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# Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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Chair: Lisa Hepfner





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• (0820)

[English]

**The Chair (Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 29 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent feedback incidents and protect the health and safety of all participants, including and especially our interpreters. You will notice there's a QR code, which links to a short awareness video.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to the order of reference of February 10, 2026, the committee is meeting to study Bill S-227, an act respecting Arab heritage month. Subsequently, we will deal with Bill S-210, an act respecting Ukrainian heritage month.

I'd like to provide members of the committee with a few comments on how committees proceed with clause-by-clause consideration of a bill.

As the name indicates, this is an examination of all clauses in the order in which they appear in the bill. I'll call each clause successively, and each clause is subject to debate and a vote. If there are amendments to the clause in question, I'll recognize the member proposing it, who may explain it.

Since this is the first exercise for many new members, the chair will go slowly to allow all members to follow the proceedings properly. If during the process the committee decides not to vote on a clause, that clause can be put aside by the committee so we can revisit it later in the process.

Once every clause has been voted on, the committee will vote on the title and the bill itself. An order to reprint the bill may be required if amendments are adopted so that the House has a proper copy for use at report stage.

I thank members for their attention and wish everyone a productive clause-by-clause consideration of Bill S-227 and Bill S-210.

We'll begin with Bill S-227.

We have with us today the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, the MP who is sponsoring this bill in the House of Commons.

Sir, you have five minutes for an opening statement, and then I'll turn to members. We'll just do one six-minute round, and then we'll proceed with clause-by-clause consideration. If a member wishes to use all six minutes for their party, that's fine. If you want to share time with another member, that's also fine. I think six minutes is probably enough to get through this very short and uncontroversial bill.

We will begin with Mr. Hussen's opening statement.

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today to speak in support of Bill S-227, an act respecting Arab heritage month.

I'm pleased to appear before you as the sponsor of this legislation in the House of Commons following its adoption in the Senate, where it was championed with dedication and care by Senator Mohammad Al Zaibak.

This bill is straightforward in its drafting but meaningful in its purpose. It seeks to formally designate the month of April as Arab heritage month.

Members of the committee will recall that this initiative is not new to our Parliament. In fact, in the previous Parliament, the Honourable David McGuinty, member of Parliament for Ottawa South, introduced Bill C-232, which was adopted unanimously by the House of Commons. It advanced to third reading in the Senate before unfortunately dying on the Order Paper following the dissolution of Parliament.

Bill S-227 builds directly on that prior consensus and momentum. It reflects work that had already united members across party lines and across regions of this country.

Arab Canadians have been part of Canada's story for more than 140 years, from the earliest immigrants arriving from what was then known as greater Syria in the late 19th century to the vibrant and diverse communities we see today in cities and towns from coast to coast to coast.

Arab Canadians are making, have made and continue to make contributions in every aspect of Canadian life. They've built businesses and community organizations. They've served as health care workers, teachers, entrepreneurs, artists, academics and public servants. They have strengthened neighbourhoods and contributed immensely to our economy. Arab Canadians have enriched our cuisine, our literature, our music, our civic institutions and our strength as a country.

Designating April as Arab heritage month would provide Canadians with an annual opportunity to learn about these contributions, to reflect on them and to celebrate the role that Arab Canadians play in shaping our shared future. Recognition matters, visibility matters and belonging matters.

Bill S-227 is also measured and responsible. It does not appropriate funds. It does not create new regulatory burdens. It does not duplicate existing legislation. It is declaratory in nature, but its symbolic impact is quite significant.

Canada already recognizes several heritage months that celebrate the histories and contributions of diverse communities. Arab heritage month would join that tradition, reinforcing the principles of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and the spirit of inclusion that defines our country.

If I may, I'd like to add a personal reflection. When I served as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and later as Minister of Diversity and Inclusion, I had the privilege of engaging regularly with stakeholders from Arab Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast. Community leaders, youth advocates, cultural organizations and business associations all raised the importance of designating and establishing an official Arab heritage month. They spoke about how such recognition would help young Arab Canadians see themselves reflected in our national story. They spoke about the challenges of anti-Arab racism and misperceptions, and they spoke about how formal recognition by Parliament would send a clear message that Arab Canadians are not on the margins of our country but are integral to Canada. Those conversations left a lasting impression on me. This bill responds directly to those voices.

In conclusion, Canada's strength lies in its ability to weave diverse experiences into a common fabric. Arab heritage month is not about separating communities; it is about integrating stories and acknowledging that the Arab Canadian experience is part of the larger Canadian experience. This bill offers Parliament the opportunity to reaffirm the simple but powerful message that every community belongs to our country and every contribution, past, present and future, counts.

I respectfully encourage the committee and my honourable colleagues to support Bill S-227 and advance it for a timely message.

I look forward to your questions.

Thank you, *meegwetch* and *shukran*.

● (0825)

**The Chair:** That was elegant and eloquent, as always, sir. Thank you very much.

Mr. Aboultaif, welcome to the heritage committee. I understand you'll be taking the six minutes for the Conservatives.

Go ahead. You have the floor.

**Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Good morning, Mr. Hussen. Congratulations on Bill S-227, and thank you for putting it forward.

I was one of the seconders of the first bill, which was presented by Minister McGuinty in the last Parliament. I'm also one of over a

million Canadians of Arab origin. Now, as a proud Canadian, I refuse to be shaped by the hyphenated term "Arab-Canadian".

How do you foresee this bill celebrating Arab culture but still preserving our national pride as Canadians?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** When you look at the history of Arab Canadians in Canada, at the presence of Arab Canadians and at the contributions they have made and continue to make in many provinces and municipalities right across this country, it is important to follow what local communities have already done. Many provinces, municipalities and community organizations, as you said, have already recognized and designated Arab heritage month in various forms, but what's missing is a federal designation providing national coherence and permanence.

A formal recognition by Parliament ensures consistency across the country. It signals that we, in the federal legislature, recognize, reflect on and celebrate the contributions of Arab Canadians. As part of Canada's official historical narrative, recognition at the federal level carries a symbolic and unifying weight that informal observances cannot.

I share with you the belief that we are all Canadians, but I also believe that recognizing the contributions of various communities to the larger national project doesn't take away from their belonging to Canada. In fact, it enhances it.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** One of the intentions of this bill is to raise awareness about Arab culture and history and the community. What other benefits do you believe this bill would bring to the culture, introduction and awareness of the Arab community?

I believe that when we put forward Lebanese Heritage Month, it was an opportunity to do the same thing. I thought it was a fantastic idea. We're thankful for the passing of this bill through the House and the Senate.

What benefits do you believe this bill will bring to Canadian society?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** I think the main one, in addition to the recognition piece, is education. Whenever an opportunity is made available to Canadians to learn about each other and their history and about the contributions that various communities have made and continue to make in Canada, the dissemination of that knowledge is a plus. It's an advantage.

The more we can learn about each other, the more we can reflect on the history of various communities and their journey to Canada. The more we can celebrate their successes and contributions, the better it is for our social cohesion, our national unity and our ability to not only live together, but actually work together and make a stronger Canada.

In my opinion, I see this as an opportunity for all other non-Arab Canadians to learn about this great and diverse community, which is, in many ways, reflective of different journeys—from folks who arrived here in the 19th century to recent immigrants who are now proud Canadians and everyone in between. The key takeaway is that the education piece will be enhanced by this bill and the recognition of this month as Arab heritage month, but there's also the social cohesion that will come from appreciation and knowledge. This recognition enables Canadians to learn about each other and appreciate each other more.

• (0830)

**Ziad Aboultaif:** This is my final question.

In a multicultural society such as Canada's, we celebrate that a lot. How do you see this bill helping to explain some of the differences as seen by other communities? I refuse to say “other”—we're all Canadians—but there are also cultural differences, because that's the nature of our country. How does this bill help to answer some of the unknown questions about the community or some of the misunderstandings of our culture and our history?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** You're absolutely right.

Again, it gives us an opportunity to open the door to more awareness about the history and contributions of Arab Canadians. When you designate a heritage month and it is disseminated across the country, as I said, it enhances the education piece, which reduces the ignorance, misperceptions and misconceptions about the community.

The first thing that it will do is introduce people to the rich and diverse culture of Arab Canadians. It will introduce them to the contributions that Arab Canadians have made and continue to make to Canada by different waves of Arab Canadians immigrating to Canada. It will also introduce people to the various faiths and cultural backgrounds of Arab Canadians. Arab Canadians are very diverse. They come from different parts of the world. They encompass a diversity that is very rich and dynamic.

I believe this heritage month will help introduce people to that complex, diverse and dynamic heritage, which inevitably will reduce ignorance and misconceptions about the community.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Al Soud, you now have six minutes. The floor is yours.

**Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Hussen, for joining us today.

I've said this before and I will say it countless times more: I am the proud son of parents who never had a country of their own until they became Canadian. I am proudly of Palestinian origin, and that identity is a core part of my story.

Of course, that story is not unique to me. In my community of Mississauga Centre, home to one of the largest Arab communities in Canada, I feel those contributions every single day: in small businesses that drive our local economy, in doctors and health care workers who care for our families, in educators shaping the next generation and in artists, innovators and public servants who are

helping define what Canada looks like today and what it will look like tomorrow.

My parents came to this country at the age of 16, leaving behind their families, their sense of familiarity and the lives they knew. They chose Canada. My father arrived as a refugee with no one but his older brother. They had no road map and no guarantees, just the opportunity and the willingness to work for it, and they did. They worked. They studied. They supported family back home. They built small businesses. They built stability, and they built a life for themselves and for their families. Just as importantly, they made a conscious decision not to lose who they were in the process.

Growing up in Montreal, I went to school in French and watched TV in English, but at home my parents would always say, [*Member spoke in Arabic*], which is, “At home, we speak Arabic”—no exceptions. Saturdays were for Arabic school, whether I liked it or not, and I'll admit that at the time I did not. Today, I am nothing but grateful for it every single day, because what they were really doing was ensuring that we didn't have to choose between identities, that we could be fully Canadian and Arab at the same time.

That's a story you see across this country, whether it's from first-generation newcomers or families like those I met in Edmonton last week with roots going back several generations. There's a shared pride in being Canadian and a shared commitment to holding on to where you come from. That is not a contradiction. That is the Canadian mosaic at its best.

Designating April as Arab heritage month is not just symbolic. It tells a community that their story, their contributions and their presence in this country are seen and valued. It acknowledges the sacrifices that were made, the risks that were taken and the challenges that were overcome. It acknowledges the giants before me and the giants whose shoulders I stand on today.

It matters to the next generation because this is about young Arab Canadians growing up and seeing themselves reflected not just as Canadians but also in the fullness of who they are: their language, their culture, their story and their identity. It's about telling them that they don't have to compartmentalize who they are, but that they can carry all of it with pride. Long after this bill is passed, there will be young people in communities like mine who feel a stronger sense of belonging because of it, and that intrinsically matters.

Mr. Hussen, I want to sincerely thank you for your leadership in bringing this forward and for allowing me to rant a bit.

I know Senator Al Zaibak couldn't be with us today, but I'd also like to thank him for his tireless work. I know how much went into this, and I know it will have a lasting impact.

I know that through your work, you've heard countless stories, stories like my father's, like my family's and like those of so many others across this country. I'd like to give you the opportunity to share some of the stories that have impacted you most, acknowledging those people in this bill.

● (0835)

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Thank you very much.

I think your remarks reflect the importance of initiatives like this. You spoke about the fact that Canada doesn't make you choose between obtaining new citizenship and abandoning your heritage. Many countries do that, but this is a very special place. This is a country that allows you to join the larger Canadian family and adopt Canadian values while keeping your rich culture and heritage. That's one of the things that make this country the best country in the world. It makes us stronger; it doesn't make us weaker. Diversity and the embracing of differences actually make us stronger, in my opinion.

My understanding of the importance of this initiative and the reason I joined Senator Al Zaibak in sponsoring this bill in the House is what you said about the impact it will have on young Arab Canadians. They will see themselves in the national fabric. They will see this formal recognition for what it is, which is an embrace by the rest of Canada of their community, their story and their contributions to Canada.

This bill will allow for deeper public education about the community. It will allow for cultural appreciation while reinforcing national unity. This is about building bridges, making sure people's stories are heard and making sure we strengthen social cohesion by increasing education about each other and by learning about each other's histories.

I was so proud to learn one of the amazing Canadian stories and discover that in Edmonton we had early Lebanese Canadian immigrants who connected with Ukrainian Canadians to use their church for worship. This was in the 1800s.

Just outside of Windsor, Ontario, I went to Leamington and discovered a very well-established Lebanese Canadian family—a married couple—who had settled there and started a restaurant in the 1950s. They're still going strong, and they're proud to be Arab Canadians.

You see these stories all the time. I remember Mr. Mansour, up in Sudbury, who came from Lebanon with virtually nothing. Today, he runs 10 businesses and employs thousands of people. He's creating jobs and prosperity for all of us every day, and so on and so forth.

I could continue talking about those contributions, but I think the point is made. This is about fostering understanding. It's about increasing education. It's about reflecting and celebrating contributions. It's about harnessing this initiative to contribute to more inclusion and appreciation for our country and what it has done for all of us, including, of course, Arab Canadians.

● (0840)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Al Soud. It's lovely to hear a bit more about your background. That was very beautifully told.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you may go ahead for six minutes.

**Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Hussen, for being with us this morning to speak to Bill S-227.

What I like about the idea of creating a heritage month is that it provides an opportunity to hear people's stories. I really like stories. I like hearing people's and individuals' stories. Whether those stories are heroic or commonplace, they are all important to each and every person they affected and to the families who share them.

Mr. Al Soud talked about his family's story, when his father came to Canada. Those are the stories I like to hear.

I also like to hear stories about Ukrainian people who have come to Canada under different circumstances over the decades. I like to hear about Irish people, whose stories overlap with my roots, and about Italian people. Basically, if properly used, heritage months provide an opportunity to hear people's stories and to better understand where our fellow citizens come from. Knowing where we come from helps us to know and understand one another better, to understand each other's realities better, and to make the society we live in better.

I think the idea of creating an Arab heritage month is especially useful because, in the minds of many Quebeckers and Canadians, Arab culture and the Islamic faith are interconnected, and we know that can give rise to misconceptions. However, I know and believe that Arab culture is extremely rich and that there is much to gain from knowing and sharing it.

Mr. Hussen, how do you see Arab heritage month being used properly, to share everything that Arab Canadians and Quebeckers have done to enrich the social and cultural fabric of our nations? If all goes well, April will likely be designated as Arab heritage month. I don't think we'll be holding our breath as to how the vote on Bill S-227 will turn out.

[*English*]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** I believe that just like other heritage months that have been designated by our federal Parliament, Arab heritage month would serve the same purpose. It would be used by local schools, community organizations, business associations, provincial governments and others to really focus our attention every year on April as the month to reflect on and celebrate the contributions that Arab Canadians have made and continue to make to Canada.

It also gives us an opportunity to use this month to show the diversity of the Arab Canadian community. As you said, there's a lot of confusion, and for a lot of people, the term "Arab" is synonymous with Muslim. We know that the Arab Canadian community has different faiths and different backgrounds. They come from different parts of the world. We have Arab Canadians who come from northern Africa. We have Arab Canadians who come from the Middle East. We have Arab Canadians who come from other parts of the world. There's a diversity and there are differences in how Arab Canadians got here, through different generations and different waves of immigration, and how they settled in different parts of the country to make their home. All of that is incredibly interesting and fascinating.

I think Arab heritage month would allow more Canadians to discover that, as I have just by working on this bill. I was able to learn even more than what I already knew about the community.

It's quite fascinating but also quite encouraging to see the level of entrepreneurship of Arab Canadians and the level of contributions they have made and continue to make from every part of Canada in every aspect of Canadian life. I think more people learning that would be a good thing. This Arab heritage month designation would focus the mind on highlighting that. Just like when federal Parliament passed Black History Month or Latin American Heritage Month, it would help focus our attention on that for a moment, in April of every year.

• (0845)

[Translation]

**Martin Champoux:** I think we can all agree that providing that window into the community and giving people the opportunity to look past first impressions will make a real difference in addressing certain types of racism and intolerance. It's clear that having a heritage month is a positive thing, again, if it's properly used.

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Absolutely. Everything you've said is true. The more people know about each other, the less they're susceptible to ignorant perceptions about the "other". That also, of course, contributes to stronger social cohesion. As you're very well aware, the presence of Arab Canadians in Quebec has strengthened Quebec and has contributed not only to its economic prosperity but also to strong civic pride in being a Quebecker.

I have been spending a bit more time in Quebec than normal because of French-language training. By virtue of being in Quebec more, I've had the opportunity to get to know and interact with Arab Canadians from the Maghrib region and hear their different journey of immigration to Canada, which is different from, for example, those in the Lebanese community or the Syrian community. It reminded me again of the diversity of Arab Canadians and the contributions they've made and continue to make in Canada.

I believe the designation of April as Arab heritage month is long overdue, and I believe we should do everything we can to support this bill.

[Translation]

**Martin Champoux:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** That concludes our question rounds, unless somebody has something urgent to add.

We'll move forward with clause-by-clause consideration of this bill.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of clause 1, the short title, and of the preamble is postponed.

Shall clause 2 carry?

(Clause 2 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall the short title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the preamble carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the bill carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Well done. Bravo.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Members, we will take a short break now.

We have another bill coming up at 9:15. We have Senator Kitcher joining us remotely, so I don't think we'll start that right away.

We have some discussions to have on our schedule. Would members prefer to have those discussions in camera?

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux.

[Translation]

**Martin Champoux:** I don't think it's absolutely necessary. Then again, perhaps it's preferable, if we're discussing how important we consider certain aspects or going into detail when it comes to the witness list.

I wanted to propose allocating two more meetings to the study, but if we need to have more of a discussion first, then, yes, I think we should probably go in camera.

[English]

**The Chair:** Does anybody else have any discussion on our schedule that we can have in public?

Go ahead, Mr. Myles.

**David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.):** I agree with Martin here. Having two more or no more than that.... It's one of those things that could go on forever, so I think it's good to have a limit. Two would be good, because we have another study coming up after that.

If we need to get into the details of a discussion about witnesses.... Maybe we don't have to do that if we can agree on the number of meetings we're going to have.

● (0850)

**The Chair:** The Conservatives would prefer to go in camera to have this discussion. We'll need 10 minutes.

Mrs. Thomas, we'll send you a link to the next meeting.

We'll be briefly in camera and then be back in public session for our next bill, the Ukrainian heritage month bill, at 9:15. I will suspend for now.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

● (0850)

(Pause)

● (0915)

*[Public proceedings resume]*

**The Chair:** We are ready to get under way in our study of Bill S-210, an act respecting Ukrainian heritage month.

We have with us in the room Mr. Yvan Baker, the sponsor of this bill in the House of Commons. We are attempting to connect with Senator Stan Kutcher remotely. He is the Senate sponsor of this bill.

We'll get started with Mr. Baker and then check in to make sure we have a proper connection with Mr. Kutcher before we go any further. Each of the sponsors will have five minutes to present an opening statement.

I forgot to mention at the top of this meeting that you may have noticed we don't have our analysts Liane and Jed at the back of the room. We have with us today the legislative clerks Andrew and Michelle, who are here to help us with the more technical aspects of this process.

That said, Mr. Baker, the floor is yours for five minutes.

*[Translation]*

**Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, fellow members. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage today. I'm honoured to be here to discuss Bill S-210, which, if passed, would designate September as Ukrainian heritage month in Canada.

● (0920)

*[English]*

The first Ukrainian immigrants to Canada arrived here on September 7, 1891. Since then, generation upon generation of Ukrainians have come to Canada, many of them fleeing oppression

and seeking a better life. They found this life here in Canada. Ukrainian Canadians have also helped make Canada the great country it is today.

*[Translation]*

That is why, in 2011, the Ontario legislature unanimously passed legislation to proclaim September 7 Ukrainian Heritage Day.

I was president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress's Ontario Provincial Council at the time, and I was proud to be among those who drafted the bill and helped to get it passed. That is also why I am so proud to have introduced my own bill in the House of Commons in the last three Parliaments to designate the month of September, every year, as Ukrainian heritage month. I am proud to be the sponsor of this bill in the House of Commons.

*[English]*

For me, colleagues, there are three reasons to support this bill and pass it now.

The first is that it's an opportunity to celebrate Ukrainian heritage, which we see demonstrated in our ridings and in communities across this country every single day in various forms. However, the significance of this bill reaches far beyond cultural recognition, in my view. It's not merely a symbolic gesture. It is a national acknowledgement of people whose contributions have shaped Canada for almost 135 years.

Since 1891, Canadians of Ukrainian descent have left a historic mark on our country. Their contributions span all the communities of the House of Commons and touch our economic, political, cultural and social lives. Since 1891, Ukrainian Canadians have played an important role in making Canada the great country it is today.

The second reason is that, through this bill, Parliament would help recognize these contributions.

The third reason is that since 1891, Ukrainians have come to Canada seeking a better life, and Canada and Canadians have supported them. That's why, for example, Canada was the first western country in the world to recognize Ukraine's independence in 1991. That is why Canada was among the first countries in the world to recognize that the Holodomor was a genocide. That is why Canada has been a global leader in supporting the people of Ukraine as they defend themselves against Russia's brutal invasion today and for the last four years. Through this bill, Parliament would recognize what Canada has done and the contributions of Canadians in the support of Ukrainian Canadians and Ukraine.

I would also argue that there has never been a more important time to pass this bill than now. For the last four years, Ukrainians have been defending themselves against Russia's brutal invasion, and Canada has been a global leader in supporting Ukraine in that fight. I want to take a minute to talk about this.

There are two key reasons we support the people of Ukraine. The first is that it's the right and moral thing to do, as I believe. The second is that it's the right thing for Canada.

I often say—you've probably heard me say this—that I think Ukraine's victory is vital to Canada's security, because if Russia wins, it's not going to stop at Ukraine. NATO will be next. I say this because Putin has told us so. I say this because Russia is sending Russian military drones over European military bases as we speak. Europe is preparing. Western European military leaders have told their citizens that they need to be ready for a land war with Russia in the next five years, so this is a real threat to NATO. If that happens, then yes, Europeans—and also Canadians and Americans—will be next in defending themselves against Russian aggression. In my view, we either pay a smaller price now to help Ukraine win, or we pay a much bigger price later.

That's why Canada has been a global leader in supporting Ukraine since 2022, with over \$25 billion in support. That includes \$8.5 billion in military support. We've been the world's largest financial contributor per capita to Ukraine since 2022.

Ukraine is fighting on the front lines of the global struggle between democracy and tyranny. Their struggle is our struggle. That's why I believe there has never been a more important time than now to pass this bill.

[*Translation*]

Bill S-210 honours the past, strengthens the present and inspires the future.

[*English*]

Ukrainian heritage month will offer a special opportunity for us to celebrate Ukrainian heritage, the role that Canada has played in supporting Ukrainian Canadians and the contributions that Ukrainian Canadians have made to Canada. By passing Bill S-210, Parliament would be affirming that Ukrainian Canadians are integral to Canada, that their heritage deserves celebration and that Canada stands with the Ukrainian people, not only in wartime but for all time.

I hope all members of this committee will join me and join us in designating September of every year as Ukrainian heritage month across Canada.

Thank you very much.

● (0925)

**The Chair:** That was five minutes on the dot. I don't know how you managed that. Well done and well said, my friend.

Do we have Senator Stan Kutcher online?

Can you just say a few words for us, Senator, just to make sure our interpreters can hear you okay?

**Hon. Stanley Kutcher (Senator, Nova Scotia, ISG):** Sure, Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for gathering today.

**The Chair:** You are good, sir.

You have the floor now for five minutes, please. We'll go over to you.

**Hon. Stanley Kutcher:** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you all for getting together to study Bill S-210.

Before I get to the heart of this simple bill, which promotes our celebration and understanding of the heritage of a group of heretofore federally unrecognized nation builders, Ukrainian Canadians, I would like to thank those who made today possible.

First, I would like to thank you, the committee, for studying this bill today. As you can see, I'm coming to you by Zoom from a hospital clinic where I'm receiving medical treatments. Some of you know that I will be stepping down from the Senate soon due to a medical condition that makes it very difficult for me to contribute effectively to the work of the chamber. I'm hopeful that should the committee move this bill to the House, the House might be able to deal with it quickly.

Second, I would like to thank member of Parliament Mr. Yvan Baker not only for his sponsoring of Bill S-210 but for the work that he has been doing to support the Ukrainian Canadian community throughout his tenure as a member of Parliament. As he said, Russia's illegal and genocidal war on Ukraine enters its fifth year.

This bill is important to Ukrainian Canadians in Canada and those fighting for survival in Ukraine. Why is that? It gives them hope: the hope that Canada will continue to support Ukraine and the hope that is necessary for Ukrainians to cling to as they fight valiantly to preserve their sovereignty against an aggressor that is attacking not only them, but also the foundations of our international rule of law. It is an aggressor that is a member of the UN Security Council, no less. It is an aggressor that flouts every agreement it has made to respect the sovereignty and security of Ukraine.

Here in Canada, the bill gives the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora, some 1.4 million strong, hope that the Government of Canada and the people of Canada can better understand the heritage and culture of the Ukrainian Canadian community and can recognize the contributions that members of that community, historically and currently, have made to the growth and development of our great country.

I am sure that by now all of you know that the story of Ukrainians who first came to Canada, those who answered Clifford Sifton's call to build the west, is about the men in sheepskin coats and women of strength and courage whose hard work turned our then emerging western provinces into the economic engines that they are today. Those are people whose children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and so on grew up to be farmers, carpenters, plumbers, lawyers, artists, musicians, doctors, hockey players, fishers, miners, teachers, bankers, clergy, soldiers, sailors, astronauts, parliamentarians and even a Governor General of Canada. Some of those contributors sit among you in the House of Commons. Some are in the Senate.

Indeed, it is Ukrainian Senator Paul Yuzyk who is widely considered to be the originator of the concept of multiculturalism, which is the foundation of the complex weaving of the tapestry that has made Canada one of the best countries in the world to live in. In a 1964 speech entitled “Canada: A Multicultural Nation”, he foresaw the potential strength of our multicultural experiment, saying, “If we succeed...in evolving the pattern of unity in continuing diversity...this will serve as precedent for other states in the world.... It will be Canada's contribution to the world.”

That is what I think Bill S-210 is all about. It affirms our recognition that our country is a multicultural country, that our Canada was built by hands of many colours, that our voice is composed of many tongues and that respect for each other begins with recognizing both our diversity and the common values that bind us together.

Indeed, it is this spirit of multiculturalism that makes Canada so different from all the other countries on this continent. This bill is a small recognition of that strength. It is through the creation of such recognition that we as members of Parliament and senators can confirm our own cultural roots as we simultaneously celebrate and respect the same for all those who labour to create the Canada we aspire to have, the Canada that demonstrates to the world that our multicultural experiment is indeed working.

● (0930)

I hope that you can unanimously support this bill, and I appreciate your studying it.

Thank you. *Dyakuyu*.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Senator.

Your passion for this bill is clear, given that you're presenting from a hospital clinic. That passion is noted by this committee.

We will now have one six-minute round of questions before we turn to clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. We'll start with Mr. Aboultaif.

The floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you, Chair.

Senator Kutcher, thank you for giving your remarks from the hospital. I hope you're feeling better, and I wish you all the best health. Also, thank you for bringing this bill forward in May 2025.

Thanks, MP Baker, for sponsoring it in the House. That's also very important.

There are 1.4 million people of Ukrainian origin in Canada. We celebrate their hard work, their honesty, their honourable approach to life in Canada and how much this community has enriched our society. We feel it first-hand in Edmonton, and in the Prairies, of course. Northeast Edmonton is home to a very large community that I enjoy and appreciate every day. Canada is a steadfast supporter of Ukraine and its people.

Mr. Baker, can you speak to the importance of celebrating Ukrainian heritage month, especially as the people of Ukraine are courageously fighting Vladimir Putin's illegal invasion of their land?

**Yvan Baker:** Thank you very much for your kind words.

Thank you to all members of the committee for expediting the study of this bill. I know there's much for you to work on. You've made this a priority, and I thank you for that.

I think it's important given that Ukrainians have been defending themselves against Russia's brutal invasion for the last four years. It is a critical opportunity and another way for us to show our support for the people of Ukraine. I spoke about what's at stake in this war, not only for Ukrainians but also for us.

When I speak to people in Ukraine, I hear that any amount of material support is appreciated, but symbolic support is also appreciated. This goes a long way toward further showing our support for the people of Ukraine.

When governments act, no matter which party is in power in Canada, it's the executive branch of government acting, very often. However, this is a unique opportunity for the Parliament of Canada to show its support across party lines. That's very important as well.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** I agree with what you said. Unity with the Ukrainian people is very important.

Yes, this bill is symbolic, but it means more than that. I believe the community, more than ever, needs support from all Canadians across the country. That unity must help to bring in some solidarity and must reflect solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Why is this very important to the community?

● (0935)

**Yvan Baker:** There are a few reasons.

My family is an example of the Ukrainian Canadian community. As you said, there are 1.4 million Ukrainian Canadians who have come to Canada. They started coming in 1891. Many of them or their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents lived through tremendous hardship, very often because they wanted to speak the Ukrainian language when they lived in Ukraine and could not, or to practise their religion or have free speech—things we take for granted in Canada.

Many of them faced hardships at the hands of the Russian regime, whether it was the Soviet regime or Russia itself. For them, there's a history of trying to defend Ukrainian heritage and culture, not only for those who have come to Canada recently from Ukraine, but also for generations of Ukrainian Canadians.

Many Ukrainian Canadians—and I'm one of them—attended Saturday schools to learn the Ukrainian language, history and culture. For many years, until 1991, Ukraine was under the Soviet Union. People didn't think they'd see a free and independent Ukraine, and they thought we needed to preserve the language here in Canada for future generations.

My point, to answer your question, sir, is that this is an opportunity to honour the efforts that have been made by Ukrainian Canadians for generations in protecting that heritage and the work they're doing now to support the people of Ukraine, whether that's financially or by advocating with us to make sure that Canada does all it can do to support the people of Ukraine. It's an opportunity, across party lines, for us to show our support for the community given the fact that they continue to support the Ukrainian people in this fight.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Outside Edmonton, there's the Ukrainian village. I believe every Edmontonian has visited the Ukrainian village and enjoyed the culture, the dances, the products and the community.

If you own a small business anywhere in northern or southern Alberta, you must be running the business inside a large Ukrainian community—sometimes the whole village—like Two Hills, Three Hills and others. I know that many of my Lebanese followers own businesses or restaurants in these small towns. They tell the best stories about how these communities enjoy working with and helping each other and about how welcoming the communities are. That also brings us to the unity of Canadian society when it comes to the Ukrainian cause.

For the last word, I would like you to emphasize this point one more time.

**Yvan Baker:** Yes, absolutely.

Passing this bill with unanimous support from this committee and the House of Commons would be an opportunity for MPs of all parties to show that we stand with the Ukrainian Canadian community, we support the efforts they've made to preserve their heritage for so many generations, we honour their contributions to Canada and we celebrate what Canadians have done to support the Ukrainian Canadian community.

We'll continue to support them here in Canada in the years to come, but also in their support for the people of Ukraine, who are not only fighting for themselves, but fighting for us all.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Myles, you have the floor for six minutes.

**David Myles:** Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to commend MP Baker.

Senator Kutcher, it's great to see another east coaster. I really appreciate the work you've done. I lived in Halifax for many years. I know you've been a real advocate for mental health and many other important issues in Canada. Thank you so much for all of your work and for representing the east coast so well.

This is a great bill. I'm so happy that you're both here.

One of the great joys of travelling around Canada in depth is that you get to learn about different immigration patterns in the country. You see where different people have ended up over time, historically. One of the great pleasures of touring through the Prairies was learning about Ukrainian culture in small Saskatchewan towns, outside of Edmonton in Alberta and all over the Prairies. It added so much to my experience of travelling through the Prairies and dis-

covering these pockets of culture that are so strong and so unique and that make our country even greater.

This recent war in Ukraine has been a real moment of solidarity for Canadians. It's brought a lot of people together in understanding the severity of this struggle.

My uncle Bernie, in retirement, as I've mentioned to you, MP Baker, out of nowhere felt a real compassion for the Ukrainian people and now spends half his year volunteering in Ukraine with children who have been displaced towards the western part of the country. His connection to the people of Ukraine and their struggle has been an incredible sign of compassion and empathy in our family. It has really brought a lot of attention to it.

As you said, there is a real connection between Canadians and Ukrainians, both historically and in the present day. That is remarkable.

I want to salute you on the work. Can you talk about how a bill can help us understand the struggle better, both historically and in the present day?

We'll start with Senator Kutcher, if that's okay, and then we'll go to MP Baker.

• (0940)

**Hon. Stanley Kutcher:** Thank you for that question and for your kind words. Thank your relative for his service.

One thing about celebrating one person's culture is that you acknowledge how important it is to celebrate every person's culture. That is an incredible thing about Canada. As you said, when you travelled through the west, you were able to get in touch with Ukrainian culture and it enriched who you were. It's the same for me. When I travel through parts of this incredible country and see other cultures, it enriches me as a person.

A member of Parliament talked about Lebanon. I had the opportunity to be in Beirut a number of times soon after the hostilities ended and reconstruction was beginning. I was working on some mental health projects. I know how important it was for the people of Lebanon to feel that the world knew their struggle. It's the same thing for the people of Ukraine.

As MP Baker said, this is a symbolic piece of legislation, and it is so important. Every morning when I wake up, I check my WhatsApp to see if my family in Kyiv and Lviv have survived the night. For them, for their friends and for the parliamentarians in Ukraine, passing this bill is a symbolic gesture of hope. Without hope, no society can flourish.

Thank you for your kind words and thank you for your question.

**David Myles:** Thank you.

**Yvan Baker:** I'm happy to add to that briefly, if you would like.

You've mentioned your Uncle Bernie to me before. First of all, please thank him. What he's doing is extraordinary.

There are quite a number of Canadians who have chosen to volunteer in various ways in supporting the people of Ukraine. Some of them are in Ukraine. Some of them are here volunteering to support the people. Some of them have taken Ukrainians who have come to Canada needing help and housed them in their homes and in our communities. Canadians have really risen to the occasion on this. It's not just parliamentarians but everyday folks, which is incredible.

I think this bill is an opportunity to show unity around our support for the Ukrainian Canadian community. It's about what the senator said: It's an opportunity to say that we celebrate this culture, and by extension, because we celebrate this culture, we value every culture that makes up Canada.

In the context of what's happening in Ukraine, which touches the Ukrainian people and touches us so deeply—our security and our future as democratic nations—it's an opportunity to say that we stand with Ukraine.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Mr. Champoux for six minutes.

● (0945)

**Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I want to convey my respect to Senator Kutcher, who is joining us from a hospital clinic this morning. That speaks to his commitment to getting this bill passed and is to be commended.

I have great respect for you, Senator.

I became a member of Parliament in 2019, and as soon as I arrived, I learned about the associations and parliamentary friendship groups that existed, giving us an opportunity to learn a lot about other cultures, other countries Canada has a wide range of ties and relationships with.

I was very pleased to be asked to represent the Bloc Québécois in the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, where I met Mr. Baker, its chair. Today, I have the honour of being the group's vice-chair. The friendship group's reach has become especially clear to me with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. My involvement with the group has helped me discover a community brimming with solidarity, resilience and courage.

We talked earlier about the various regions in Canada where immigrants have settled in rather different ways. Quebec is obviously home to many people of Ukrainian heritage, but not as much as other regions, as Mr. Aboultaif mentioned. It was therefore quite a revelation to discover the community's strong place in Canada's fabric. With that realization has come the enjoyment of interacting with members of the community through not just the parliamentary friendship group, but also the Canadian Ukrainian Congress, including people from Ukraine who came to meet with us. We met with Ukrainian MPs, among others, who spoke to us about the war and the Russian invasion, which was extremely insightful and remains very relevant. These experiences have always strengthened my sense of belonging and commitment to the friendship group, which is actually much more than a friendship group at this point.

Mr. Baker, talk a bit about what a Ukrainian heritage month would mean. In the current context, in particular, what would this designation add in terms of value? What would it give Ukrainian Canadians? What would it do for them, on a practical level, to have us dedicate a month of the year to Ukrainian heritage?

**Yvan Baker:** Thank you very much, Mr. Champoux.

First, I want to thank you for your work in the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group. I know many of us members—perhaps even all—belong to the friendship group. Thank you for your leadership on the executive, Mr. Champoux. I am especially grateful.

As for your question, it's worth pointing out that I introduced a similar bill in the previous Parliament, before the full-scale invasion in 2022. To my mind, then, the bill should be adopted, whether or not Ukraine is at war, for the reasons I mentioned. It's a chance to celebrate not just Ukrainian culture and the community's contributions to Canada, but also what Canada and Canadians are doing to support Ukrainian Canadians, especially when they arrive in Canada. They are vulnerable. They need help, and Canadians are there for them.

You asked about the importance of giving this recognition now, with the war going on. First, I think it's a good opportunity to show that we understand the significance of what is happening in Ukraine, of all the work the Ukrainian community here, in Canada, is doing, along with many Canadians. We heard about Bernie. There are a lot of people like Bernie in Canada, people who do not have a Ukrainian background but are actively supporting Ukraine. We want to demonstrate that we stand with the people of Ukraine and that we understand that the war in Ukraine is something that affects us all.

● (0950)

**Martin Champoux:** Speaking of the war, I would say it's awakened people's curiosity. Obviously, we have welcomed Ukrainians in Quebec. Because of the war, a number of Ukrainians now call my riding and the Drummond area home, especially Drummondville. They were able to integrate fairly easily.

As you mentioned, having a Ukrainian heritage month could help us focus our attention on something positive.

I realized that the knowledge I had of Ukraine was somewhat surface-level. However, I got to learn a bit more about the country on Vyshyvanka Day, which showcases the talent of Ukrainian artisans and the importance of that clothing. Much more than a piece of clothing, the vyshyvanka symbolizes the great strength of Ukrainian culture. Ukrainian cuisine is another area of discovery. We could talk about borscht, for instance.

A Ukrainian heritage month opens the door for us to learn a lot more about the culture, helping to showcase elements that are not tied solely to the war. I'd like you to talk about that, because I think it's a very positive aspect.

**Yvan Baker:** Thank you very much.

I know I don't have much time left, but I would just say that Bill S-210 was important for a number of reasons, in light of the war. However, I like what you just said. I think it's an opportunity to celebrate the culture.

Frankly, if we want Ukraine to win the war, we have to take concrete steps to support Ukrainians. That is the reality. This bill won't change that. If we want to help Ukrainians, we have to vote in favour of providing assistance to Ukraine. That's my message.

It's also important to highlight the contribution of Canadians, in this case, of Ukrainian descent, because they helped to shape our country and all the provinces. That is worth celebrating.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I will acknowledge MP Baker and all the years and effort he put in. We're very happy to be able to deal with this piece of legislation today and to get it passed in the House of Commons so that it actually happens.

Moving on, we will go to clause-by-clause consideration.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of clause 1, the short title, and of the preamble is postponed.

Shall clause 2 carry?

(Clause 2 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall the short title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the preamble carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the bill carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Bravo. Congratulations, colleagues.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Our intention is to present these two bills to the House upon our return after the two-week break for Easter. That will happen as soon as possible.

Once again, thank you very much, gentlemen, for your time, your attention and all your hard work on this issue.

Do members have anything else to raise?

I adjourn this meeting.

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