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Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 39 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, pursuant to the order of reference of Friday, March 6, 2009, Bill C-302, An Act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their “enemy alien” designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history.

Appearing here this morning is the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Honourable Jason Kenney.

Mr. Kenney, go ahead, please.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism): Thanks very much, Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Joining me today are Ümit Kiziltan, from the Citizenship and Multiculturalism Branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Sandy MacDonald, Director, Historical Recognition Programs.

I am pleased to join you today to speak to an issue that concerns one of this country's largest cultural groups. I have some brief opening remarks and then I will be happy to take your questions.

According to the 2006 census, Canada has over 1.4 million Canadians of Italian descent. This community has made an enormous contribution to the building of our nation. However, during the Second World War, some 632 people of Italian origin were interned as enemy aliens of Canada, almost all of them at an internment camp in Petawawa, Ontario. Others were also interned in various other camps and penitentiaries.

[English]

At that time the government had legitimate security concerns about the operations of foreign governments in Canada. That is the historical context of the actions at that time, which we should not dismiss. We should give full consideration to that historical security context.

That being said, it's clear now in retrospect, decades later, that what occurred during the internment involved, in many cases, the violation of people's due process rights. It caused great anxiety that continues to this day among many Canadians of Italian origin.

In some cases the grounds for internment were spurious and based on race and suspicion rather than evidence. For example, 24-year-old Benny Ferry was an Italian-born Canadian who was arrested in June 1940 and held at Petawawa. But 11 months later the authorities recognized their mistake. They released him and within a few months, as a model, loyal Canadian citizen, he had volunteered for the Canadian Army. There were numerous cases like this—a year or less of internment followed by release.

I acknowledge the sincere efforts of our colleague Mr. Pacetti to address this historical experience in this bill. I acknowledge that in this bill he speaks to an issue that has long been a matter of deep concern to Canadians of Italian origin.

I'd like to provide some historical context on the approach and responses of successive Canadian governments to the issue of the internment of Canadians of Italian origin during the Second World War. Then I'll address some comments on the bill itself. While I acknowledge the sincere motivation of Mr. Pacetti, I submit that the bill is deeply flawed, and I will analyze the reasons why I hold that view.

First of all, in the years following the war there was a decision to not recognize the problematic or unjust nature of these detentions. Prime Minister Trudeau, from 1968 to 1984, took the position that what was in the past was in the past, and we should not in any way deal with issues of historical recognition or redress for incidents such as wartime internment, not only for Italian Canadians but also for the Japanese, Canadians of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the first war, and immigration restriction measures. He completely opposed such efforts.

He was succeeded by Prime Minister Mulroney, who took a different approach. He believed that Canada was big enough to learn from its mistakes and should face up to them, which of course he did in 1988 with his apology for the internment of Canadians of Japanese origin. Prime Minister Mulroney also, on November 4, 1990, made an apology on behalf of Canadians and the government to Canadians of Italian origin for what occurred between 1940 and 1943. Let me quote at some length from his statement on that day.

At a luncheon of the National Congress of Italian Canadians he said:

What happened to many Italian Canadians is deeply offensive to the simple notion of respect for human dignity and the presumption of innocence. The brutal injustice was inflicted arbitrarily, not only on individuals suspected of being security risks but also on individuals whose only crime was to be of Italian origin. In fact, many of the arrests were based on membership in Italian Canadian organizations—much like the ones represented here today. None of the 700 internees was ever charged with an offence and no judicial proceedings were launched. It was often, in the simplest terms, an act of prejudice—organized and carried out under law, but prejudice nevertheless.

In 1988 my Government revoked the War Measures Act—so that never again will such injustices be inflicted on innocent and unsuspecting Canadians. By creating the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, we are also saying “never again”. But to say “never again” without explicitly and formally recognizing as well that a wrong has been done is not enough.

● (1115)

Forty-five years of silence about these wrongs is a shameful part of our history. The silence was maintained by Governments who thought the internments were either right or inconsequential. Well, we know that they were neither. They were legally wrong and morally offensive. They showed as well that, when things got tough, the Government of Canada was not above blaming the newcomers with unusual-sounding names, not beyond scapegoating minorities still struggling in many cases to learn English or French. This is a crucial issue and I want to be clear. This kind of behaviour was not then, is not now, and never will be acceptable in a civilized nation that purports to respect the rule of law. On behalf of the government and people of Canada, I offer a full and unqualified apology for the wrongs done to our fellow Canadians of Italian origin during World War II.

Mr. Chairman, that apology was followed between 1993 and 2005 by a government that subsequently refused to provide any commemorative funding to deepen our understanding of the internment experience and to educate future generations about it. In fact, Secretary of State Sheila Finestone wrote to the Italian-Canadian organizations and other groups indicating that the government would not deal with any demands for redress. Similarly, former Heritage Minister Sheila Copps took the same position on behalf of Prime Minister Chrétien.

In October 2005, just before the federal election, however, an agreement in principle was signed to provide \$2.5 million in commemorative project funding to four organizations: the National Congress of Italian Canadians, the National Federation of Canadian Italian Business and Professional Associations, the Order Sons of Italy of Canada, and the Fondation communautaire canadienne-italienne du Québec.

When our government took office, we began discussions with those organizations. I was honoured to lead many of those discussions over the course of 2006 and 2007. It was the position of those organizations that the government should transfer funding for \$12.5 million to the National Congress of Italian Canadians Foundation, and we explored that in good faith. But first of all, I couldn't understand where they came up with this \$12.5 million figure. They claimed it had been a commitment made by the previous Martin government. We looked very closely at all of the books, and we asked our officials to go through all of the public accounts and budget documents and fiscal framework and announcements. We could find no evidence of any such commitment beyond the \$2.5 million in the AIP.

When my department officials came back to me, I asked them to review this possibility of an endowment, and here's what they told me. They said:

Endowments are a unique funding mechanism and Treasury Board sets strict criteria for approving their use. Treasury Board requires a business case to be prepared and a clear demonstration to be made that the recipient has the capacity

and experience to manage and invest the funds in accordance with the Minister of Finance Investment Management Framework for upfront funding and to comply with the rigorous reporting governance and accountability requirements for foundations.

In May 2008, in exploring all options for delivery of funding under the community historical recognition program, departmental officials requested from the National Congress of Italian Canadians the necessary documents to determine the capacity of the NCIC foundation with respect to the requirements above. The NCIC provided only the foundation's letters patent and bylaws. It did not provide other documents requested, such as the foundation's investment policy, board members, investment committee members, information on activities and achievements, or any financial information.

Officials were, however, able to obtain from department files the 2005 financial statement for the foundation, which showed that it possessed only \$521 in assets and had nil revenues for the year. Upon verification with Canada's online federal corporations data, officials also learned that the foundation had not submitted its annual report since at least 2006 and that it had signalled its intent to dissolve in 2004, later revoking it, which provided further indication of the foundation's inactivity. Based on this information, officials concluded that it would not be possible to develop a successful business case demonstrating that the NCIC possessed the required capacity and experience to manage an endowment.

I conveyed this information back to my interlocutors from the four organizations, that the government is obliged to comply with the Treasury Board criteria and the Minister of Finance's management framework and that the foundation simply didn't qualify. Subsequently, because we were unable to come to a consensus with the organizations, our government decided that six decades of inaction with respect to the commemorative dimension of redress for Italian internment was too long and that we had to take action.

● (1120)

Consequently, we designated \$5 million of funding within the community historic recognition program to be available exclusively for projects that commemorate and educate Canadians about the Italian Canadian internment during the Second World War. I'm pleased to say that we've already received a number of applications, that the grants and projects to be funded by CHRP will be done on the basis of an advisory committee of eminent Canadians of Italian origin.

Let me close by saying that the CHRP fund that our government has made available, the first moneys ever released by any government in Canadian history to commemorate this experience, is joined by other efforts by our government, including the creation of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, with the \$25 million endowment by the Mulroney government, including the construction of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the establishment of Pier 21 as a national immigration museum. We believe both of those institutions will acknowledge permanently the sad history of wartime internment measures.

So I submit that the bill is flawed in a number of respects.

First of all, it designates the Minister of Canadian Heritage when it's the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who's now responsible for historical recognition.

It identifies one organization when there were four identified in the agreement in principle, and that excludes the other 33 million Canadians who may individually or through their own organizations want to participate in this funding. I don't think they should be forced to go through one organization. I don't think we should be picking winners and losers.

It speaks of restitution. The other historical recognition files—the Chinese head tax, Japanese internment—don't talk about restitution, because that implies returning real property, which is clearly no longer the case. We no longer have survivors, and no one has proposed that we actually restore real property.

It talks about referring an agreement to Parliament for approval. It doesn't say by what instrument or what kind of approval that would constitute.

It talks about promoting ethnic and racial harmony. I agree, and that's why the previous government created the Race Relations Foundation. That's why we have these other projects, such as the human rights museum. So I think that's redundant.

It speaks of an apology. As I've indicated and quoted at length, the Prime Minister of Canada already made a full apology on behalf of the government and people of Canada—a full and unqualified apology.

And finally, it speaks to the creation of a postage stamp, which is in violation of what I think is a pretty sensible policy for commemorative stamps by Canada Post. I don't think we should be politicizing that. I think a postage stamp on this is a great idea, and I'd be happy to join with Mr. Pacetti and other parliamentarians in writing the advisory committee of Canada Post to recommend a stamp, but I don't think we should make exceptions to the general sensible policy they have in that respect.

So those are my comments on the bill, and I look forward to any questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the first question, Ms. Minna, please.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Chair; and thank you, Minister.

Minister, I want to start off by pointing out the fact that you acted after my colleague tabled the bill. Your actions did not come prior to that. So I need put that on the table, but I also want to tell you something.

The day that you did the apology to the Chinese Canadians, I was glad, but I also cried, because I personally, even now, feel offended and incensed that you can sit there and tell me that for the Italian Canadian community it's sufficient for someone to say "I'm sorry" in a banquet hall, that it does not deserve someone to say "I am sorry" in the Parliament of Canada, where the representatives of the people of Canada sit.

Can you please tell me why you think the Italian Canadian community does not deserve that? And please make it short, because I have five other questions. Just give me a quick answer as to why you think so.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes or no to your question? Prime Minister Mulroney made a full and unqualified apology—

Hon. Maria Minna: I've already told you that was not acceptable either to the community or to myself.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Did you make that point to Prime Ministers Chrétien and Martin?

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, I did, and the fact that—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Can you point to that anywhere on the public record?

Hon. Maria Minna: Wait a minute, Minister, the fact that they did not act does not make a right. I made my point then. As I member of that community, I will continue to make it. Ultimately, Mr. Martin came to the table—

Hon. Jason Kenney: If I search the parliamentary record, am I going to find any record of your making that point?

Hon. Maria Minna: Do two wrongs make a right, Minister? Is that what you're telling me?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I think Mr. Mulroney's apology was a right.

Hon. Maria Minna: You've answered my question. You're picking and choosing who deserves. They at least apologized to no one, and while I disagreed with them, you obviously have a preference as to who in this country deserves this government's apology.

Thank you very much.

Now, moving on to the administration of the funds, which you made a great deal of, I see that you feel the Ukrainian Canadian community is mature enough to be able to administer their own funds; however, in the Italian Canadian community, they're not mature enough to administer their own funds. In fact, you've gone to great lengths to tell us about how you've chosen an independent... It's administered by the government; it's only \$5 million, not more than that, although the agreement was much larger. The duly elected representatives of the community, although you say you cannot pick and choose, you are picking and choosing.

Therefore, I would like to ask you, who recommended the three individuals you've appointed?

•(1125)

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, I reject the premise of the question. You say the agreement is much larger. I don't know what agreement you're referring to. If you have evidence—

Hon. Maria Minna: The Ukrainian is \$10 million, and this one is \$5 million and is administered by the government.

Hon. Jason Kenney: If you have evidence of an agreement that was more than the \$2.5 million in the agreement in principle, I would like to see it, because we haven't been able to find it in the government records, first of all.

Secondly, with respect to the Ukrainians, the Taras Shevchenko Foundation, they are acting to administer a fund on behalf of a committee that the government has—

Hon. Maria Minna: I want to know who recommended these three people to you. That's what I want to know. Where did you get the names? How did they come to you? Who recommended them?

Hon. Jason Kenney: We consulted people throughout the community.

Hon. Maria Minna: Who did you consult?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would have to go back and verify my notes. It was two years ago and I don't exactly recall the details. They were individuals who came...

Hon. Maria Minna: I would suggest—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Please, Mr. Chairman, am I able to answer any questions?

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, finish.

The Chair: Let him answer the question.

Hon. Maria Minna: All right, who recommended the three people?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Once again, Mr. Chairman, I don't precisely recall. I think we consulted with a number of different people.

Hon. Maria Minna: Who did you consult with?

The Chair: Excuse me, let him answer, please.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, but I want to know.

Thank you.

The Chair: He won't get the answer across if you keep interrupting.

Hon. Jason Kenney: These were individuals whose names came forward from different sources. I will be happy to get back to you if I can find in my notes exactly who recommended the individuals. I think they're all eminent Canadians of Italian origin. In any event, the government needs to ensure that any grants and contributions that are provided through the CHRP fund comply with Treasury Board rules and the terms and conditions. The job of the advisory committee is simply to recommend whether or not they think these are good projects.

Hon. Maria Minna: I have very little time so I'm going to move on, because I think you just answered by questions. None of the major organizations in my community were approached.

I can tell you I have been a volunteer for 35 years in my community, and I was president of one of the largest organizations. I

was the national president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians. I know that community really well, and you did not. In fact, one of them I know is the president of the Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel riding for the Conservative Party. I suspect that was the consultation you had. That shows to me, Minister, that you have bypassed the major organizations in the community completely, therefore not consulting with any of them. The National Congress of Italian Canadians, the ones who were here yesterday, is an umbrella organization. And the organization of one of your three appointees is in fact a member of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, and you chose not to consult them or any of the others. And I can name all of them for you.

The Chair: Very short, please, to the question.

Hon. Maria Minna: I actually want to make a comment, because as a member of that community I find this highly offensive.

I have lived through this kind of contemptuous treatment of my community for decades. I have lived with it, and it has come from all parties. So don't smirk at me on that side. The Conservatives, the NDP, the Liberals—I am quite ready to say all of them have done it at different times.

This is the ultimate offence: no apology, you cannot manage your own funds, and no consultation with the major organizations, telling them that they cannot handle it. Minister, I think you owe us an apology not only for what happened during the war, but what's happening right now.

The Chair: Your time is up. That was a statement, I think.

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, I know. I wanted it put on the record.

The Chair: Madame Lavallée.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our committee, Minister. It is a pleasure to have you join us. Judging from your presentation, I get the impression that you are not opposed to the idea of issuing an apology to the Italian community. Am I wrong? You stated that there is no denying that for some Italian Canadians, living in this country has not always been easy.

Do you in fact believe that Italian Canadians deserve an apology?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes, and that is why former Prime Minister Mulroney issued a formal, unqualified apology on behalf of the government and the people of Canada.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: So then, you agree that they deserve an apology. An apology was in fact issued, but in a less formal setting than Parliament. Suppose we set aside the bill and try to find some common ground.

Why can't the Prime Minister issue another apology, but this time in the House? That would satisfy the demands of the Italian community. If we were to do only that, it would be a small step for our Prime Minister, but a major step forward for the Italian community.

•(1130)

Hon. Jason Kenney: The Government of Canada has already apologized, through the actions and words of the former Prime Minister. I don't think Canadians would go along with the government apologizing twice for the same incidents.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: There is no question that issuing an apology in the House of Commons is an important step. There is a reason for your opposition. I think that since the government has already apologized outside the House, the average citizen would have no problem with the government issuing another apology in the House. Usually, we don't see the opposite occurring, that is the statements made in the House repeated outside this forum. What we're asking here is that the government apologize again in the House. That would be a very symbolic gesture. Parliament is an important institution in the eyes of Italian Canadians. Perhaps they would be happy with an apology.

Hon. Jason Kenney: First of all, we are here to debate the bill. It does not call for the Prime Minister to issue another apology in the House. The bill aims to recognize the injustice done to Italian Canadians.

Moreover, there is no rule that says apologies must always be extended in the House. Two years ago, Prime Minister Harper issued a formal apology for the way in which Maher Arar was treated. That apology was not made in the House of Commons. Other governments have acted in a similar manner.

It's important to point out that the Prime Minister of Canada has already apologized on behalf of the people and Government of Canada. I can understand that some may be frustrated with the fact that the apology was not made by a Liberal prime minister. I'm sorry for Ms. Minna that a Liberal prime minister refused to take this step before Mr. Mulroney did, but that's what happened. In my opinion, it's important to learn from our past mistakes, as Mr. Mulroney did.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: For that reason, I'm suggesting we set aside the bill and agree to do what the Italian community is asking of us. I have to admit that it was rather impressive to see such a large contingent of Italian Canadian men last Tuesday. I think all three of your advisers, Mr. Kenney, are members of this community.

Prominent members of the Italian-Canadian community came here to ask for an apology to be issued in the House. That was their initial demand. They even told us that once this apology was extended, there would be no further grievances or demands from the Italian community.

Hon. Jason Kenney: In my opinion, a government should not have to apologize several times for the same mistakes. There are over 1.4 million Canadians of Italian descent. To be honest, 34,000 Canadians were affected by the internment process. All Canadians of Italian descent were affected, not just the organization of a so-called leader. As I see it, our actions are indicative of a much more democratic approach. Under our program, leaders of these organizations can apply for funding for commemorative and educational activities. All Canadians of Italian descent who are interested in these kinds of activities can apply for funding...

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I'm sorry for interrupting, but as you know, I am on the clock and...

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up, Madame Lavallée.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I just want to finish my sentence.

[English]

The Chair: We've gone over time.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for coming to our committee.

I've been trying to work through this bill, and at our last session we had the leaders of many of the large Italian organizations. My colleague Mr. Calandra certainly seemed very hostile to them, and I was trying to understand what was behind that.

Would you agree with the statement that the efforts for redress are elite-initiated and influenced by the political ambitions of minority Canadians in national politics?

•(1135)

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would say that politics plays a role in this. I wouldn't put those words in my mouth, but I would say that clearly politics plays a role in this. There's community politics, partisan politics, there's a lot of politics around this.

Mr. Charlie Angus: So there's politics. Would you agree with the statement that Canada's internment of Italian -Canadian fascists was politically sound and necessary, and that the Canadian government should have made it clear that they were being interned because they were fascists and therefore a security risk, just like German Nazis, communists and jailed witnesses? Would you agree with that?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Again, I wouldn't ascribe those as my views. I would say, as I did at the beginning, that there was an understandable and legitimate preoccupation about national security. There was fascist activity in Canada in those years. But clearly, we all recognize that the government overreacted and there were unjust internments at the time.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I ask that because the man that you chose, Dr. Perin, has written these statements and he is now the man you say democratically will be deciding what issues are going to be addressed by the Italian community and which ones are not. You chose a photographer, you chose a fundraiser, and you chose an historian with very clear views on this. He says, "We have watched with concern the campaign of Canadian redress. Its leaders are guided by simplified versions of events, drawing on selective evidence, ignoring contrary views and glossing over the fascist history of the Italian communities." That's his position.

Why would you put this man in charge of it? Do you agree with him? Do you think that redress is something that is politically inspired?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Well, I think as much as possible we should take the politics out of redress. That is why—

Mr. Charlie Angus: No, why did you choose him? Do you agree with him?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'm answering your last question, which was do I think the politics should be taken out of redress, and I'm saying as much as possible we should take the politics out of redress, and I think one way of doing that is to allow individuals to make their applications so they don't have to go through one organization—

Mr. Charlie Angus: But through one man who is very politically partisan. He has extremely clear views on this.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I don't know what his political views are—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I find that very surprising.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I have no idea what his political views are, and I can tell you that, to the best of my knowledge, I've never met or even spoken with Mr. Perin. His name is recognized—

Mr. Angus, if you want to take.... I understand he's a tenured university professor—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Dr. Perin says these internments have yet to be studied in depth, but this is not to keep ethnic organizations from demanding redress.

The Chair: Mr. Angus—

Mr. Charlie Angus: The subject of redress raises a central political question, whether a current government or generation should apologize. Then he goes on, because my colleagues over there keep referring to Mr. Mulroney's apology.... He says that Prime Minister Mulroney's apology has confirmed the validity of a laundered version of history.

You chose this man. You chose him because you knew he would be the one to decide which stories of history were told and which ones were not. So why don't you just say it clearly: you don't like the fact that you think these Italian organizations are inspired by political operatives, perhaps for the Liberal Party? You don't like the issue of redress, and you're not going to issue an apology. That's why you chose him. Just say it.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, please let the minister answer this time.

Mr. Charlie Angus: He doesn't need any help.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, first, I think Mr. Angus is quoting from published articles of a tenured academic. If you'd like to get into an academic debate with the gentleman—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm reading from the man you chose, because your colleagues said, "What's there to apologize for?" That was the position of the Conservative Party the other day. Do you agree with that?

The Chair: Mr. Angus, would you let the minister answer, please?

Yes, Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, Mr. Angus has insinuated something that was never said at this committee. We never once claimed on this side that there was no apology necessary.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Calandra said—and I checked the notes—"What's there to apologize for?" I'm asking, do you agree

with that? Because that's what Mr. Perin seems to be of the view, and he's the man you chose.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, there was a point of order, and I will say that our minister has not been able to answer. I guess the statements have been made. We've heard those statements and we are now moving on to Mr. Del Mastro.

Hon. Jason Kenney: He asked several questions there that I—

The Chair: Okay, would you please answer the questions and try to respond?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Angus asked, am I opposed to redress? Mr. Chairman, absolutely not. I'm the minister who successfully managed to oversee the redress of the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act, something that was not done or ever addressed by previous governments.

I'm the minister who brought about, for the first time ever, working with the Jewish community on the *St. Louis* incident and will recognize the country's refusal to accept European Jewish refugees during the Second World War. There was a failure to address that by previous governments. I'm the minister who successfully came to an arrangement with eastern and central European communities about the history of the First World War internment.

I'm also the minister who tried very hard to come to an agreement with four organizations in the Italian-Canadian community who did not qualify, according to our officials, for the kind of funding they were asking for, Mr. Chairman. And do I think there should be an apology? I think there was an apology, and I accept that, Mr. Chair.

• (1140)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the minister for his testimony.

Minister, you've been a member of this House since 1997. Ms. Minna alluded to needing to put something on the record in this committee, quite vociferously I would argue. Between the time of 1997 and today.... Well, let's go back to 1997 to 2005, when she was a minister in a previous government. Do you ever recall her putting anything on the record to the extent of what she said today?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Actually, Mr. Chairman, on this issue, the only statements by the previous governments of Canada, from 1993 to 2006, were from Prime Minister Chrétien indicating there would be no consideration of these requests for redress. He reiterated Prime Minister Trudeau's words that these actions were in the past and that we should focus exclusively on the future. That was reiterated by former Minister of State Sheila Finestone and former Minister of Canadian Heritage Sheila Copps.

I've been unable to find anywhere on the parliamentary record any comments to the contrary by any members of that government, including Ms. Minna.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you. I appreciate that.

We've gone through this list. We've talked about how Pierre Trudeau said emphatically the matter was closed. There would be no excuses, no compensation, and no apology. That's the Liberal record. Jean Chrétien said the same thing. Paul Martin did nothing until an ACE agreement, which had no money budgeted, was hastily crafted when the government was in its death throes. You've indicated that you've looked into this. You can't find any reference to these funds that are claimed, and I appreciate that.

I want to refer to something. Do you know one thing that's really bothering me? I've indicated to you personally that my family was in this country when this occurred. When this occurred, there had been decades of racism and so forth, I would argue, shame that extended beyond this, and to the best of my knowledge I'm the only person whose family was in this country at that time. I said the other day that I don't claim to be a better Canadian of Italian descent than anybody else on this committee, but I do speak to it with experience. My father actually did change his name, as did a lot of his family members, so they would fit in better. My grandparents refused to speak Italian in the house, even though their English was bad, because they wanted their kids to be Canadian and not to be discriminated against.

One thing that really bothers me is the impugment of solid Canadians who have stepped forward to work on a historical recognition program. I want to refer to something written by.... And you know, this is this elitist attitude, Ms. Minna, once again, impugning Canadians who have stepped forward.

Hon. Maria Minna: It's not an elitist attitude.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: That is elitist. And I'll tell you that Angelo Persichilli is a Canadian writer of Italian descent, somebody I have a great deal of respect for. Maybe Ms. Minna thinks he might be okay. Angelo Persichilli wrote:

This committee formed to manage the funds available at the government of Stephen Harper and appropriately placed under the guidance of a person as intelligent and balanced as Pal Di Julio who will give clear instructions on how to spend this money and may be the last word on this ugly page in Canadian history.

Can you understand why opposition members are impugning Pal Di Julio, a solid Canadian, a person who I know works hard within the Italian community, a person who personally put aside—I don't know—dozens and dozens and dozens of hours just this past summer raising money for the Abruzzo earthquake fund? Can you understand why he apparently is not a good enough Canadian of Italian descent to advise the government and to work with Italian groups across this country to recognize this incident? Why do you think the members across the way think Pal Di Julio isn't a good enough Canadian of Italian descent?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I don't know, Mr. Chairman. I think it's regrettable that people are attacking the integrity of individuals who have stepped forward—voluntarily, by the way, without compensation—to provide us with this kind of advice. I should say that our experience with other advisory committees we've named in the context of historical recognition has been very positive, and essentially the vast majority of applications are approved. They're there to make sure the applications are relevant to the experience, in their judgment.

I'm pleased to say we have received many applications for projects—very worthwhile projects, I think—from across the expanse of the Canadian-Italian community, including from local chapters of the National Congress of Italian-Canadians.

• (1145)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Very good.

I'd like to point something else out. It will be very quick. It's in response to Madame Lavallée.

The Italian community has great women in leadership, and in fact in the early 1990s it was Annamarie Castrilli who brought this issue forward and worked with the Mulroney government at the time to bring about the apology. Ms. Castrilli is an accomplished lawyer and a fantastic leader within the Italian community, and she and I continue to have a great open dialogue.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll go to Mr. Rodriguez, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you may think that the apology issued by Mr. Mulroney was enough, but that is not what the community believes. We are concerned about how the community feels today and about the importance of issuing a formal apology. To my mind, and in the opinion of this community, an apology made in a reception hall does not have the same impact as a formal apology issued in the Parliament of Canada. That is what the community is demanding.

Before I make my point, I just wanted to share with you a concern that I have. You stated that you were not familiar with Mr. Perin's political views, and I find that worrisome. The fact that you referred to him by name should mean that you are familiar with his views. At the very least, your advisers should have briefed you on what this man has written and what he thinks about this whole matter.

Getting back to the testimony presented last week, we heard from the Italian community's largest groups, the ones that traditionally represent and have been mandated to represent the community. I put the question to each group, as I did to the CIBPA the week before that. There was unanimous support for the bill.

Let me share with you a few of the comments they made. For example, regarding the agreement-in-principle that you alluded to that was reached with the Martin government, they had this to say: Minister Kenney decided unilaterally, for reasons that defy comprehension, to go ahead with a new program that does not have the support of the main organizations within the Italian-Canadian community. As for the advisory committee that was set up, it is said to be a program advisory committee that represents the Italian community and that no organization...

So then, Minister, there is a fundamental problem when reputable organizations that have been recognized for decades are unanimous in their support for the bill. None was consulted about doing away with the program established in 2005 and none was consulted about setting up an advisory committee. Do you not see that there is a fundamental problem here owing to the fact that the Minister acted unilaterally?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Thank you for your question, Mr. Rodriguez.

You have to understand that this issue has been around for six decades. Several governments have failed in their attempt to put in place a process to commemorate the events surrounding the internment. When I met with the four organizations that co-signed the agreement- in-principle, I gave them the opportunity to set up an advisory committee.

[*English*]

I offered to those organizations to nominate members to the advisory board. They declined. Their position was that they wanted an endowment fund. I looked at the possibility of an endowment fund, and my officials advised it would not comply with the law. I have to comply with the law, but I also wanted to move forward on the issue and I thought this was the best way to do so.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I'll quote him again. They were here 48 hours ago: "We chose to continue the negotiations with the government, with Minister Bev Oda, with Minister Kenney, only to be insulted, only to be put aside when they came up with this program which had never been discussed, had never been approved by anyone, with people on this consultative committee."

That was a double insult to the Italian community.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

There is a rift between your government and the main groups representing the Italian community because they feel insulted, and doubly so. I have here a letter addressed to you from Mr. Ciaccia. It reads as follows:

[*English*]

"Your plan of action announced on March 21...under the community historical reparation plan has no legitimacy and simply does not make any sense."

He goes on to say: "For all of the above we submit that bypassing the legitimate community organizations who have been negotiating with the government in good faith is simply misguided and unacceptable."

You never replied to that letter. Why?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'm sorry, I receive thousands of letters. I can't recall. Did I not reply? I'm not sure.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: It was sent to you on March 31. It's not to just anybody.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'd be happy to look into that, Mr. Chairman. I can't recall off the top of my head the dates of replies to thousands of letters that I receive.

But for the sake of clarity I will say that in my discussions with the representatives of the four organizations, which we held in good faith, and which is why I looked at the possibility of an endowment transfer, I indicated that we could not do the endowment transfer but that the government could administer the funds and disburse them to eligible projects on the advice of an advisory board made up in part of representatives of the community organizations. They decided for their own reasons not to participate.

I was of the view, Mr. Chairman, that after so many years of inaction on this file we should move forward and make funds available to the broader community—not to one or two individuals but to the broader community—and that's exactly what we did.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. The minister said that he consulted documents and never saw the \$12.5 million. Could he table the documents he consulted, please?

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, because there are no such documents.

Mr. Chairman, let me be clear about this. The \$12.5 million never existed. It was a phantom; it was a lie, Mr. Chairman.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jason Kenney: I invite members of the opposition to make access to information requests—

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Are you saying the Prime Minister of Canada is a liar, or are you saying the Italian community are liars?

Hon. Jason Kenney: —from Finance, from Heritage, from my ministry to see whether there is any single official government document that refers to \$12.5 million. There's not, Mr. Chairman.

Talk about bad faith.

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand: the Ukrainians can manage it; Italians cannot.

The Chair: It's been noted.

I go on to Mr. Pomerleau, please, or Madame Lavallée.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, Minister you...

[*English*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I don't want to interrupt. I'm not a member of this committee. I'd just like to ask whether we can have those documents tabled. I requested those documents. You cannot tell me there are no documents.

Hon. Jason Kenney: There are no documents to table. That's the whole point.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: You mentioned that there were documents. There was an agreement signed on November 12 between the Government of Canada and various members of the Italian community. There must have been negotiations and documents that preceded this agreement. You cannot deny that this agreement existed. I could table the agreement, but there are documents, which I've requested, that have not been made available.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: I have a point of order. Thank you.

Perhaps they could also table the documents related to things such as Kelowna, or perhaps they could document things related to Kyoto, or produce other documents the Liberal Party signed that they had zero intention of ever following through on.

That was a political document, and you well know it.

The Chair: We're going to move on to Mr. Pomerleau, please.

I would imagine that through access to information those documents will be available.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: The minister has to leave at noon, and Madame Lavallée's question is being interrupted, so could you proceed?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Yes, and I hope the points of order don't cut into my allotted time.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm trying to. I should have used my gavel, shouldn't I?

Madame Lavallée, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Earlier, Minister, you stated that it would be undignified for the government to apologize too often. I'd like to dispute that contention. When one makes a mistake, the least one can do is issue a dignified apology, until such time as the victims are prepared to accept that apology. It takes a big man to apologize. Making an apology at a reception or dance is one thing, but it isn't enough. We want you to issue an apology in the House of Commons.

The very least an honourable government can do is to openly admit to the members of the House of Commons that it made a mistake and apologize for it. And it should continue to apologize until the victims are satisfied with and accept these apologies. That's what a responsible government must do, a government that has the welfare of its citizens and in this case, of the Italian-Canadian community, at heart.

• (1155)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, there are no longer any victims still alive to witness any new apologies.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I'm sure there are a few of them who are still alive.

Hon. Jason Kenney: But the bill makes no mention of the government issuing a second apology in the House of Commons.

I am curious about one thing, however. The four organizations in question signed an agreement-in-principle on November 12, 2005 in which the following is stated: The Government of Canada and the Italian Canadian Community have developed this Agreement-in-Principle premised on the principles of "no compensation" and "no apology".

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I'm sorry, Minister...

Hon. Jason Kenney: The four organizations agreed that no apology would be requested.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: And yet, these persons came here to request an apology. I have my doubts about these documents, and even about what you said earlier about the National Congress of Italian Canadians. I know your government is always ready to invoke a sophistical argument, as it did in the case of the 10%, to establish questionable facts.

Moreover, I was quite surprised to hear your advisers' comments when they were here. They even went so far as to inform me, outside the confines of this committee, that the people interned during the

war were fascists and deserved their fate. That's what they told me. Therefore, I find...

[*English*]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order, I'll hear Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Madame Lavallée is referring to testimony from witnesses that was not delivered at this committee. I don't see how that can be in order.

The Chair: I don't either.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: What she just referred to were some comments made in a hallway. How can we attribute any truth to that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: In any case, they've repeated these statements in books.

Minister, I asked the advisers who came here to name the person or organization at the helm of the Italian community. They answered that there was no one person or organization in particular, whereas we know very well that the National Congress of Italian Canadians has taken on this role. For all kinds of reasons like this, even though I'm no expert on Italian-Canadian or Italian-Quebec affairs, I have to question the quality of the advice they gave you.

Summing up, I do want to say that I have a great deal of respect for Italian women. It so happens that we have a prominent Italian woman in our midst. My cousins, uncles and aunts—I'm from Montreal—all married Italians. My uncle, Orelia Ferraro, is Italian. Not only is he my uncle, he is also my godfather. My cousins are Italian and they taught me how to make real Italian pizza. Therefore, I have a great deal of respect for Italians and for the Italian community. When I hear prominent Italian Canadians say that despite the bill, they would still like to have the government apologize in the House of Commons...

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chair, they were of the opposite opinion when they signed the agreement in 2005.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Like I said earlier, I'll believe it when I see it.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I didn't hear a question there, necessarily. Is there some sort of response?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, I need to be really clear. There are various questions here about tabling documents. I'm happy to table the agreement in principle between the Government of Canada and the Italian-Canadian community of November 12, 2005. I didn't think it was necessary; I thought it was already before the committee. This is the agreement in principle that speaks of an amount of \$2.5 million, and an agreement of no compensation and no apology.

I said there were no documents referring to \$12.5 million. I can't table such documents because they don't exist. There's no document in the records of the Government of Canada that refers to an agreement for \$12.5 million. There is only this agreement, Mr. Chairman.

What I find really curious is Madam Minna's talking about demands for an apology. The organizations in question—Mr. Campione, president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians; Mr. Mariani, president of the Fédération nationale des associations commerciales et professionnelles italo-canadiennes; Mr. Buetti, past president of the Orders Sons of Italy of Canada; Mr. Galella, Fondation communautaire canadienne-italienne du Québec—*ont signé un accord* that said there will be no apology, no compensation and no apology.

That was their agreement. That may have been sufficient for Raymond Chan and the previous Liberal government. It wasn't for either the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney, which made the apology, or our government, which has put on the table not \$2.5 million but \$5 million for commemorative funding, and not to be distributed by a handful of self-selected community leaders but available to everyone in the community, Mr. Chairman—everyone.

• (1200)

Hon. Maria Minna: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. As an Italian Canadian, when someone gives you absolutely no choice, you take what you can. I'm saying there was no choice. But when you start apologizing to everyone, then there is a choice.

The Chair: The last question is from Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you. Can you confirm that I'll get my full five minutes, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You will.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you. I appreciate that.

To begin with, I want to address this issue of Treasury Board. You've indicated that the application didn't meet Treasury Board guidelines. We know the Liberal Party has a record of disregarding Treasury Board. We've all seen what Justice Gomery had to say about the Liberal Party in respect of Treasury Board.

Can you outline why our party thinks it's a good idea to respect Treasury Board guidelines, and that it's not an insult to anyone that we're actually following the rules?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would say that I think this is a flaw in the bill with respect to Mr. Pacetti, the sponsor, because the bill in clause 4 does not specify the instrument for prospective restitution, as it refers to. It doesn't specify that this would be in compliance with existing terms and conditions of Treasury Board guidelines or any other elements of the Government of Canada's financial management framework.

We had good-faith discussions with the four communities that signed this agreement. It's an agreement, by the way, that calls for no apology and no compensation. They asked if we could please set up an endowment, make a transfer to an endowment, and I said I'd be happy to look into that.

The officials came back and looked at the Treasury Board guidelines and they looked at the Minister of Finance's investment management framework for upfront funding. I'll boil this down. I guess one of your colleagues is not interested in the facts here. It essentially says that the organization has to have a certain track record of managing significant amounts of funds, have a strong accounting framework, etc.

When we looked at the foundation that they were asking us to fund an endowment for, it had \$521 in assets, no revenues for that year, and hadn't filed its annual report. It indicated an intention of dissolving and had essentially no activities to report. It would be effectively illegal. I'll put it this way: it would certainly be a violation of all of the accounting and financial rules of the Government of Canada to vest an endowment fund in such an instrument, in such an organization.

That's not an insult against the people involved. I'm sure they're very good people, but for whatever reason, they hadn't maintained the management of this fund. They were not giving us something to work with. I told them that if they had a legitimate, well-structured foundation that could qualify, I would absolutely be willing to discuss transferring endowment funds.

Now, Ms. Minna has been saying—I think quite unfortunately, playing one community against another—that somehow I'm suggesting the Italian community couldn't manage funds and the Ukrainian community could. Look, the officials looked at the facts, not at opinions, not at community politics. The particular NCIC foundation clearly did not qualify, based on the analysis not of me but of the officials. The Taras Shevchenko Foundation, on the other hand, is a large foundation that has managed millions of dollars for many years with very robust activities and extremely robust accounting practices. It qualified according to the finance investment management framework.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you.

Following up on where we sit here on the committee, you mentioned that some committee members weren't paying attention to the answer. That's too bad, because they made impassioned arguments against the point you were making. I'm glad you had the opportunity to clarify that.

I mentioned that Angelo Persichilli has written a number of articles on this bill, including one very recently. I apologize because I'm going to quote it in English, but it was originally written in Italian.

It says that Bill C-302 is a result of a personal initiative of two deputies who are not sponsored.... It's not a position of the Liberal Party, just of Mr. Pacetti and Mr. Tonks. He goes on to say that the initiative, while it's laudable, is above all politics.

One of the things that I really haven't appreciated in this is that as a Canadian of Italian descent, I firmly believe that Canadians of Italian descent have long accepted that this country apologized when the War Measures Act was repealed in 1988 and specific reference in the House of Commons to the Italian internment was made. Italians forgave. Italian Canadians have been key builders in this country. I think they have both found their place in this society and made contributions.

I think this bill ultimately will divide. We've heard them impugn Canadians of Italian descent here today who apparently aren't good enough Canadians to sit on historical recognition boards.

• (1205)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, if I could—

The Chair: You have a minute to wrap up, please.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Look, the record speaks for itself. Successive Liberal governments refused apology, refused any form of commemorative funding. I count seven Liberal Prime Ministers who refused to do so over the course of 58 years.

You know what? I think we should focus on the many different activities that are available and on the many different funds and institutions that are available to commemorate these sad experiences. I think we should focus—all of us, together—on putting aside whatever disagreements may have existed. Rather than trying to score political points on this sad moment in our history, we should be focusing productively on how best to commemorate the events and to educate future generations about them.

I encourage members of this committee and all those interested to make applications through the community historical recognition program that's being very ably administered by our officials. I encourage them to contact Pier 21, the new national museum on immigration, or the Canadian human rights museum, both of which are creations of our government, to suggest other projects that could be used to commemorate.

I suggest they contact the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, created by the Mulroney government in 1990 precisely as part of the legacy of wartime internment experiences. I suggest they work with the national foundation on projects to move forward.

The community organizations said that they did not expect a second apology. They signed off on that in 2005. An apology was made by Prime Minister Mulroney. We have made \$5 million of funding available. There's the \$25 million endowment with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. There's Pier 21. There's the museum of human rights.

All of those worthwhile initiatives are to commemorate periods of historical injustice in Canada's past—not exclusively Italian Canadian internment, but that is one of those many experiences. I think we could all productively work together on that, going forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you for your answers this morning and for being here at committee.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Do you need me to table the agreement in principle, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: The agreement in principle is a public document. It's the papers that went with it, the negotiations behind it, that we're asking for.

Hon. Maria Minna: That's where you find the references.

Hon. Jason Kenney: The negotiations were with Minister Chan.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: And the Government of Canada.

Hon. Jason Kenney: I'd be happy to see what's available, but—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: There was a bureaucrat, and I can tell you the name—

The Chair: Anyway, Minister, if you'd like to table the document, we will accept that document.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, could we also have the accompanying documents? Otherwise it's meaningless. It's not accurate. It doesn't reflect the discussion. It doesn't reflect the—

An hon. member: And thank you very much; that's our point exactly.

An hon. member: The Liberals...*[Inaudible—Editor]*

Hon. Maria Minna: That is not what I meant, and you know it.

The Chair: Right now this document has been presented, and—

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, there is no companion document.

I have a hunch—I'll just go out on a limb here—that if there was any government document that gave support for the claim of a \$12.5 million contribution, maybe the previous government would have released it.

The Chair: With that, we will recess.

We'll come back in about five minutes, because this meeting will be over at 12:30.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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