



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

Bill S-219 Third Reading

OFFICIAL REPORTS
(HANSARD)

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 198 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

Wednesday, April 22, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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JOURNEY TO FREEDOM ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as reported (without amendment) from the committee

- (1820)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill S-219.

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will not be selected by the Chair, because they could have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

Motion No. 3 will be debated and voted upon.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motion No. 3 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTION IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Ind.), seconded by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, moved:

That Bill S-219 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the bill is slightly controversial but I think everybody is in favour.

Private Members' Business

I am pleased to rise today to speak to my proposed amendment. I know I had proposed various amendments and they were all for the same reason.

We are speaking on Bill S-219, the journey to freedom day act. From the outset, I would like to say that I am not opposed to this bill. All of my proposed amendments, deleting lines 7 to 13 of the preamble on page 1, deleting lines 16 to 30 of the preamble on page 2, which you ruled out of order, and that which you have accepted, deleting clause 2, are due to the fact that these clauses all contain April 30 as the date to mark the journey to freedom day. As we heard in committee, there is no consensus within the Vietnamese community that the date is appropriate.

The purpose of these deletions is to allow the bill to pass while providing the government an opportunity to go back and consult with the Vietnamese Canadian community and select a date upon which a broad consensus exists. The reasons that a consensus does not exist are because: April 30 is the anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, which would make journey to freedom day synonymous with a historical event that Canada did not play a significant role in; it would take away the focus from Canada's role in settling displaced Vietnamese people and place it on the many points of contention surrounding the Vietnam War; and, it risks making journey to freedom day political when it should not be.

It would be unfortunate if Parliament passed this bill only for it to sow division. We instead seek to create a uniquely Canadian day to commemorate the Vietnamese community's acceptance into Canada and its achievements thereafter.

I can propose a few dates, but they are dates that we got from reading the minutes at committee and through speaking to some constituents.

For example, July 27 is a possible alternative because it is the day that the Department of National Defence's Operation Magnet II began making its flights of displaced Vietnamese people, also known as boat people, to Canada.

May 1 is also a possible alternative because it is the day that the Canadian government declared it would sponsor refugees with relatives already in Canada.

June 20 is a possible alternative because every year the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees marks World Refugee Day on June 20, which I think is important. On June 20, 1986, the Nansen Refugee Award was awarded to the people of Canada by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees due in large part to Canada's role in welcoming Vietnamese refugees into Canada.

I do not want to say that I have a preference for any of these dates because that would be contradictory to my first statement, that I would prefer to have the Vietnamese community, along with government, decide on a consensual date where everybody would be happy.

I have always believed that one of the greatest humanitarian contributions we can make in times of international crisis is to open our borders in order to welcome those who are forced to escape perilous circumstances abroad. Journey to freedom day has the potential to celebrate such noble actions quite admirably. It can also

highlight the positive impact that Canada made during a time of crisis by virtue of being a welcoming and compassionate nation while celebrating the numerous achievements by Vietnamese Canadians who have enriched Canada ever since. Making these the exclusive focus of the journey to freedom day act would be the most beneficial. The day could then serve as a reminder to Canadians that our generosity in difficult times can make a lasting impact that betters our country and the world we live in. This is why I believe it is important to choose a date that does not obscure these goals in any way or divide Canadians, especially those of Vietnamese origin, and that we can move on constructively.

On a personal note, I have received correspondence from Vietnamese in my community who are in favour of the bill. However, the controversy is the date. That is one of the reasons that I propose that we go back and try to have my amendments passed in the House as well as have the bill approved at third reading in the next couple of weeks before the House rises.

● (1825)

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak to Bill S-219, journey to freedom day act. I am co-sponsoring this bill with Senator Ngo from the other place.

It is important, however, contrary to what we just heard earlier from the other speaker, that April 30 is designated as journey to freedom day. It is important that this is the date the community has agreed upon. This is the date the community wants.

I presented a petition in the House of Commons signed by 2,620 people of Vietnamese Canadian origin just a little while ago. In addition, we had committee hearings at the heritage committee where we heard from various members of the community, including James Nguyen, president of the Vietnamese Association Toronto. He said:

As a leader of the biggest Vietnamese community in Canada, I attend many events on a weekly basis. There is overwhelming support for this bill whenever the conversation comes up. This bill is important to me and to those I encounter in the community, because it acknowledges our heritage. April 30 is a day for Vietnamese Canadians to come together to express our gratitude to Canadians for welcoming us with open arms.

The community wants April 30. This is the day the saga of the Vietnamese boat people began. Let us not forget that April 30, 1975 was the day the communist forces from North Vietnam occupied and conquered the south. They took over Saigon and as a result almost two million people fled South Vietnam. They fled persecution. They fled political imprisonment. They fled, in a lot of instances, death.

Some 250,000 boat people who went on rafts, that were put together with logs and rope, and crossed the seas succumbed to murder by pirates, rape, sexual assault, drowning, thirst, and hunger.

In 1980, some 120,000 were accepted here in Canada. In 1986, Canada was awarded the Nansen medal. There are 300,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin now living in Canada. It is important to Vietnamese Canadians, who all agree, that April 30, journey to freedom day, is the day that is recognized by the community and by this House of Commons.

Private Members' Business

It is important. I have many people in my community of Vietnamese origin who have told me that April 30 is the day. Canada is a country made up of people that have all come from somewhere else. We all come here for pretty much the same reasons: to escape persecution, to escape hatred, and to escape violence. We come here because we want the opportunity and the hope that Canada has to offer us, for ourselves and more importantly, for our kids.

In the late 1970s and 1980s when Canada opened its doors to so many Vietnamese boat people, that boat became a symbol. It is a metaphor for freedom, for a journey to freedom. That is why April 30 is the date the community wants, the date that Saigon fell to communist forces.

Many Canadians do not know the story of Vietnamese boat people. This day, April 30, is the day Saigon fell, the day when the exodus of people from South Vietnam began, the day that Canadians will learn what people will do and to what extent they will go to escape persecution, to embrace freedom for themselves and for their families.

This is so significant. This is an important date. The young people here in Canada must know April 30 as the date. This bill will serve a pedagogical purpose. It will educate young Canadians and Canadians alike of the importance of what we have here in Canada, the great Canadian values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

This is also a celebration. This bill is a celebration of Canada. It is a celebration of Canadian values that we here in Canada, in 1980, opened up our arms to welcome boat people, people who had absolutely nothing. My dad was a survivor of the Holocaust and he came here with only the shirt on his back.

Many people, not just Vietnamese, have come to Canada with the very same, just the shirt on their backs and some change in their pockets to make Canada their home because Canada offers hope and opportunity for people.

• (1830)

I will tell the House that people in my community want April 30 as the day to mark this. Forty years have gone by now and we have an opportunity in the House to do the right thing, to say to the Vietnamese Canadian community that, yes, Saigon fell on April 30. That is the day that the journey to freedom began, which ended up here in Canada, where now some 300,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin live.

On the weekend, I was at the North York Vietnamese seniors club. There were many people there, both young and old alike, who came on these makeshift boats. Some came as babes in arms. All remember the experience and all are so grateful to Canada. This date is very important for them. We must do the right thing here in Canada.

People say we have not heard from the community, but the community has been heard. The community has spoken. The community has said April 30 is the day. Some say we need to hear from the government of Vietnam or its representatives. It is not the practice of this Parliament or any other democratic parliament around the world to hear from representatives of foreign governments when it comes to passing domestic legislation, and we should

not bend to the pressure from that embassy or any other embassy. When we pass legislation in the House, it is because the will of the people has tasked us to do that. We are responsible to the Canadian people, not to people in another country.

Vietnamese Canadians have spoken. They have sent many of us here, just like other Canadians, to get the job done, and the job in this piece of legislation is to designate April 30 as journey to freedom day.

• (1835)

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak about Bill S-219. I just listened to what the sponsor of the bill said, and I would like to clarify something. The member said that he speaks on behalf of the community. Being a member of Vietnamese origin, I can say that I have listened to what the community has said. To be honest, I think the member is not listening to what everyone has to say.

It is a divisive bill. I am not saying that April 30 is not the right date. What I am saying is that it is not unanimous. It has created a division. I find it very unfortunate.

One of the ways we could have gone forward and brought the Vietnamese community together was by doing something more concrete. I have listened to a lot of people in my riding from the Vietnamese community who have told me that one of the main issues for them is human rights issues in Vietnam. What we are doing here is not even addressing that issue.

I heard a lot of comments when the senator talked about the bill. There were no specific things brought forward to deal with the issues that affect people in Vietnam. There is a subcommittee for international human rights that is actually looking into the human rights situation in Vietnam. It heard from Viet Tan, for instance, an organization that spoke about some of the issues the Vietnamese have to deal with.

I will read something from my colleague on the other side, the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells, a Conservative member, who yesterday at the committee said, “The Vietnamese government continues to be a violator in a broad area of human rights and is among the worst violators of religious freedom in the world. The international community must exert pressure on the Vietnamese government to cease these abuses against its own citizens”.

Even when we hear alarm bells coming from the Conservatives, the only thing they can come up with is this bill.

There are only three articles. I will read from the bill. The first one is:

This Act may be cited as the Journey to Freedom Day Act.

That is the short title. The second one is:

Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

Article three, the last one, is:

For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

Private Members' Business

These are the only articles that will stay after the bill is adopted. All the discussion about the preamble, with all the divisiveness that has come up, and the issues we heard from all sides, will not be in the final text of the legislation. Instead of using a bill to bring Vietnamese together, what the Conservatives have done is divide the Vietnamese community.

To be clear, I will be supporting the bill. I voted for it at second reading and I will vote for it at third reading.

There is a big fundraising rally for the Vietnamese boat people museum. This is a way of learning about the history of Vietnam and what happened after April 30. It will actually be the 40th anniversary this year. There are so many stories of Vietnamese boat people leaving Vietnam.

I invite all members to watch the documentary *Bolinao 52*. It is a documentary that follows a group of boat people through their journey. Why 52? It is because 52 out of 110 people survived. The rest of them died.

There are a lot of ways for us as members of Parliament and for the government to bring forward tools for other generations to know what happened.

● (1840)

I saw the documentary with my mother. It was organized as a fundraiser for the Vietnamese museum. I think that is one way of bringing people together. Everyone agrees that we have to remember our roots. In my case, my Vietnamese roots are part of who I am, and it is really important for me to learn about them.

However, we have a bill that actually does not say much and actually does not do much. I agree with the member when he said that April 30 is already a day when people in the community are celebrating. For instances, this weekend I will be in Montreal celebrating April 30. For me, it is different. Everyone sees the day differently. For me, it is a day to remember my roots and to commemorate all the sacrifices my parents made to come to Canada and for me to actually be here today in the House.

I mentioned human rights in Vietnam. Right now what has been done is basically that an issue has been brought up that is divisive but does not bring anything in return. We have seen what happens when the current government deals with trade agreements. I will give the example of Honduras. The reason the NDP opposed it is that when the government actually negotiated the agreement, it never talked about human rights. Honduras is not the best place on earth in terms of protecting human rights. When the government could actually talk about human rights and negotiate human rights, it did not do it. It is the same thing with the Liberals, who actually supported it.

What we get from the other side is basically, "Let's negotiate a trade agreement. Let's help develop it. After that, eventually everything will be cleared up and the human rights issues will be resolved". However, at the end of the day, we have to negotiate now.

The reason I am talking about this, if members would listen, is that right now there are negotiations regarding a trans-Pacific partnership agreement, and we have not heard the government talk about human rights when it talks about negotiations.

What people in Vietnam and people from the community are saying is that we need to help people in Vietnam. What we are talking about is a bill that is divisive and is not bringing things forward. It is not helping people in Vietnam. That is why what we are offering on this side are solutions. Right now, the solution is negotiations and talks.

I invite the member who is heckling over there to listen to what was said at the subcommittee meeting yesterday. There was a subcommittee meeting in Parliament regarding human rights in Vietnam. Before coming here, I actually watched the whole thing and listened to it. For me, it is important. It is a way of bringing things forward and making sure that we do not forget our past. For me this is really important, because it is part of who I am. That is why I mentioned to the member who is heckling on the other side that instead of bringing forward something that is so divisive, why not help the Vietnamese museum of boat people? Why not help people in Vietnam right now? That would have been a way to bring people together. That would have been a way to move forward. That would have been a way to actually improve things, not just here but in other countries.

Again, the bill we have here today is being used sort of as a tool, and it is unfortunate.

It is too easy to generalize by saying that the community is united for it or against it. We understand the differences. As I said, for me it is a way to remember my roots, to remember my origins, to remember where my parents came from, and to remember the people from Vietnam. It is a way for me to see how great it is for us to live in Canada, where they actually open the door and where people of different origins are welcome.

● (1845)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the previous speaker, said it all. He outlined his concerns about it, as I have. I imagine many have. The government continues to use important communities like this as nothing more than wedges to divide communities, not build them.

We have to understand what our role is as parliamentarians. It is about uniting people. It is about helping communities to get strong and build. It is about helping communities to go forward. It is about celebrating special days within that community. The way to do that is by consultation, and that means thorough and proper consultation.

As my NDP colleague has pointed out, the bill would divide the community immensely. Rather than have it united, as my Conservative colleague, the mover of the bill, would have us think that everyone was in agreement, if everybody were in agreement, then we would all be very happy today to deal with the bill at this point. The problem is that all are not happy.

We never get 100% at any given time on an issue, but there are as many people against this as there appear to be for this. Those of us who represent a large Vietnamese community in particular have been bombarded with all sides of this issue. When I speak to it today, it is of mixed feelings on both sides because it is a community that I represent.

Private Members' Business

I happen to work a lot with the Vietnamese community, and I support it immensely. People are flagging all these issues about not voting for Bill S-219 because it is not the right day. The senator changed the title, which the people were satisfied with, but there was very limited consultation. I believe there was one day of debate at the Senate level and when it came here, it was again very limited debate and discussion at committee.

Many of the people who have written to me and talked to me have said that they wanted to get to the committee when it came up, but it was not even listed on the parliamentary agenda. It suddenly appeared on the agenda and they did not have time to get here. When some of them did come very quickly for the meeting, they were denied the opportunity to speak because there was only so much time.

That is the way the government plays the wedge politics of pitting one part of a community against another. It does not give time for full discussion. What is the problem with taking extra time to ensure that as parliamentarians we get it right so we can support a bill that unites a community? The goal may have been right, but more time was needed to ensure that we had it right, which is why it gives many of us such difficulty trying to figure out how to deal with the bill.

I want to recognize my colleague, who is the party's critic on this. Again, we all try to do what is right but what is right for everyone, not just what is right for a handful of people who suit the government's requirements. We want to do something that is right for everyone.

As I said, I have had so many emails, petitions and so on, asking that we recognize it as a day of celebration, but not April 30. There has been a lot of correspondence for everyone in this. As their MP, I have come to know the people in the community very well and I want to honour them as we go forward.

I will be part of a special commemoration this coming Saturday at Nathan Phillips Square. I have attended it for many years. I speak to hundreds of veterans to remember that day, and we remember the over 250,000 Vietnamese who died fleeing that regime. They died of starvation, or in the ocean or wherever. It is a commemoration like Remembrance Day. It is a day of sadness to remember what happened.

● (1850)

The people that I am talking to in the community want to see a day that is a celebration of all the positive things that have happened as a result of the Vietnamese community coming to Canada, the successful families that they have raised, the businesses that are now operated by successful Vietnamese members of the community. They think it is a great honour to have a day to celebrate all of their achievements in this country that they now call home.

April 30, as the senator initially had for the name of the day, is a black day because it is a day of sadness. April 30 is not a day to celebrate all the great things that people in the Vietnamese community have done in Canada. It is a day on which they remember the fall of Saigon and the ultimate exodus of thousands and thousands of refugees from Vietnam. It is a day that we always recognize at Nathan Phillips Square and other places as a day of

sadness and a day of acknowledging the many men and women who live in Canada who were part of the military that fled. They stand in uniform and remember that day as a day of sadness. I believe what the community would like to have is a day to celebrate the Vietnamese community. That is a day that I would love to see happen. That is where the concern is, that the day is seen as being a black day rather than a day of celebration.

That is why I have tremendous concerns about how to deal with this issue. This is a private member's bill, so we are able to represent our constituents as to how they feel and what they want us to do. A lot of the people in my riding are not happy with going forward with the date of April 30, but as my colleagues indicated earlier, that is the only date on the bill. The bill says very little. It has three lines. It would not achieve anything except to possibly allow the government to continue its wedge politics, which is dividing communities in saying that they are with them or they are not with them, even though their concerns are very legitimate as we move forward.

Most people who are concerned are saying that this is a day of sadness. It is like Remembrance Day for us here in Canada. It is not a day to celebrate all of the great things that the Vietnamese community has done and has worked for.

The Vietnamese community in Canada is made up of people who are fiercely and rightly proud of their history. They work hard and in many cases continue to fight for the true freedom and democracy in their homeland. I attended the human rights subcommittee yesterday and heard the head of the Viet Tan organization talk about the atrocities that continue to happen in Vietnam. They talk about human rights violations. They talk about the amount of human trafficking going on in those communities. Those are issues that we need to be pushing forward and moving along, to ensure that we are helping a community that we very much respect in a tribute. However, is April 30 the right day?

I would prefer the bill to have been sent back to committee and have allocated more time to hearing from more witnesses on all sides of the issue, and do what we are supposed to do in Parliament on issues like this, which is to find a way to bring the community together to unite it. I have no doubt we could have done that, but unfortunately because there was insufficient time, that did not happen.

April 30 is widely seen by the Vietnamese Canadian community as a dark day, like November 11, Remembrance Day, is for us. I would like to have a day to celebrate the Vietnamese community and the wonderful work that the people continue to do to build and strengthen our community, and help us continue the positive things we are doing.

We are going forward with the difficulties of legislation that is tearing apart the community on all sides. I would like to have gone back, if that were an option, but the procedures may not allow that to happen at this particular point. As we move forward and see what else we can do to assist here to take away the difficulties between the two sides of this issue, as to how we get them all to agree, that is going to be difficult to do. I am not sure where we would have to go from here to make any corrections. For the bill to go forward in its current form is a disservice to the Vietnamese community and leads us into a difficult position.

Private Members' Business

● (1855)

However, this is a private member's bill and we will all have our opportunity to reflect our community's wishes at the time it comes up for disposition.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to rejoin the debate on Bill S-219, the journey to freedom day act, and to speak in support of the proposed legislation.

As members know, the journey to freedom day act would designate April 30 to mark the day that began the flight of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese in a mass exodus from their homeland. April 30 is the right day to be designated to commemorate the beginning of that exodus. I respectfully disagree with my colleague, the member for York West, and before her, the NDP member for Brossard—La Prairie, in the use of the word “divided” to describe the sentiment of the Vietnamese Canadian community.

On Saturday night I attended a very large celebration banquet in Toronto, which was attended by between 600 to 800 Vietnamese Canadians. The evening was titled “Thank You Canada”. This represents the majority faction of Vietnamese Canadians who support this bill and recognize that April 30 was indeed a tragic day. It marks the communist capture of the South Vietnamese capital after decades of civil war in the country. The final capture of Saigon really was the end of the 1954 Geneva peace accord, which divided the country in hopes that there would one day be reconciliation, but instead, we saw the domination and oppression that followed with the North Vietnamese regime.

For me, April 30 is of particular importance. I was among the 7,000 who were airlifted out of Saigon on April 30 by the American military Operation Frequent Wind. The overwhelming majority of those 7,000 were Vietnamese who had reason to fear for their lives and the lives of their families. They were lucky to have joined that final airlift as the American embassy in the centre of Saigon was abandoned. However, even as we left from the embassy, we could see people gathering at the riverside boarding all types of tramp steamers and smaller boats. They began immediately to flee for their lives. They were the first of hundreds of thousands over the next half decade who would leave their homeland in desperation, seeking new lives abroad.

There were 840,000 souls who fled Vietnam in the mid to late 1970s following the fall of Saigon seeking refuge and new homes. In her Governor General's award-winning novel *Ru*, members may recall Kim Thy describing in vivid detail the experience of these Vietnamese refugees escaping by boat to an uncertain future, something she herself had done as a child. I will read briefly from her writing:

Heaven and hell embraced in the belly of our boat. Heaven promised a turning point in our lives, a new future, a new history. Hell, though, displayed our fears: fears of pirates, fear of starvation, fear of poisoning by biscuits soaked in motor oil, fear of running out of water, fear of being unable to stand up, fear of having to urinate in the red pot that was passed from hand to hand, fear that the scabies on the baby's head was contagious, fear of never again setting foot on solid ground, fear of never again seeing the faces of our parents, who were sitting in the darkness surrounded by two hundred people.

● (1900)

Miss Thy continues:

Before our boat had weighed anchor in the middle of the night on the shores of Rach Gia, most of the passengers had just one fear: fear of the Communists, the reason for their flight. But as soon as the vessel was surrounded, encircled by the uniform blue horizon, fear was transformed into a hundred-faced monster who sawed off our legs and kept us from feeling the stiffness in our immobilized muscles.

The reality is that 250,000 people would not survive the difficult sea journey. They fell victim to illness, piracy, and dangerous seas. Those who did survive made their way to refugee camps in neighbouring countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore and Hong Kong, which created a massive humanitarian crisis. This crisis required action on the global scale and the world responded.

With the aid of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, government officials began the process of resettling the refugees in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, the United States and, yes, Canada. Of those who survived the perilous sea voyage, more than 60,000 were welcomed by Canada. Approximately 34,000 were privately sponsored, and 26,000 were assisted by the Government of Canada.

These people, these refugees, became known as the boat people. They were welcomed with open arms by communities and religious congregations. Canadians helped these newest arrivals in Canada to find jobs, to make lives for themselves, and to educate their children and grandchildren. In fact, the outpouring of support here in Canada was so strong that the private sponsorship of refugees program became enshrined as a fundamental part of Canada's refugee resettlement program. It is a program whose strength is still recognized around the world.

Today, there are over 220,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin. They contribute to all aspects of Canadian life: culture, sport, the economy, and academia. We value these contributions. Canada must continue to acknowledge what the Vietnamese refugees of the 1970s experienced to get here.

We must remember that April 30, 1975 was the trigger. The final capture of the South Vietnamese capital by the communist North Vietnamese was the beginning. While there is sadness to be commemorated, and it is commemorated every year on April 30, there is joy and celebration within the South Vietnamese community at the new life that they found here in Canada. I have seen it regularly on the anniversary.

As a result of Canada's efforts in assisting the boat people, members will remember that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the people of Canada the Nansen medal in 1986. The only time in history that an entire country has received such recognition.

To this day, Canada has one of the fairest and generous immigration and refugee systems in the world. In fact, we welcome more resettled refugees than almost any other industrialized country in the world. On a per capita basis, Canada leads the way.

Private Members' Business

In conclusion, the designation of April 30 as journey to freedom day would be a significant day for all Canadians, not just the Vietnamese Canadian community. It would also be a fitting way to mark the eve of Asian Heritage Month, which we celebrate every year in May. With the passage of the bill, April 30 would be a special day of commemoration for the Vietnamese Canadian community. All Canadians deserve a day to remember with pride their considerable efforts to show the world that we are a caring and truly compassionate nation.

• (1905)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to address what I think is a very important issue. There is no doubt that it bridges political parties in the chamber as we reflect on Canada's great diversity. The leader of the Liberal Party has often said that one of Canada's greatest strengths is in fact its diversity. This is something we can all be very proud of. We can look, for example, at the issues surrounding the principle of multiculturalism, something which Pierre Trudeau established a number of years back and has instilled a great sense of pride in all of us. It does not matter which region of the country we live in.

I can talk about a great Canadian I know and had the honour to present a medal to, and that is Ba Van Nguyen, who is someone I have known for many years. In fact, when I was first elected to the Manitoba legislature in 1988, one of the very first events I was invited to back then was at the Saigon Centre, which is a wonderful, beautiful housing complex in the heart of Winnipeg. That was the first time I had the opportunity to meet Ba.

Through the years, the education and information that Ba has provided me with regard to the historical perspective of Vietnam and in particular the Vietnamese heritage here in Canada is of great value. Ba, and I suspect along with many others but I want to single out Ba, has done a tremendous job of sharing his heritage not only with individuals such as myself but with literally hundreds, if not thousands, of people over the years.

The Saigon housing complex will often have special events, where I will see other politicians as well as members of the public in attendance. They recognize the important role the Saigon Centre plays. Throughout the years, it has created such as positive hub of activity. In fact, just down the street, literally steps away from the Saigon Centre, is a park that is dedicated to the boat people.

If one were to talk to Ba, one would find that he would be prepared to share his story. He, too, had the misfortune of having to get on a boat and travel to the Philippines, and ultimately he came here to reside in Canada. I look at Ba as an individual who has contributed so much to our society. In fact, he ran in a provincial election for a different political party than I belonged to. He has demanded a great deal of respect, not because he stands on a pedestal and requires it, but because he demonstrates through leadership. He has a great sense of pride. He is a proud Canadian and has a great deal of pride in his Vietnamese heritage.

I look at the bill before us and what it would really do. What I would suggest to members of the House it would do is it would say that we need to cherish the Vietnamese heritage and a big part of that heritage are the boats that ultimately brought the refugees to Canada. By designating a day, we would be affording individuals the

opportunity, whether they are of Vietnamese heritage or not, to recognize the contributions and reflect on the history of the Vietnamese community and the positive impact it has had on the broader community.

• (1910)

The potential has been realized in many different ways in the province and the city I call home, Winnipeg, in terms of the social and economic well-being of our communities and the manner in which our Canadian Vietnamese constituents and others have really contributed to our economy and to our social fabric.

We can see that in many different ways, including in our health and manufacturing industries and in politics. The community has really built up, as have other communities. I started talking about diversity and our multicultural fabric. There is a very good sense of just how a community has done so exceptionally well in a relatively short period of time.

This last summer I had the privilege of travelling with my daughter to Vietnam. What a wonderful experience that was, just being able to experience first-hand a culture and heritage that many of the constituents I represent inside this House today can really identify with, the country of Vietnam.

When I look at the bill that we have before us today, I reflect on the importance of the issue at hand and on instilling the sense of pride that we should all have in terms of our Vietnamese community and how well it has done and how well it has overcome, over the last number of years, many different barriers.

Through experiences and talking with members from the Vietnamese community, I know they want to be able to see even more, in terms of contributions and preservation of the heritage. There were discussions about looking at how we could have street improvements, and looking at parks to see how they could reflect how Canada's heritage has actually been enriched by our Vietnamese community.

In second reading, I listened to the debate and I had the opportunity to participate. I listened to many speeches in regard to the value of recognizing a day. I appreciate all the individuals who have taken the time to stand in their place and share with the House some reflections on a very important community.

I look forward to the bill ultimately moving forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

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Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.
I declare Motion No. 3 defeated.

(Motion No. 3 negatived)

●(1915)

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC) moved that Bill S-219, an act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read a third time?
By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Mark Adler moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)
