable society.

I also want to comment on their recognition of the principle of independence, which we believe in, too, of course, and we hope for that same experience in a sovereign Quebec.

With the bit of time I have left, I am going to take a risk. I hope, if people can hear me, that they will excuse my accent. *Dobry wieczór, pozdrawiam i dziękuję.*

I will translate what I just said to make sure it was understood. I just said, “Good evening, best regards and thank you”.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):

Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise here to speak to Motion No. 75, Polish heritage month. I am going to read the motion, so that we have it in the record. This is important not only for the Polish community, but also for the country of Canada and the multiculturalism that we have. We also have a country that is being built by people coming here and contributing in many different ways, not only in terms of a heritage aspect but also in terms of the economy and civil society. That has been the experience of the Polish community in Windsor, which has done so much for so many years. This also reflects one of the reasons that we have heritage months and the recognition of different weeks. In Ontario, there is already a Polish Heritage Month.

The motion moves 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.

That is important not only for the Polish community but also for other communities. It means that we embrace multiculturalism and the participation of citizens who come to build a new life here, who bring some of their culture and experiences with them and get a chance to shape our democracy, our communities and our society. This is the experience I had with the Polish community before politics, when I worked at the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, which also has a Polish carousel as part of the Carousel of the Nations, as well as when I became a city councillor.

I want to recognize just one person of many. He is Jerzy Barycki of our Polish community and the Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor. It is very important to recognize the contributions one can make. Jerzy has been recognized with the Cross of Merit in Poland, the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and many other different things. I got to know him as just a citizen sitting on our panel at the race and ethnic relations committee of Windsor and Essex County, when I was chair of that committee. He brought forth the idea to have the city of Windsor twin with Lublin, Poland, and have our city expand its horizons.

I saw a situation evolving that took from the streets of Windsor and Essex County and continued to grow that relationship with Lublin, making sure that we had civic engagement by all. We looked at the settlements of Polish citizens from the 1800s to the forefront of businesses, contributing and being part of our Armed Forces, our citizens who do work at home, our auto industry, manufacturing and a number of different avenues from very professional to blue collar. Delegations went over on several trips, and this convinced me that there is no doubt we can achieve just about anything.

When I came here as a member of Parliament in 2002, I was fortunate to meet Joe Comartin, the former member of Parliament for Windsor—Tecumseh. Back in 2007, we started to press for a waiving of the visitor visa for Polish citizens. We knew that was a big issue with regard to getting some justice on that file, but we had a government at that time that we were not sure was going to do the right thing. Eventually, it did. I want to give credit to then minister Jason Kenney, who actually worked hard on this and deserves a note in this chamber for the hard work of making sure a change took place. That was one that was adopted by all the corners of the House, and it shows that, when we put ourselves to the test, at different times, we can find more in common than not. It does not always seem that this place is conducive to that, but the reality is that we can get some good work done.

One thing I want to note with regard to this heritage month is that we have other ones that are emerging as well. With respect to the Polish heritage month, I hope the government allocates some resources to making sure that we actually have information and supports for programs and services. It may not be official in this motion, because that cannot be appropriate at this point in time. However, it should set a standard for places such as the Dom Polski in Windsor, where we have events and heritage months for Ontario. Now, hopefully, for this and other types of cultural engagement, there would be adequate supports and programs. That has happened at different points and different times over the years.

Windsor and Essex county have seen this heritage play itself out with a lot of pride. I mentioned some World War II veterans who were in our contingent of support for the Canadian Armed Forces. Some of them came to my community. They were some of the hardest workers, who contributed to developing not only the Polish community but also the sectors we have in our country.

Polish Canadians started immigrating to Canada in 1858, which is when recording began. I am sure others came before then. It is important that this chamber, not just Ontario, recognizes a heritage month because it is from coast to coast to coast. We reflect individually, which happens quite a bit, as we have heard other members, including me, talk about the experiences they have had in local communities. As we travel in this job across Canada and to other places, including the United States, where I have been many times, I have noticed that, in the many different communities in Canada, there is a special flavour and element that comes with the pride of having cultural celebrations that include other communities.

Across the river from Windsor, two miles to the north, there is Detroit and the United States, and they do things differently than we do. It is not that they do not have those cultural connections, but there is a special element to Canada that is rather unique. With the opportunities I have, I find these motions are very important, but, at the same time, I hope they are going to continue to encourage the government to make sure that heritage and other types of budgetary expenses, which may be seen as soft to some members in this chamber who might see budgetary expenditures as a loss in supporting cultural celebrations, will create engagement with other countries, groups and organizations. In my community, Lublin, with the city of Windsor, citizens stepped up to help out. They create opportunities for economic development and diversity.

I was one of the individuals put on the initial list of people who were banned in Russia. I did not mind. When I got the notification, my response was that I had hoped I could put myself higher on the list. It is because of some of the work I have done on this issue, among other things, and the importance we have as a country right now to support so many of the brothers and sisters in the Polish community within overlapping societies. The motion is symbolic in many respects. It is not legislation, but it would create an opportunity and a path forward. At the same time, I know it reflects the important grounding that is necessary.

When we celebrate Polish Heritage Month in the province Ontario, it is a very special event, where there are professional discussions, celebrations, food and many different things. We have seen displays and other things that Jerzy and the rest of the group put together that have educated new people about Polish contributions, whether they are in arts, culture, the economy, or many different things. Those things lead to economic development. The delegations over the years have strengthened the relationship and economic opportunity.

To wrap up, I am grateful I have had the opportunity to speak. This is very important for the Polish community, but it is also reflective of a country that accepts and wants the civic engagement of other cultures in the very fabric of how we do things on a daily basis. It is most important to recognize them through special relationships. Polish heritage month is well timed. It is due, and I thank the mover of the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):

The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville for his right of reply.

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

Madam Speaker, *witam i dziękuję*. I am delighted to wrap up this beautiful discussion that we have had here on my private member's motion, Motion No. 75. The diverse voices of my colleagues, spanning various political affiliations and regions of our country, have resonated with unwavering support, declaring May as Polish heritage month and designating May 3 as Polish constitution day in Canada.

The unanimous backing from members across the spectrum is a testament to the profound contributions of our Polish-Canadian communities.

I want to thank my colleagues, the members of Parliament who have spoken today, the members for Yellowhead, Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Edmonton Strathcona, Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Berthier—Maskinongé and Windsor West, the member we just heard from. I want to thank all those who participated as well in the first hour of debate for their thoughtful expression.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Polonia in Canada, whose roots trace back to the arrival of the first Polish immigrant in 1752. Over 272 years, this community has evolved into its present-day Polish diaspora of 1.1 million. Nicolaus Copernicus, the eminent Polish mathematician, doctor of medicine, theologian and astronomer, once said, “To know that we know what we know, and to know that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge.”

What we do know is true is the profound impact of the Polish-Canadian community on Canada's social, economic and political landscape. Its contribution in arts, music, entrepreneurship and academia have enriched our society immeasurably.

This motion owes its existence to the dedicated leaders within the Polish community who have tirelessly supported me and fellow members here in sharing their stories of Canadians of Polish descent. I extend my appreciation to those watching. We know some are with us here in the chamber today, whether in person or through our parliamentary channel.

While I cannot name everyone, I want to express a big thanks to His Excellency, Ambassador Witold Dzielski and his officials; to the Canadian Polish Congress and its president, John Tomczak, and vice-president, Dominik Roszak; as well as to the entire executive team of the Canadian Polish Congress.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the various Polish Congress branch presidents and their boards, our Canada-Poland parliamentary friendship group and our chair, who was born in Poland and represents his community of Windsor—Tecumseh in the House. I know he will be working hard for our first flag raising here, when we get to commemorate May as Polish heritage month.

I had the privilege of joining my Polish community friends this past weekend at the Polish combatants' hall for the annual new year *oplatek*, or wafer reception. It was a moment to break bread, reflect on the past year and celebrate the achievements of the Polonia in Canada. This year marks the 90th anniversary of the Canadian Polish Congress, and we took the opportunity to express our gratitude to Canadian-Polish veterans who bravely fought for the peace, freedoms and democracy that we enjoy today.

I feel like I have been adopted by the Polish community. Like the Speaker, we come from Portuguese descent. That is maybe like John Tavares, with Portuguese and Polish coming together, but it has been a true honour. At that function, I received the Ignacy Jan Paderewski Polish medal of recognition. It is with pride that I wear it here today. I am very thankful for this recognition.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Polish Canadians for Poland's steadfast support for Ukraine during these challenging times, my wife being of Ukrainian descent. The Polish spirit, determination and tireless efforts exemplify their commitment to enriching Canada with Polish culture, a strong work ethic, deep faith and unparalleled resilience.

When we think about what we are recognizing today, we are celebrating Polish heritage month and May 3 constitution day, from coast to coast to coast. I look forward to raising that Polish flag here on this Hill in Parliament, along with the Canadian flag.

Dziękuję bardzo. Niech żyje Polska. Niech żyje Kanada.