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INTERNMENT OF PERSONS OF UKRAINIAN ORIGIN RECOGNITION BILL

Second Reading of Bill C-331

Speech by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

Friday, November 25, 2005

THE SENATE

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INTERNMENT OF PERSONS OF UKRAINIAN ORIGIN RECOGNITION BILL

SECOND READING

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, I should like to speak in support of Bill C-331, which acknowledges the internment of persons of Ukrainian origin during World War I and calls for the recognition of this event through commemoration and public education.

In addition, the act expresses the deep sorrow of Parliament for that event and allows a request to be made to the Canada Post Corporation for the issue of commemorative stamps.

Lately, we have heard a lot about the need to acknowledge past wrongs perpetrated by the Canadian government and the need for redress. Since we cannot change the past, our efforts must focus on making sure such unfortunate events cannot occur again. The only way we can do that is through acknowledgement, public education and commemoration.

As the Prime Minister said, "It is not enough to remember the past, you have to learn from the past."

Between 1914 and 1920, as a result of the War Measures Act, and the Order-in-Council that followed, 8,579 Eastern Europeans including 5,000 Ukrainian-Canadians, according to the published reports were rounded up and placed in internment camps.

Essentially they were imprisoned in their new homeland because of where they came from and who they were, and they became "enemy aliens."

These same Ukrainians have gone on to form the backbone of our multicultural country. In Western Canada, in particular, Ukrainian heritage is most evident. It has shaped the region. For the longest time, these families have been denied the satisfaction of having their history officially acknowledged by our government.

It is time that we as Canadians take ownership of our past, both the good and the bad, so that we can move forward to share in the collective future of our great country.

An agreement in principle was signed between the Government of Canada and the Ukrainian Canadian community on August 24, 2005, for the initial amount of \$2.5 million, for acknowledgement, commemoration and education. Without a doubt, Bill C-331 and the determination of its sponsor, Inky Mark, provided the catalyst and foundation for negotiations between the Ukrainian Canadian organizations and their government counterparts.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate Inky Mark, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko for jointly supporting Bill C-331. I would like to congratulate as well the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, Raymond Chan, and our Prime Minister for beginning the process of reconciliation.

Honourable senators, I urge all my colleagues to support this bill.