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## **Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, November 22, 2017**

**Vice-Chair**

**The Honourable Peter Van Loan**



## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Wednesday, November 22, 2017

• (1535)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC)):** I would like to call the meeting to order.

The notice of meeting, as amended, reflects the chair's instructions. The chair, Madam Fry, is not here today, so I will be, as vice-chair, serving as chair today.

The notice of meeting indicates we are to meet for approximately an hour to discuss Bill S-232, an act respecting Canadian Jewish heritage month. We'll hear two witnesses on that particular issue. They are the Hon. Linda Frum, who is the proposer of this bill, and Michael Levitt, who is the sponsor in the House.

As the sponsor, I will ask Ms. Frum to proceed first.

**Hon. Linda Frum (Senator, Ontario, C):** Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to speak to your committee in support of Bill S-232, the Canadian Jewish heritage month act.

I would like to thank Michael Levitt, MP for York Centre, for his role as the driving force behind this bill that has been so warmly received by the Jewish community, and for his efforts moving it forward in the House of Commons. I had the privilege of sponsoring Bill S-232 in the Senate, and was gratified by the unanimous support it received there.

As a proud member of Canada's Jewish community, I enthusiastically support the purpose of Bill S-232, which is to formalize the month of May as a time to celebrate Canadian Jewish culture, and to honour the significant contributions made by Canadians of Jewish faith ever since the earliest days of colonial settlement. The story of the Jewish people in Canada has been, by and large, a story of acceptance, tolerance, and mutual embrace. While not without blemish, Canada has been a country where Jews have been able to enjoy religious freedom, safety, and prosperity.

Today, Canada is home to the fourth largest Jewish community in the world. Many of those are the descendants of the 35,000 Holocaust survivors whom Canada accepted after World War II.

The month of May was a thoughtful choice as the month to celebrate Jewish heritage. Jewish heritage month is already celebrated at that time in the province of Ontario. Since its adoption, in 2012, Ontario's Jewish heritage month has received widespread

support among citizens, community organizations, and local governments across the province.

The month of May has also been proclaimed by the United States as a time to celebrate the contributions of the American Jewish community, and has been ever since 2006, when President George W. Bush and Congress passed a resolution deeming it such. May is also the month that Israel celebrates one of its more joyful holidays, Yom Ha'atzmaut, or Israeli Independence Day.

One of the key advantages of formally establishing Jewish heritage month into law is that it gives community organizations the inspiration and lead time they need to plan events. For example, in Toronto, the annual Jewish film festival is held during Ontario's Jewish heritage month to celebrate and showcase Jewish filmmaking from around the world. This is an example of the type of activity that can now become national in dimension.

Across the United States, you will find a wide range of activities during Jewish American Heritage Month, from lectures at the Library of Congress and National Archives, to cooking classes and klezmer music performances in American cities throughout the country.

During the Senate human rights committee hearing on Bill S-232, Senators heard from leaders of the Jewish community about the impact that Jewish heritage month will have on Canada. Shimon Fogel, CEO of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, said this about a Canadian Jewish heritage month:

The concept of heritage months offer a proactive approach to peeling back the ignorance that really serves as the engine or driver of the kind of intolerance that all of us would wish to see diminish and eradicated. It is in this context that I think they play an important role in helping other Canadians appreciate the shared values of specific communities...They bring down that sense of suspicion and hostility that is born from a sense of ignorance about other faith communities.

Michael Mostyn, the CEO of B'nai Brith, agreed on the importance of a Canadian Jewish heritage month, saying:

This act is most welcome. It will recognize the many achievements of Canada's Jewish community, the members of which faced many hurdles from the outset of Canada's original existence as a colony and yet were able to greatly contribute to the fabric of Canadian society. Despite facing systematic racism, our community has never seen ourselves as victims, viewing roadblocks as opportunities rather than obstacles. It is because of our perseverance and our willingness to stand up to adversity and better ourselves that the Jewish community was able to help build this country up, despite our small numbers.

Mr. Mostyn added that in order for Jewish Canadian heritage month to be successful, it cannot be an insular celebration, a Jewish community celebration only for the Jewish community. He said:

...there is no point in any community holding a celebration for itself. We are all part of Canada and the essence of any heritage day has to be how we communicate the contributions of our particular community to other communities....

Speaking for myself, it is my hope that with the establishment of the Canadian Jewish heritage month, all Canadians will have the opportunity to learn about the culture and history of Jewish Canadians, and appreciate the integral role that the Jewish community has played in shaping Canada, be it in the fields of education, medicine, the arts, politics, journalism, business, and many more.

I am proud that Canadian Jewish heritage month has received unanimous support so far. It is exciting to think that Canada will have a national Jewish heritage month starting as early as May 2018.

I look forward to any questions you may have.

● (1540)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** Thank you, Senator.

Now we will move to Mr. Levitt, the sponsor in the House.

**Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and colleagues from all parties for this opportunity to testify before you on Bill S-232, the Canadian Jewish heritage month act.

It's a different experience sitting on this side of the table, but it is a privilege to bring this bill before you along with its Senate sponsor, Senator Frum, who has worked closely with me to make the Canadian Jewish heritage month a reality.

The substance and intent behind this bill began as a motion in the previous Parliament presented by the Honourable Irwin Cotler, the former member for Mount Royal. While it unfortunately did not pass at the time, the overwhelming and multi-party support shown so far for Bill S-232 has been an uplifting experience. As I have stated previously, I have dedicated my efforts on this bill to Irwin Cotler.

To this end, in addition to Senator Frum, I want to particularly thank members of Parliament Peter Kent and Randall Garrison for their strong support of this initiative to recognize and celebrate the contributions of Jewish Canadians across Canada.

I believe this bill has come to the committee at an important time. I understand that you just concluded a study on systemic racism and religious discrimination. I had the opportunity to sit in on some of those meetings, in particular to hear from representatives of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and B'nai Brith Canada on the anti-Semitism Jewish Canadians face, and have long faced. As we know, Jewish Canadians are the most targeted group for hate crimes in Canada.

What we're seeking to achieve with this bill is to recognize and share the history and experiences of Jewish Canadians across the country. A Canadian Jewish heritage month would present the opportunity to educate and celebrate Canadian Jewish heritage with Canadians of all backgrounds and would further strengthen and preserve the diversity we pride ourselves on as Canadians.

Canada is home to approximately 400,000 Jews, the fourth largest Jewish community in the world, and the history of Jewish Canadians

is long and storied. The early Jewish immigrants to Canada came mostly from western and central Europe, followed by eastern Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Following the Second World War and the shame of the MS *St. Louis*, approximately 20,000 Holocaust survivors made it to Canada, followed by refugees from the Middle East and north Africa. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Jewish immigration from north Africa, particularly Morocco, brought many francophone Sephardic Jews to Quebec. Beginning in 1990, there was a significant Jewish immigration to Canada from the former Soviet Union, including a large Russian Jewish community.

This very brief history hides the incredible diversity of cultures and experiences that Jewish Canadians have brought with them. I have met Jewish Canadians from all corners of the world: South Africa, Russia, France, Israel, Morocco, India, Iran, Argentina. I'm proud that my own riding is a microcosm of this incredible diversity. In many ways, the diversity of Jewish Canadians mirrors the mosaic of our broader Canadian society, each of us bringing with us our own customs and traditions, making Canada stronger because of them.

I want to share with you my own Canadian Jewish experience. I was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, where there is a very small and very Scottish Jewish community. Many of you may have seen me in my kilt, proudly sporting the Jewish tartan.

In 1983, my mother, Edna, and I left Scotland to embark on what she called a "great adventure". She brought me to Canada to build a better life and future for us both. Knowing barely a soul, we settled in Toronto because she knew there was a thriving Jewish community that would welcome us and provide us the support we needed. As part of that, we brought and integrated our own traditions to the local Jewish community and Canadian society as a whole. This is an experience I share with a great many Canadians who have found refuge or opportunity in this country.

I want to highlight an example. On July 1, 1946, Holocaust survivors Jacob and Fanny Silberman gave birth to a daughter in an IDP camp in Stuttgart in occupied Germany. Jacob Silberman held a law degree from a renowned Polish university. When he started, he faced a Jewish quota and was one of just a lucky handful of Jews accepted to the school. The classrooms even had segregated seating, known as the bench ghetto.

After surviving the Holocaust, Mr. Silberman applied to emigrate to Canada, but as a lawyer he was rejected by Canadian authorities.

● (1545)

To our shame, Canada had largely closed its borders to Jews since 1933, and they remained closed until 1948, when a small number of tailors were allowed entry to the country. Jacob Silberman was finally given permission to emigrate as a tailoring cutter in 1950, but after arriving, despite his credentials, he was barred from practising law because he was not a citizen. The moment his then four-year-old daughter heard that, she made up her mind she would be a lawyer. In her own words she says:

When people said, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" I said, "A lawyer." I knew no women who were lawyers. All I knew was he couldn't be it, and he wanted to be it, and I would be it.

That daughter is Justice Rosalie Abella. She was appointed to Ontario's Family Court when she was 29. She was then the first Jewish woman appointed to the Supreme Court in 2004 and is now the second longest serving justice on the court.

As she tells it, she was:

...female, Jewish, and an immigrant, in a male profession... It can be a great advantage to understand that you're different, you're never going to be like everybody else, and that's good. Enjoy the fact that you're different.

Her story, struggles, hard work, and success are emblematic of the history of Jewish Canadians.

My own riding of York Centre became home to a large number of Holocaust survivors like Justice Abella's parents who built new lives here in Canada.

In September I joined Holocaust survivors and the Prime Minister to inaugurate the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa, joining local memorials like the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in my riding in Toronto and the Wheel of Conscience at the Canadian Museum of Immigration on Pier 21 in Halifax, which form part of the legacy of survivors and their families.

Their stories are our stories as Canadians and have played out in communities big and small across our country. I am certain every member of this committee can find a history of Jewish Canadians in their communities.

While the largest Canadian Jewish communities are in Montreal and Toronto, part of this bill's purpose is to recognize the role and tell the stories of Jewish Canadians in cities and towns from sea to sea, whether Shefford, Longueuil, Winnipeg, Estevan, Chestermere, or Vancouver.

Each community has a rich history and a story to share, like Congregation Emanu-El in Victoria—Canada's oldest synagogue has been in continuous operation since 1863—or the Jewish community of St. John's, which is one of the oldest in Canada, having arrived in Newfoundland in the 1770s. Even the very small Jewish community in Iqaluit, numbering just 20 people according to the latest census, adds to the fabric of the Canadian Jewish experience.

The enactment of the Canadian Jewish heritage month would ensure that the rich history of Jewish Canadians is recognized, shared, and celebrated across this great country, inspiring all Canadians to build a better, more diverse, and more tolerant Canada for generations to come.

I want to thank you for your consideration of this bill, and I look forward to your questions.

● (1550)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** Thank you very much.

We will now go to seven-minute rounds of questions.

We will start with Ms. Dabrusin for the Liberals.

**Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.):** Thank you, Senator Frum and Michael Levitt. I really appreciate that you brought forward this bill and that you took the time to come to talk to us about it today.

I'm Jewish, so I take a particular pride in seeing this bill passing and, as you mentioned, unanimously.

I was thinking back. I'm in the middle of reading a book called *Clutch*, written by one of my constituents. In fact, she just published it, and it's about the experience of a young Jewish boy growing up on rue de Bullion in Montreal. There are so many different stories like that and great culture and arts that come from distinctively Jewish stories, which I think are quite universal as well.

Thinking about the book I'm reading right now and those different types of stories, if you had your dream scenario of what we could do to promote our great Jewish arts and culture in Canada, what would you like see? How would you map that out?

I'll start with you, Senator Frum.

**Hon. Linda Frum:** I know you're from Toronto, as am I, and as is Michael. I think we—

**Ms. Julie Dabrusin:** I'm from Montreal originally, but I do live in Toronto.

**Hon. Linda Frum:** We are the beneficiaries of very rich Jewish culture in the two cities of Montreal and Toronto, so I think the value of something like this in the dream scenario is the broader range of what is possible.

I mentioned the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. I suppose it's not so much that events like that can grow, because they are already very successful where they are, but that they can move and that maybe more communities would take the initiative—because it's May and it's Jewish heritage month—and do something within their communities across Canada where there might be a smaller local Jewish population. This would be a way of opening doors of friendship and understanding in smaller communities.

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** I agree with Senator Frum. One of the real values of having a national Canadian Jewish heritage month is that it will give the smaller communities, the ones that we don't hear from.... It's been amazing. I've had people writing in, emailing me, letting me know about communities in their small town in Canada that I'd never heard of before, and probably many people don't know these stories.

Arts and culture are a concern in particular. I was lucky enough to sit on the board of the Koffler Centre of the Arts prior to entering politics. Seeing the vibrancy of the Jewish arts scene and seeing again the depth, whether it's in visual arts or theatre or music, there was so much that can be shared.

I agree with the senator. This is going to be a platform, a podium, that people can rally around and use as an opportunity to be in the spotlight to share the stories. I think there's an incredible potential for the Canadian Jewish heritage month to act as a means to get those stories out from coast to coast to coast.

**Ms. Julie Dabrusin:** Thank you.

You mentioned klezmer music. In Montreal, the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band was really popular, and I think it's popular in Toronto as well. We have the Ashkenaz Festival in Toronto, which is another great festival that gets to bring people out and celebrate and dance. That's an amazing thing.

I really like that you talked about the diversity of the Jewish community and the fact that we do come from so many different places and have different traditions. What opportunities do you see in having a Jewish heritage month, even within the Jewish community, to learn amongst ourselves about the diversity within our own community?

• (1555)

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** Being a member of Parliament gives you such an opportunity to engage with and learn more about your own community. I'll use the Moroccan Jewish community of Toronto—the Sephardic community in Toronto—as an example. I had never engaged nor had an opportunity to learn their celebrations, to attend and to hear about their culture. There are so many unique stories that exist in each of those.

There is the Russian Jewish community. Even in my riding alone, there are four or five different groups that each bring their own flavour to the way they experience the Jewish identity. Again, I think this is an opportunity to be able to focus on that.

I can picture in York Centre, but of course across all the rest of the country, that this will be an opportunity for people to learn and share their experiences outwardly. I think that will be a real advantage and will give us a lot better understanding of how other Jews celebrate, how other Jews live, and what their traditions are.

**Hon. Linda Frum:** I agree. The Jewish community is very diverse. Of course, the Ashkenazi community has dominated the culture in most places. Yes, this is an opportunity to broaden that understanding within the Jewish community itself, of itself, and how diverse it is within itself.

Again, as I said, and I was quoting Michael Mostyn, this would be successful if it wasn't just Jews talking to each other, but if it was a way to really share with other communities and to connect with other communities, and part of that would be to show how diverse and broad we are as well.

**Ms. Julie Dabrusin:** I have 40 seconds and I will pass that over to Mr. Graham.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):** Thank you.

Mr. Levitt, I'm a Scottish Jew with an Irish passport and a Turkish grandfather and a Polish grandmother, all of Jewish descent. I look at Jewish heritage in an alternative way.

I want to quickly recognize the presence of the Honourable Irwin Cotler in the room today. I think it's very important to recognize that he's here for this. That is all the time I have.

Thank you.

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** We will now move to the Conservatives.

Mr. Kitchen.

**Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for coming today. I appreciate the opportunity.

I come from southeastern Saskatchewan. We do not have a big Jewish community, but I am very proud of the small community of Hirsch, where one of the first Jewish communities in Saskatchewan was founded. The reality that shows this is the Hirsch Community Jewish Cemetery. I bring that up because it was restored in 2000, thanks not only to the Saskatchewan Jewish Council but also the Jewish Community Foundation of Montreal. To me, that's a great thing to see communities helping communities. I think that's wonderful.

You mentioned heritage education. I support education. I think it's important. We cannot rewrite history. History is history and we need to educate people on that history. Would you expand on how you see this being of value to advance that?

**Hon. Linda Frum:** I can respond to that, because you make me think of my own family on my mother's side, which settled in Niagara Falls, Ontario, when they first came to Canada as Jewish immigrants in the late 1800s. My great-grandparents and grandparents were part of the group that founded the Niagara Falls synagogue, but there is no longer a Jewish community in Niagara Falls, or rather, there's not enough people to sponsor a synagogue. The synagogue was shut down long ago. There is still a Jewish cemetery. There are still remnants of Jewish life there.

I think you make a good point. That's just one of many such communities across Canada. Cape Breton is famously also one of them. Preservation of Canadian Jewish history is also a potential focus of this, as is a remembrance of where people settled and the contributions they made, even if they are no longer there in significant numbers. This can also be a rich element of what can be done if prompted by a Jewish heritage month.

• (1600)

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** I think education is a key component of what a Canadian Jewish heritage month can help bring about. Education on issues like anti-Semitism and tolerance and diversity, and the value of those things in Canadian society, is increasingly necessary as we see the problematic behaviours that this committee has recently examined. I think there are a lot of things to celebrate during a Canadian Jewish heritage month, but there are also a lot of difficult things to reflect on, whether it's the treatment of Jews back in the thirties and forties or the rise in sustained anti-Semitism that exists across the country.

The Toronto board of education recently had an exhibit on the Holocaust, and it was quite a remarkable exhibit. It was staged at a school that has no Jewish presence. They had Holocaust survivors and Holocaust educators go in, train a number of students at the school who were not Jewish, and then they brought students in from across the city to experience it. Some of the facilitators had more of a formal background in Holocaust education, but the students also spoke to them about what they had learned and how it had opened their eyes. I sat in on one of these sessions. As I said, it was a group of kids from a school with no Jewish presence, and I don't think many of them had heard of or understood the impact of the Holocaust and what it was all about, what the lessons are, and the depths of the depravity that took place. Watching them get these lessons from other students and watching them relate to one another, many of them in tears, was quite a remarkable moment.

I think Canadian Jewish heritage month should be a celebration, but it should also be a time to reflect on the difficult lessons that Jewish Canadians have faced across the country. I think this is going to be a poignant element that will be reflected, whether in your community or in the larger communities of Montreal and Toronto.

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** In Saskatchewan we talk about being advanced through immigration and through our Ukrainian background. We're quite proud of that in Saskatchewan. It's great to see we have all these communities and new immigrants coming to the region. It's wonderful.

Back in 2002, I believe, the Government of Canada declared May to be Asian Heritage Month, and now we're asking to do the same. Do you see an issue with having two months?

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** No, I don't. There are 12 months in the year and there are very many more heritages and peoples to celebrate, so no, I don't see an issue. As Senator Frum commented, the reason we've selected May is that it will coordinate with the Ontario and the U.S., and also some significant dates.

As an anecdote on the Ukrainian connection to this Jewish heritage month, I had the pleasure of meeting the Ukrainian Prime Minister about a month ago. He was in Ottawa, and I went to a reception and was introduced to him, and the person who introduced me said something in Ukrainian, and all of a sudden he turned to me and said, "Shalom", and put out his hand and embraced me. I didn't know the Ukrainian Prime Minister was Jewish. I went back and did a little bit of research and learned that he comes from a small town where he'd been active in re-establishing the synagogue. He's been active within the Jewish community in Ukraine.

This was new to me, but it just shows you that there are these stories that exist, and maybe there's some connection to that in your Ukrainian community as well. Who knows?

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Go ahead, Senator Frum.

**Hon. Linda Frum:** Just from a logistical and practical point of view, it's true. There's probably a lot of other days and heritage months in May as well, not just the Asian and Jewish. I had a list at one point. I've now forgotten it. We'll be sharing this with other groups. That's fine. Frankly, that has potential to do things together because, as I keep trying to say, this is not just about doing things in silos. It really is about communities understanding each other and

trying to break down barriers. Maybe it can be seen as a positive and not a negative.

• (1605)

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Thank you very much.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** Thank you.

Now, we will move to the NDP round with Ms. Malcolmson.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm Sheila Malcolmson. I'm a member of Parliament for Nanaimo—Ladysmith. My dad's family was born and I was born in St. Catharines. Our families are close and around the same time. It's an honour to meet you, Senator. Thank you, especially for your very animated personal storytelling. It's a great example of the things to celebrate and about making the personal intervention into legislation, which we don't always remember to do.

The New Democrats support the legislation and thank you both for advancing it. Maybe if I could just head some things off at the pass, is there any impact on the federal government that we should air, to get it on the record and give you an opportunity to rebut?

**Hon. Linda Frum:** No. There's no financial implications to this bill whatsoever, nor is it anticipated that there's any federal funding required or expected. This is something that the community itself would take on.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** Are there any arguments that you've heard, in any realm, that would cause anybody in Parliament to vote no? Not that I'm recommending that at all, but just for the record I think it's always helpful to give witnesses the opportunity to reveal and rebut.

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** On the contrary actually, I think the most wonderful thing about the experience of the senator and I joining together on this particular bill has been doing the outreach to members from the other parties to ensure that there was support. As I stated, working in the Commons with Peter Kent and Randall Garrison, it was great to have that multipartisan support and I think, from the perspective of the senator and I, that was key to our vision for this. This is everybody getting behind something that I think is maybe a little overdue and that we're thrilled to be able to spearhead and move forward.

No. I don't see that there should be any issues whatsoever in terms of any objections. I've certainly heard none at all in either chamber.

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** I appreciate the new fact that I've learned from the preamble that the Jewish population in Canada represents the fourth largest Jewish population in the world. Already your legislation is having impact, as far as education. I would not have guessed that.

Can you elaborate more on the impact for Canada, as a country, of knowing that everybody across the country is celebrating at the same time, as opposed to the approach we have right now, where there are different commemorations and celebrations that are more localized than at the regional level?

**Hon. Linda Frum:** Right now, it's just Ontario that officially has a Jewish heritage month. It was important to ask that the national month be done in coordination with Ontario's month. It makes sense. There is a large Jewish community in Montreal and in Vancouver as well. There are Jewish communities in almost every major Canadian city. It gives those communities an opportunity to work together and to do something communal across the country. That's a very exciting experience as well.

I'm very involved in the Jewish community and in the Jewish federation in Toronto and we talk about this within our community. We have a national community as well as a local community and that, as the strongest and biggest community, the one that's in Toronto has a responsibility to make sure that the communities across the country are thriving and feel supported for projects like preserving cemeteries. Those are national projects that the national Jewish community has to think about. We have stakeholders all across the country.

Again, this could be a trigger to help us think about this on an annual basis. How can we do things together as a national community?

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** I fully agree. I think it may even be an opportunity for some of the larger communities in the country, the bigger cities, to do some outreach to some of the smaller towns, to do some programming. Whether it's some of the arts and community cultural organizations, or some of the larger things like the UJA Federation, B'nai Brith, or the Simon Wiesenthal Center, this could be an opportunity for them to actually spread the message and do programming.

Again, when you have it in one month, it just shines a spotlight in a very positive way. It may be an impetus for these types of events to occur in places that they might not have before. I think it's only a net benefit. I really do. All the feedback that I've had—I think probably similarly to the senator—has all been very positive. I know that we've both been getting emails from the community at large and from other communities and other individuals, just saying that they've seen this and that it's a really positive step forward.

I think it's going to be embraced.

•(1610)

**Ms. Sheila Malcolmson:** I appreciate the opportunity for the nation-building aspect of this, so that we know we're all pulling in the same direction.

Starting on Saturday, we're just about to begin the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, which is a United Nations campaign that is very much embraced in Canada. That leads up to and includes the anniversary of the massacre, you might say, at the École polytechnique.

We have good examples of what happens when we're all commemorating at the same time. It kind of combats isolation as well. I appreciate your work.

There's nothing else I have to add. Thanks, Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** Thank you.

We now will go to the next Liberal round, where I gather the time will be carved up among several people, starting with Mr. Virani.

**Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I wanted just to say thank you to both of you for this very important piece of legislation that you've introduced, Senator Frum, and that you've sponsored, Michael. Thank you for acknowledging two titans of the community, one of whom is the president in the back there, Mr. Cotler, and also Justice Abella, whom I've had the honour of appearing before. She is quite a titan.

In terms of personal anecdotes—since she was sharing them so liberally, Michael—a piece of Jewish heritage right in my own riding is that on Maria St., in the Junction, is the oldest synagogue in Ontario, which has a plaque outside of it. This is something that I learned only in terms of representing the community, but there's Jewish heritage everywhere and all around us.

I wanted to address my question briefly to you about something that you raised, Senator Frum, and then I'll turn it over to Dan Ruimy. I invite you both to comment.

You mentioned, Shimon Fogel, I think, in reference to this idea about a heritage month being an opportunity to peel back ignorance. I think that is the phrase you used. You also talked about overcoming suspicion and hostility. That's something that we have definitely heard a lot of. Michael referenced a study we just concluded on systemic racism and discrimination.

We talked a lot about breaking down barriers by improving dialogue. It prompted me to think about interfaith dialogue—having Jewish leaders engage with other leaders of different backgrounds.

Do you see this kind of bill as a springboard to promoting more of that kind of dialogue that is so pivotal to breaking down anti-Semitism and breaking down the types of discrimination that we're seeing right now?

**Hon. Linda Frum:** If that were a by-product of this bill, it would obviously be a wonderful thing. I would welcome that. I don't see why that couldn't happen. Again, I am speaking to the outreach that would be associated with having a national Jewish heritage month. It would put the burden on the Jewish community to reach out to other communities to share, to try to interact with other communities, and to make this part of a national celebration, not just a local community celebration.

There is also a big educational component that could be part of this, as well. If we speak about ignorance and hostility, very often those things are born out of isolation, because, as we're acknowledging, there are only 400,000 Jews—I've heard 350,000. There are not very many of us in the country. Of course, there are many communities in Canada where people will grow up and never meet someone of Jewish background. That's not helpful if you want to create understanding.

There is an opportunity, maybe through the educational system where there is no local Jewish community itself, to talk about Jewish culture. If some enlightened teachers wanted to use a Jewish heritage month as a springboard in their communities to talk about the Jewish community, that could promote some interfaith understanding.

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Michael.



**Mr. Michael Levitt:** I'm going to focus on my own community for a second and talk about York Centre. I'm incredibly proud that under the leadership of four faith leaders, York Centre has established an interfaith dialogue. Rabbi Morrison at Beth Emeth Synagogue was the spearhead from the Jewish community. Working with faith leaders—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—they've now had, I think, three events. I could totally see this interfaith council in York Centre, and I know there are other ones that exist in other parts of the city. Other cities could definitely embrace something like this.

To Senator Frum's point, I think if this were a springboard to more dialogue and better understanding, it would be a fantastic opportunity. We know how important those relationships are. We know the impact they can have on creating education and awareness of issues like anti-Semitism. I think it would be a wonderful outcome if the Canadian Jewish heritage month created a forum for increased interfaith or multi-faith dialogue—100%.

• (1615)

**Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.):** Thank you both for being here today. I don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to jump right into it.

My parents emigrated from Morocco to Montreal, where I was born and raised. I left Montreal years and years ago, and I moved to a little town, Maple Ridge, with a handful of Jewish people. I've owned a business there for the last six years. I didn't really have any connections to the Jewish community whatsoever. We don't have a Jewish community there.

One thing that happened after I was elected was that a gentleman had come in with an issue, and as he was leaving, he turned and said to me, "Why were you hiding the fact that you're Jewish?"

I said, "Excuse me?"

He said, "What do you think the newspaper would say if I called them up right now and told them you're a Jew?"

For me, that was the very first time that I'd ever encountered something to that extent, and having a month like this.... I mean, honestly, you don't go around shouting, "Hey everybody, I'm Jewish." I mean, you live in the community that you live in.

Do you see Jewish heritage month as an opportunity to perhaps, for some of us folks, be able to shout out to our community, "Hey, look"? I'd like your thoughts on that.

**Mr. Michael Levitt:** I see this month as being a source for great pride for Jewish communities across the country.

MP Ruimy, I think what you're saying is that in a smaller town where there's not a presence or probably an understanding—ignorance comes often from not understanding—it's a tremendous opportunity for Jews. If we can get the UJA equivalent in Vancouver, or some larger organization, to do some outreach into the surrounding communities that maybe don't have an infrastructure or a Jewish presence, I think it's a wonderful opportunity to enlighten and to give Jews in those communities a chance to say, "This is who I am. This is my heritage. This is what I come from. I am proud of it, and I want you to understand it. I want to talk to you about it."

What better thing could come from that? Absolutely.

**Hon. Linda Frum:** I don't know how much time you spend on Twitter. I spend too much time, I'm sure. If you're a Jewish person on Twitter, anti-Semitic attacks are almost a daily experience—really, truly.

I feel like anti-Semitism is part of my daily life. I feel lucky, though, because I am part of a large Jewish community, so I can take solace, comfort, and support from people in my community. If you're in a smaller community, I can see how frightening and intimidating it could be when confronted with the very real problem of anti-Semitism that exists in Canada on a daily basis.

It's making common cause, having a sense of community, and understanding why you should be proud to be Jewish. I do announce it. That's my solution to it. The more people think they might be able to hurt me with it, the more I make it clear to them how proud I am to be who I am, and what I am.

Is Jewish heritage month a helpful vehicle to help promote those feelings? I hope so. If so, it would be a great thing.

**Mr. Dan Ruimy:** I do shout it out now. We did a Shabbat night with the centre in Vancouver. They came out to Maple Ridge, and it was a great night. That's where they first realized, "Oh, wait a minute, you're Jewish?"

It was a fantastic night. I look forward to supporting this in the House.

Thank you.

• (1620)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** I want to thank you both very much for your evidence today.

I will just make some observations on some of the evidence from my own experience. I grew up in York Mills, where half the community is Jewish, and very much in the shadow of World War II. My family were refugees from Estonia who had a parallel experience. Many of those in my family and my community, the Estonian community from the Soviet gulag, lost their lives there. I was surrounded by kids who had families with similar experiences of the Holocaust, so there was a lot of sharing going on, and a lot in common there.

I heard, with interest, the comments about Rosalie Abella. My grandmother, who largely raised me, was actually a lawyer back in the 1920s in Estonia. She didn't practise here, but her grandmother was a Rosenberg, up the maternal line, and a straight maternal line to me, so you know what that means, at least according to the Lubavitchers, who keep trying to persuade me to put my poor, suffering son into Hebrew school. I'm just trying to get him to learn a bit of French. If I could get that done, that would make me happy.

In any event I've seen great things happen. I had a student staffer formerly with me who was from Saskatoon, and you see another great community there. She was not Jewish at all, but she started a klezmer band in her high school, which continues to this day.

My observation about the value of what you're doing is this. I look back to that time when I was growing up and we were coping with events that were pretty immediate. I've seen a lot of anti-Semitism disappear in the community, and in the communities that I've known since then.

At the same time, in parallel, I've seen new anti-Semitism arise in other places. While some understanding has grown, I've seen things here when we were elected, when the south Lebanon war took place and I was on the foreign affairs committee. Things were said that I thought were unthinkable and that we would never hear after the events of the Holocaust and World War II.

The work needs to be done. It appears that it perhaps never, ever will be complete. That is the way and the fate of the Jewish people, sadly, but this is a positive step towards doing that. I commend you both on bringing this forward, and thank you.

I think that completes our business for today.

Yes, Mr. Vandal.

**Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.):** I understand that proper notice hasn't been given to study this clause by clause.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** That is correct. There hasn't been notice given—

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** I'd like to move a motion that the clerk do all things necessary so that we can do a clause-by-clause review at our next meeting.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** I will now entertain a motion for adjournment.

Mr. Vandal.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Before we do that, there is just a bit of committee business to do with M-103.

I understand that the report is going to be presented sometime in December and I think perhaps we could hear from the analyst as to when the report actually will be back for a discussion.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** They aren't here. The clerk will respond.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson):** Yes, basically we've had a production meeting with the various services that are involved in producing a report. The time estimate of the earliest time we can get the report back and distribute it to the committee would be December 8.

It is still being drafted now. After it's finished being drafted, it will go to translation services. They have a service standard that they meet. They can only do so many words a day, and this is a busy time of year. Every committee is trying to get a report in, basically. After translation services, it goes to publication services. Everything is in the proper channels and there really is nothing more to be done to speed it along at this point.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** I just find December 8 to be an incredibly long time. It's already been two weeks with the administration. The eighth

is at least another two weeks. Is there any way we can get it back by December 1?

**The Clerk:** It's really out of our hands. It's going to translation on Tuesday. My understanding is that the drafters are going to be working on it all weekend just to meet that deadline. Unless we instruct the analysts to stop drafting now and go with what has already been written, as an incomplete report...and you'd only gain a few days doing that.

Right now it's out of our hands. It's just that this is the process and this is just how long it takes to produce a report of that size.

• (1625)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** It is what it is.

Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** May I inquire as to what that size is likely to be? That's why I think we really do have to go to Erin to answer.

**Ms. Erin Virgint (Committee Researcher):** We're looking at around 40 to 50 pages.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** This is exclusive of any recommendations.

**Ms. Erin Virgint:** Exactly.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** This is essentially a summary of testimony, major topics, laid out in the manner described in that meeting at which you proposed or laid out a possible outline, and then reviewed it. That's what we're talking about.

**Ms. Erin Virgint:** Exactly, yes.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** If I might go back then to the clerk, did you say December 8 is the earliest date, or is an actual date we can be certain of?

**The Clerk:** We can never say "guaranteed", but when we had our production meeting that was our best estimate of when we could have it back. Everyone felt comfortable that December 8 would be doable.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** All right. I just ask that for scheduling purposes. The eighth is what day of the week?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** It's a Friday.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That's the Friday before the final week that we sit prior to rising.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** Correct.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** We're likely to have two meetings at which we could deal with the content of the report, I would gather, assuming the House rises when anticipated. Is that correct?

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Yes, I'm looking at the calendar.

To clarify, it's going to translation on Tuesday the 28th. How long does it take to translate?

**Ms. Erin Virgint:** They said five days for 40 pages.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** That brings you to beyond the first. Under these timelines, we're likely to be studying this into February, unless we can actually nail it—

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Or debating it anyway.... The study portion is done. I'm not sure that's an unrealistic expectation.

Here's a question, if you don't mind.

Mr. Chair, I'm taking liberties. I should be—

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** You are.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** May I...?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** Yes. I'm trying to avoid.... The chair had encouraged us not to discuss committee business at this meeting. I'm trying to respect that but I will indulge you.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you.

The eighth is the best estimate. That's a Friday. If it was done, for the sake of argument, a couple of days earlier, we could then actually have a meeting on the sixth within our schedule. I don't want to put you in a position of.... I don't want to squeeze a promise out of you. I merely ask whether that is within the realm of possibility, as opposed to non-possibility. I guess I'm looking at the clerk for this because you're dealing with all the different things.

**The Clerk:** I can go back to the services and ask them if that is a doable day, but then again, you'd be looking at having it distributed

on the sixth, so there would be very little time for members to digest the contents of the report before we have the meeting.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That's true.

**The Clerk:** That's if we could get it by the sixth.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Peter Van Loan):** I think it's clear to all those working and toiling on this that there's an anxiousness among committee members to get on with it as soon as possible and I think they've all heard that.

**Ms. Erin Virgint:** Yes, we're aware.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Can you make the request to.... Sorry, Mr. Chair, I'm taking liberties as well.

Would you, through the chair, be able to make the request to expedite this as quickly as we can?

**The Clerk:** Yes, of course.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** I need a motion to adjourn.

Thank you, Mr. Reid.

(Motion agreed to)

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