

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

HE-26

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

HE-26

**Standing Committee
on Heritage, Infrastructure
and Cultural Policy**

Croatian Heritage Day Act, 2023

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Monday 10 July 2023

**Comité permanent du
patrimoine, de l'infrastructure
et de la culture**

Loi de 2023 sur le Jour
du patrimoine croate

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Lundi 10 juillet 2023

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 2816-7252

CONTENTS

Monday 10 July 2023

Croatian Heritage Day Act, 2023, Bill 81, Ms. Skelly / Loi de 2023 sur le Jour du patrimoine croate, projet de loi 81, Mme Skelly.....	HE-591
Ms. Donna Skelly	
Croatian National Home; Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton; Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce.....	HE-597
Mr. Ivan Luksic	
Mr. Jason Grbavac	
Mr. Ivan Grbešić	
Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation	HE-605
Ms. Jeanne Valetic	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE**

Monday 10 July 2023

Lundi 10 juillet 2023

The committee met at 1001 in committee room 1.

CROATIAN HERITAGE DAY ACT, 2023

**LOI DE 2023 SUR LE JOUR
DU PATRIMOINE CROATE**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to proclaim Croatian Heritage Day /
Projet de loi 81, Loi proclamant le Jour du patrimoine
croate.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning):
Good morning, honourable members. In the absence of the
Chair and Vice-Chair, it is my duty to call upon you to
elect an Acting Chair. Are there any nominations? MPP
Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Good morning. I would like
to nominate MPP Coe to be the Chair today. Thank you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning):
Are there any further nominations? Does the member
accept the nomination?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning):
Okay, seeing no other nominations, I declare the nomi-
nations closed and MPP Coe elected Acting Chair of the
committee.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Good morning,
everyone. Thank you for being here. The Standing Com-
mittee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will
now come to order. We're here to conduct public hearings
on Bill 81, An Act to proclaim Croatian Heritage Day. We
are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and
broadcast and recording.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to
speak and, as always, all comments should go through the
Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

Our first presenter is the bill's sponsor, MPP Donna
Skelly. She will have 20 minutes to make an opening state-
ment, followed by 40 minutes for questions and answers
divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government
members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official oppo-
sition members and two rounds of five minutes for the
independent member. Are there any questions?

Seeing none: MPP Skelly, you have 20 minutes for your
presentation. You can begin.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, Chair, and good
morning to all members of the committee. It is so nice to
see you all back here at Queen's Park. I hope you've been
having a relaxing and enjoyable summer with your family
and that you're all rested to help pass Bill 81.

For more than a century, Canadians of Croatian heri-
tage have made incredible contributions to business, to
politics, to medicine, to science, to sport and to culture in
Ontario, enriching this province in so many ways. Croa-
tian immigrants escaping communist oppression began
arriving in Ontario in the 1920s in search of a better life.
Today, Ontario is home to over 100,000 people of Croa-
tian descent, the largest Croatian population in all of our
country. Croatians live and work in communities across
the province, including in my hometown of Hamilton, in
Toronto, Mississauga, Kitchener, the Niagara area, Cam-
bridge, Waterloo, London, Windsor and, of course, right
across our province.

In every corner of our province, Croatian Canadians
helped build Ontario. They worked in the steel mills in
Hamilton and in Sault Ste. Marie. They worked in the
mines in northern Ontario. They worked in the shipyards
in Port Credit. They worked in fruit orchards and survived
by operating boarding houses. They worked on construc-
tion sites across Ontario. Croatian immigrants helped
build this province into the economic powerhouse it is
today.

Early Croatians immigrants instilled in their com-
munities the importance of integration, participation and
contribution to our society. Croatians became proud and
patriotic Canadians, and embraced Ontario and all that it
has to offer.

Croatians are deeply rooted in their parish life. There
are more than 13 Croatian parishes across Ontario. They
are not only places of worship, but they also play a crucial
role in preserving and promoting Croatian culture, tradi-
tion and values.

Founded in 1950, the parish of St. Francis of Assisi in
Windsor is one of the oldest Croatian parishes in Ontario.
The parish provided support to the vulnerable and to new
immigrants, helping them integrate into Canadian society.
Croatian parishioners across Ontario participate in chari-
table work in our communities. They help with everything
from outreach programs to Easter food drives to Christmas
carolling at seniors' centres.

The contributions of members of the Croatian community to our province are extensive. Designating May 30 each year as Croatian Heritage Day would allow all Ontarians, including and perhaps especially those of Croatian descent, an opportunity to recognize and celebrate Croatian culture, folklore, history, sport and so much more.

In business, Croatian Ontarians have established successful enterprises across various sectors, including construction, information technology, the hospitality industry and manufacturing. Robert—and please excuse my pronunciation—Herjavec, an astute businessman who became a household name as a celebrity investor on *Dragons' Den* and *Shark Tank*, is one of these successful Croatian Canadian entrepreneurs. He immigrated to Ontario as a child. He came from a poor family, but through his own drive and determination, he was able to achieve the Canadian dream.

Dario Zulich, a graduate of Western University's Ivey Business School, is another prominent Croatian Canadian businessman and philanthropist. He owns the Sudbury Wolves OHL hockey team and is the visionary civic leader who is helping drive efforts to grow and revitalize Sudbury's downtown.

The Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce is a not-for-profit network of Canadian Croatian businesses, professionals and organizations. The chamber works to promote Croatian culture. It engages with young people through scholarship and mentorship opportunities, and its membership represents the incredible breadth of Croatian Canadian business achievement, with members representing every sector of the economy and every region of our province.

If passed, Croatian Heritage Day would give community members a chance to celebrate the Croatian Canadian business leaders who have created countless jobs in our province and helped grow our economy.

Croatians have made important contributions in the fields of education and science across Ontario. Notable individuals include Zvonko Vranesic, an international grandmaster of chess and a professor emeritus of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Toronto; Igor Stajlar, a professor of molecular biology at the University of Toronto and expert in the field of self-signalling; and Vinko Grubišić, a poet, playwright, essayist, translator and professor at the University of Waterloo, where he was the first chair for Croatian language and culture.

Athleticism is also an important part of the Croatian identity, and Croatian immigrants brought their love of sport with them when they came to Ontario. This dedication to sport has allowed Ontario's Croatian community to produce world-class athletes.

Many of you probably have heard the name of boxer George Chuvalo. He was a five-time Canadian heavyweight champion, who was best known for having never been knocked down in his 93-bout professional career. Chuvalo is also a two-time world heavyweight title challenger. His career included fights against Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and George Foreman. George Chuvalo was inducted into the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame in 1995.

Sandra Bezic and her brother Val are two more outstanding Croatian Canadian athletes who won the pairs gold at the Canadian Figure Skating Championships every year from 1970 to 1974. The pair also competed at the 1972 Winter Olympics in Japan.

1010

Soccer has a special place in the lives of Croatians and is an important part of Croatian identity. Shortly after arriving in Canada, many Croatian immigrants quickly established soccer clubs as a way to connect with their culture and to share their love of the game with anyone who wanted to join. There are numerous Croatian soccer clubs across Ontario, including the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton, a community hub in my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook. The centre was established over 65 years ago to promote sports and other forms of Croatian culture. It offers a wide range of sporting and recreation activities, including soccer, bocce, hockey and lawn bowling. It's a vibrant sports centre and busy community hub that welcomes people from all backgrounds and all ages to enjoy sports, food, culture and good old-fashioned family fun.

The Mississauga Croatia Soccer Club was established in the 1970s and has a long history of athletic success. The club brings together people through the love of sport and is actively involved in promoting healthy living and community development through various initiatives such as soccer camps. In 1977, Mississauga Croatia created its first soccer team under the name Metros-Croatia Mississauga in honour of the Toronto Metros-Croatia team. Toronto Metros-Croatia, a soccer team with many members from Toronto's Croatian community, won the North American Soccer League's Soccer Bowl in 1976, making them the only Ontario team and one of only two Canadian teams to ever win that championship.

Let's talk a little bit about our national sport, hockey. Ontarians of Croatian descent have also embraced and excelled at our national sport. Some even went on to be big stars in the National Hockey League. Robin, you remember this, I'm sure: Frank Mahovlich, who was born in Timmins, Ontario, had a long career in the NHL and was named one of the 100 greatest NHL players of all time. I remember him growing up in Sudbury, and we used to collect all of the stamps for the Esso books and the Mahovlich brothers were one of the key players. I believe they were probably part of the first six hockey teams in the country.

He was actually part of the Toronto Maple Leafs team to win a Stanley Cup, believe it or not, back in the 1966-67 season. Frank was inducted into the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame in 1999. His younger brother, Peter, also played in the NHL. Peter was known as "Little M," and his big brother Frank was known as "Big M." Other Croatian Canadians in the NHL include John Kordic, who played for the Toronto Maple Leafs, and Matt Pavelich, who was also the first ever linesman to be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

In the sport of football, Tony Mandarich, a Croatian Ontarian from Oakville, played in the NFL for seven

seasons after being drafted second overall in 1989. Mandarich's older brother, John, also excelled at football and went on to play in the CFL for the Ottawa Rough Riders.

Croatian immigrants have helped to enrich the province's cultural landscape by bringing their traditional music, dance, folk costumes and rich cultural history to Ontario. Organizations, festivals and events organized by members of the Croatian community have helped preserve the vibrancy of the Croatian culture. By nurturing their traditions, music and identity, Croatian Canadians have woven their culture into the broader multicultural tapestry of Ontario.

Through concerts and performances, the Canadian Croatian Choral Society has provided opportunities for the Croatian community to come together to celebrate their heritage. The society has helped introduce Croatian music to a wider audience and has played an important role in promoting cultural diversity in Ontario.

Across the province, local associations of Croatian Canadians have helped to preserve and promote Croatian culture. The Queen Helena Canadian-Croatian Cultural and Charitable Society has been promoting Croatian culture in the Kitchener-Waterloo area through folk song and dance since 1978. The Croatian Parish Folklore Group of Mississauga was established with a mission of preserving, promoting and celebrating Croatian culture within the province and engaging Croatian Canadian youth. Canada's Croatian Folklore Ensemble has been active since the 1970s. Their performances impress audiences and help preserve traditional Croatian music, dances and costumes.

Pavilion Croatia was among the original 10 pavilions when the Carassauga Festival in Mississauga was first held in 1986. The event has since grown into the largest multicultural festival in Canada, celebrating the cultural diversity of the country and showcasing the traditions of countries from around the world.

If Bill 81 is passed, Croatian Heritage Day would not only acknowledge the rich Croatian culture in Ontario, but it would recognize the efforts of the Croatian Canadian community, who strive to promote multiculturalism of all the diverse groups that call Ontario home. This bill proposes May 30 as the date for a Croatian Heritage Day in Ontario. In Croatia, this date is marked as Statehood Day because on May 30, 1990, the first modern multi-party Croatian Parliament was convened, ushering out the era of communism and ushering in the democracy and freedom that the country enjoys today.

Canada was among the first nations to recognize an independent Croatia, on January 15, 1992. Canada, under the leadership of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, led our allies, including the United States and the UK, in extending recognition to the newly established nation. In 1993, Canada and Croatia established full diplomatic relations. Over the last 30 years, Canada and Croatia have enjoyed a friendly and co-operative relationship that has benefited the people of both nations. As allies and members of NATO, Canadian and Croatian troops have

served alongside each other on missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo to advance peace and human rights.

The economic partnership between our countries is growing as well. Canada and Croatia enjoy a free trading relationship through the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. This represents a significant economic opportunity, with tens of millions of dollars in trade occurring annually between our two nations.

At this time, I would like to voice some of the support that has been voiced for the creation of this heritage day. Ante Jović, consul general of the Croatian consulate in Mississauga, has been a strong supporter of this bill. A letter of support from the consulate says a Croatian Heritage Day on May 30 would be an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the culture, history and contributions of the Croatian community across Ontario.

Ivan Luksic, president of the Croatian National Home, an organization founded in 1928 dedicated to preserving Croatian culture, says, "We strongly support your initiative for a Croatian Heritage Day so that the broader community can learn of our rich heritage and our contributions to the province of Ontario."

The Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton is also a strong supporter of this effort. Mark Vuksan, the organization's president, said Croatians are proud of their heritage and want to share it with all Ontarians.

Croatians have always been an integral part of Ontario's success story. They have helped build and shape our province through hard work, dedication, determination and commitment to family, community and their culture. Croatian Canadians make up a vital part of the country's cultural mosaic and have contributed to every aspect of our society. This community's achievements in business, sport, science, medicine and culture deserve to be honoured and recognized.

I brought this bill forward because I believe all Ontarians can benefit by acknowledging and celebrating all that Croatian Ontarians have done to enrich our society.

1020

With the passage of this bill, Croatian Heritage Day will allow all Ontarians to become more familiar with the culture, heritage, traditions and contributions of Croatian Canadians. This community, which has done so much for our province, should get the recognition they deserve. It is my hope that each year on May 30, Ontarians will mark Croatian Heritage Day by celebrating and giving thanks for the important role that Croatian Ontarians have had in promoting multiculturalism, building our province, growing our economy and making our country proud on the world stage.

I want to give thanks for all that Croatian Ontarians have done to help create the vibrant and prosperous province we call home. I look forward to us all having a day to reflect on and celebrate these contributions and this incredible community.

I thank you all, and I now am available to take questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP Skelly, for that presentation.

Committee members, as a reminder, this round of questions will start with the official opposition followed by the independent member and then the government. The official opposition, please. MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Chair. I will be brief. I just want to first of all thank MPP Skelly for bringing this private member's bill forward. It's something that means a lot to the Croatian community in my community in Niagara. It was a pleasure speaking in favour of the bill in the Legislature and attending the flag-raising, where a surprising number of Croatians travelled from great distance. I even had some people from my area at the flag-raising that were there just to celebrate the Croatian flag and, of course, the passing of this bill.

My question is going to be basically asking you how we can use Croatian Heritage Day in the future and what you've heard from groups across the province, how they will commemorate the day going forward. But I'll just tell you, in my community, before I was elected to the Legislature, I was the executive director of a settlement agency and multicultural centre in Niagara, the Niagara Folk Arts.

One of the founding members of that group back in the 1950s was the Croatian community. The Croatians, Filipino community, Greek community and Armenian community started that and began one of the oldest heritage festivals in Canada, which has been ongoing since the early 1950s. I know that they plan to mark the day going forward by lighting up the Welland bridge, which they already did this year. As I said, they didn't want to wait for the passage of the bill; they're already celebrating Croatian Heritage Day. They're pretty happy about that.

We also had a great open house in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where they have a great club with a big soccer field and shacks where they barbecue lamb. They brought the Croatian folk singers in. It was a great celebration. We're already celebrating it in Niagara, and everyone is very happy that this bill came forward. I know we all look forward to supporting it.

Back to my question, what have you heard from other groups across Ontario in terms of their plans to help commemorate this new day once the bill passes?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, MPP Burch. Through the Chair, I want to thank you first of all for speaking so passionately and eloquently to Bill 81 when we first presented it in the Legislature. I know that you have a significant and very active Croatian community in your area and all across Niagara. It was clear that you're very involved with the community, and they were proud that you were speaking to the bill. I believe a number of them actually showed up on that day as well. It was wonderful.

We spoke about this just before we came into this meeting this morning. I'm a fifth-generation Canadian. My roots go back to Ireland, but I've never even been to Ireland. So when I hear people talk about how connected they are to where they were born or where their parents were born, it's interesting to be able to be part of a bill that

will help them celebrate that and share that history with other Canadians.

You talked about how to celebrate it. Well, the community in Hamilton, in my riding, it's the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton. They're a very active group, and they have opened their doors not just to Croatians but to kids from right across the city of Hamilton. There's always a need to have more sports fields, especially soccer fields, and the families that are showing up at this Croatian centre—which was built, by the way, through donations of the community, in-kind donations, and actually them going out and hammering and nailing the infrastructure itself, putting the infrastructure together itself.

They share their culture and they share their traditions with all Hamiltonians and anyone who wants to come and participate. They have plans, of course, to celebrate May 30 each year at the event. They also are very much looking forward to the flag-raising here at Queen's Park when we actually have it on May 30, when we can say it's Croatian Heritage Day.

One of the points I was trying to make when I mentioned that I'm a fifth-generation Canadian, the last event I attended at this particular centre, the MC introduced me and shared that we were hoping to bring this—we brought the bill forward and we were hoping to have it passed in the Legislature. Afterwards, a woman, I'd say, in her early to mid-thirties, came up to me with tears in her eyes, and she said, "You have no idea how much this means to me and my family. My parents came here during the war"—the war in our lifetime.

It's so foreign to someone like me, but they're so passionate and proud of their culture. And to be able to part of just one little initiative that means so much to so many people, I'm very proud of it, and I'm very happy and proud that you spoke to the bill as well.

Mr. Jeff Burch: We look forward to supporting this bill when we come back in September and celebrating it with the entire Legislature.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good to hear.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have one minute and 48 seconds, the official opposition, for a quick question. Yes, MPP Andrew.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you, MPP Skelly, for an impassioned presentation. On behalf of the Croatian community across the province, and certainly we have folks in St. Paul's as well, thank you for the initiative. I have had the opportunity of trying Joso's in Davenport. It is a restaurant where the gentleman who founded the restaurant, going back decades, actually created the art that's in the restaurant itself. Now, it's not in St. Paul's, but Davenport is our neighbour.

I also just want to give a shout-out, because I understand that Croatian NBA star Bojan Bogdanović, after he lost the game to the Raptors on Croatian Community Night, still came back and celebrated with about 800 Croatian fans in Toronto, and it was just fantastic to see the heart and the compassion. I wasn't there, but I heard about it. Certainly, Croatians are people full of heart. They love

their culture, their heritage. They're gastronomical legends, as per Joso, and certainly leaders in STEM and arts and all that good stuff that makes Ontario one of the best provinces, if not the best province, to call home. So thanks for your work on that.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We'll now move to our independent member, MPP McMahon. You have five minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Happy summer, everyone. It's great to see you in the Chair's position, MPP Coe.

MPP Skelly, that was a fantastic presentation. I think you did the Croatian community proud in covering all aspects that you could and regaling us with information we did not know about famous Croatians. So I thank you for that and I thank you for bringing this forward. I think every day we should be celebrating someone's history and heritage in Canada. We know Toronto—we're proud to say that diversity is our strength, and we need to be showcasing the stories and culture and cuisine from everyone that makes us a better country, city, province. So thank you again, and on behalf of, as MPP Andrew said, Croatians across Ontario—also I have some Croatian friends. They're going to be thrilled with this, absolutely, when it passes, because it's going to pass.

1030

My question to you is just: Can you take us through the chronology of this idea—where it came from and that kind of history, and who was involved.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your question. Before I answer that, if I could just speak to Joso's. I had the opportunity of going to that restaurant, and if you haven't, please do. It is unique—may I say it's unique? It is a restaurant that has genuine Croatian food, authentic Croatian food, a lot of seafood and art. The founder was an artist, and his art is displayed in every inch, every corner of that restaurant. It is really interesting, and it's just such an experience. It overwhelms the senses, so I would invite all of you to share and take a relative or friend to the restaurant. But I digress.

The idea was actually brought to my attention by one of my colleagues who had been approached by members of the Croatian community, and they knew that I had a significantly large Croatian community within my riding. They asked if I'd be interested, and when I explored it, I reached out and we communicated with Ante Jović, who is the consul general. I cannot say enough about how much work he put into this. I'd like to take all the credit, but really, he worked tirelessly and he's very proud of it, and he should be. Our consuls general are here, and when they can take on an active role and work hand in glove with other members of government and we're able to bring something like this to Parliament—and hopefully it will pass and is successful—I think that's one of the roles that we all have as politicians.

When I reached out and started talking to my own friends who are Croatian and, again, people within my own community, the level of passion and support for this bill was surprising. They are really, really, really proud of

their culture, and when you start to learn more about the culture, I understand why. I'm just hoping—and as you said, it will pass; I hope you're right. If it does pass, I'll be very proud to have been associated with it, and I will be very happy if you will support it.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you. Count me in.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have one minute and 30 seconds, if you have any additional questions.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, it's probably too short, but I was wondering about ways, as MPP Burch had mentioned, we can promote the day when it passes and if there's any ideas about outreaching to schools and how we can spread the word and celebrate together.

Ms. Donna Skelly: One of the things that we haven't talked about, or I haven't, perhaps, mentioned enough about—and I hate to bring this part into it, but the reason we are celebrating national Croatian Heritage Day is because of the day that in—and I want to make sure I've got the proper date, but when they were able to form their statehood.

I was a reporter back then and I remember working with some of the refugees coming into Canada. Again, when you've lived your entire life in a country that has never had any war on our soil, you don't appreciate how horrific war can be. These are people who moved to Canada and built a life, but they escaped communism and it was a horrific time. Maybe, perhaps, one of the things that we should be talking about more is the history of why it is so important—the history of their statehood and why it came about and the fact that Canada played such a leading role in it as well.

I mentioned Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. I was talking to Minister Mulroney about it and her mom is Serbian, and he brought this forward in support of the Croatian statehood and really rallied the troops, the other allies, to recognize it as—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP Skelly.

We're now going to move over to the government. Questions, please? MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to MPP Skelly for bringing forward this bill, which I think will be greatly appreciated by the Croatian community in Ontario. I kind of enjoyed your going through all of the representatives of that community here in Ontario and all the things that they've done. I like to hear that kind of history because we don't often reflect upon it, and there is quite a lot of important Croatian personalities that have played a role in Ontario's history and Canada's history.

It's one of these strange facts about myself that, when I was at McGill University, I actually studied Croatian for a year. I know; it seems weird now, thinking back on it. Don't ask me why. I think there was something I wanted to read in the original language, so I decided I had to learn the language, which I didn't, but I spent a year trying. I am a great patron of Joso's, which has been mentioned several times. The food is fabulous and highly recommended to

anybody who wants to go try it out. I certainly have fond memories of some of the Croatian cuisine that I enjoyed there. The seafood generally is just fabulous, which is my favourite kind of food.

The other thing that you mentioned that really hit home for me was Frank Mahovlich. Well, I'm a woman of a certain age, so Frank Mahovlich was a hockey hero. Of course, his brother, Pete Mahovlich, was also a hockey hero at the time, but we grew up in—well, not in Leaside, because we couldn't afford Leaside, but near Leaside. We went to Leaside hockey arena to learn how to skate, and that's where my brother played hockey. I don't know if you know this, but the man who sharpened the skates at Leaside hockey arena for I don't know how many years, maybe 50 years, was the father of Frank and Pete Mahovlich. His name was Peter Mahovlich Sr., and he sharpened skates there. As a kid, it was kind of a thrill to get your skates sharpened by Mr. Mahovlich—we never called him Pete—who was there sharpening your skates. There were all the pictures of his boys' success all around him.

I noticed on the Vintage Toronto Facebook group that, in 2019, they had a little encapsulation all the people who had gone to get their skates sharpened by Mr. Mahovlich, because Friday night was the skate night and everybody would go skate in circles around the arena. That was the thing to do on a Friday night, in our area, anyway, and to get their skates sharpened by Mr. Mahovlich.

I think it's fabulous that we're recognizing another community that's made an important contribution to Ontario. I think one of the things I heard you say was that there is a community centre. I wondered if you could just talk about that a little bit because I didn't know that—where it is, how it got established, when it got established etc.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you. It's funny, I didn't realize you had the connection to the Mahovliches when I called you up. I figured, we're kind of the same—we're not really the same age. I'm a lot older than you, but I know you like hockey. I remember the Mahovliches. I was a hockey fiend when I was a kid and, as I said, saved all those little Esso stickers. You are all too young for that. You'd go and fill up at the gas station and get your sticker.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Oh, do you recall that? Yes. But I digress.

Yes, the one centre I was referring to is in Hamilton. There are actually two, but this particular centre in my riding was built recently, within the last couple of decades. It's absolutely beautiful. The Croatians simply raised money on their own. They had a lot of their people who were builders come in and, in-kind, build this and build that. I would invite all of you to come and see, but they have an interior facility for events and an exterior facility and soccer fields and bocce courts. It's absolutely beautiful. The last time I was there, they had lamb and pork and all kinds on the barbecue. It was fabulous. It was absolutely fabulous.

But the kids who are part of the sports teams are not all Croatian; they're from across the city. And they recognize that, especially soccer, it's really tough to get access to fields. So they have been opening up their facility to all kinds of young people. What's really nice is that it's safe, it's family-oriented and it's really a community mind of safe space.

When we talk about the culture, Croatians are really, really, really proud of their heritage and their traditions. I've been fortunate enough to enjoy a lot of the musical events, and I'm quite surprised at how young the members are that participate in the cultural dance groups, the musicians and the choruses, the choirs. The tradition is truly, genuinely being passed down from generation to generation. You see children who are five, six, seven, eight, and then in their teens. There was a teen band; I was really surprised. So it's very entrenched in their culture and in their families. It's something they're proud of and, as I said, it's something I'm so proud to be part of as well.

1040

Mrs. Robin Martin: You mentioned, MPP Skelly, that there's a second community centre?

Ms. Donna Skelly: There are—let me find them here—

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'm just curious as to where they are.

Ms. Donna Skelly: There's one in Mississauga, and I believe there is another one in the Kitchener area as well.

Mrs. Robin Martin: The Croatian soccer team certainly have had some success in recent years. They're quite a good soccer team, so I'm not surprised people go there.

Interjection.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Oh, sorry, I'll let you go ahead, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP Martin.

MPP Smith, please. You've got one minute and six seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Mr. Chair: I just want to congratulate and thank MPP Skelly for this remarkable presentation. I'm very fortunate because my next door neighbours are Croatian. I've been exposed to so much of the culture and the beauty. I can almost recite the Happy Birthday verse. It's got a real kick to it at the end. I'll try and do it later off-line, if you wish.

Speaking to sports, I'm a director with the soccer club and they are so sports-oriented: Soccer is such an important sport for them, along with so many key pieces and people—Chovalo—who have been a part of their heritage and their lineage, and they're so proud. I'm just thinking, and I'm speaking off the cuff, that maybe there's something to be done in the sporting realm on the 30th. I'm just talking out of the box, because it's so rich within their DNA.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I think the day itself is going to certainly shine the light on what this particular community has brought—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Skelly, that concludes our time for the first round of questions.

Before proceeding with the second round I'd like to ask the committee members if you have additional questions. I'm seeing people shake their heads no. If that's—yes, sir?

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Well, let me just continue for a moment. If there aren't any more questions, we can recess—to MPP Skelly—until 11 o'clock, when we have our first presenter, Mr. Ivan Luksic, from the Croatian National Home.

Yes, MPP Sabawy?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I still have a question.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have one question? Then we won't get to the government, because I'm going to have to start with the official opposition, the independents, then come back to the government.

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. The Clerk is being very benevolent. He says we can go to you now. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to thank MPP Donna for introducing this bill. We have in Mississauga a huge Croatian community. We actually have two Croatian community centres, two Croatian parks in Mississauga, which not only serve the Croatian community but are open to all the public. During the summer they are used by all communities for lots of events, not only the Croatian community.

Canada is a home for many Croatians. Some of them came as immigrants. Some of them left their country during wartime and, despite the fact of the pain and everything, they still have great love for the country and their culture. I think the bill is a good recognition of the Croatian community's contributions. As I myself introduced the Egyptian Heritage Month bill, I understand the feeling of the community and how they feel about that.

Do you agree with me that bringing recognition like this could help the Croatian community showcase for the rest of Canadians their culture, art, music and everything else?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for that question, MPP Sabawy. Yes, I would agree, through the Chair. That's one of the fundamental points of this heritage day, is to shine a light on everything that Croatians have brought to our community.

I also want to thank you for raising the point that there are two community centres in Mississauga. Mississauga has a very, very significant Croatian community. They were one of the driving forces behind this bill as well.

I think, regardless of whether it's Egyptian Heritage Day or Croatian Heritage Day, it's a day for communities to showcase, to celebrate and to share all that they have brought to our country and to our province.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for that response, and thank you, sir, for the question. With the consensus of the committee, we'll recess until 11 o'clock, and our first presenter then will be the Croatian National Home, Mr. Ivan Luksic, at 11 o'clock. Try to be in your seats, please, by five to 11. Thank you.

This committee is now recessed until 11 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1045 to 1100.

CROATIAN NATIONAL HOME
CROATIAN SPORTS AND
COMMUNITY CENTRE OF HAMILTON
CANADIAN-CROATIAN
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy is back in session. Today's remaining presenters have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes for an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent member of the committee.

Committee members, are there any questions? Seeing none, I will now call on the Ivan Luksic, president, Croatian National Home; Jason Grbavac, director of public and member relations, executive committee, the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton; and Ivan Grbešić, executive director, the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce, in that order.

Ivan, if you would please start. You know how long you have for your presentation. I'll be timing it for you.

Yes, MPP Skelly, please?

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's virtual, is it not?

Mr. Ivan Luksic: Yes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Very well. Thank you very much. Go ahead, starting first of all with the Croatian National Home, please, per our agenda.

Mr. Ivan Luksic: Good morning, Chair and members of the community. My name is Ivan Luksic. I'm the president of the Croatian National Home in Hamilton. Our organization is celebrating its 95th anniversary this year. It is Canada's oldest cultural organization.

It is my pleasure to be here to support Bill 81, the Croatian Heritage Day Act. I would like to thank the honourable member from Flamborough-Glanbrook for introducing this bill, and the members of the Legislature who have unanimously supported this bill in its first two readings. In the second reading of the bill, all sides of the Legislature supported the proposed legislation, with members speaking in support of their Croatian communities across Ontario.

This is an important bill that will provide long-overdue recognition to a group of people, Ontarians of Croatian heritage, who have contributed so much to the province's economic and cultural fabric. With the passage of this bill, Croatian Heritage Day will be celebrated on May 30. This date coincides with the day when the first multi-party Parliament was convened in Croatia, following the first democratic elections in its modern history.

In Croatia and among Croatian communities around the world, May 30 is known as Statehood Day, a day when

Croats were finally able to fully and freely express their cultural identity. It's a day of reclaiming their sovereign status as a nation, which for centuries was denied by various empires and political entities that controlled the traditional territory that is home to the Croatian people.

Croats first emigrated in larger numbers in Ontario at the turn of the 20th century. They toiled in various industries in precarious economic times, often migrating from town to town in search of work. Many of them were deemed enemy aliens by virtue of being citizens of Austria-Hungary, and were forcibly interned in camps for the duration of the First World War.

The next wave of Croats arrived in the 1920s as a result of newly enacted American legislation that severely limited the number of emigrants from southern and eastern Europe. These migrants found work in mining and heavy industry, settling in places such as Timmins, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Kirkland Lake, Windsor, Welland and Hamilton.

Organizations such as the Croatian National Home provided an outlet for Croatian immigrants to celebrate their culture and traditions. In 1928, the Croatian National Home was incorporated, and in 1920 the organization built its first hall, which was a venue for our community to participate in social gatherings and to preserve our Croatian culture.

By 1934, the Croatian National Home established its first musical group, where students learned to play the tambura, a traditional stringed instrument. In that first group of tamburaši was a young student named Joe Lončarić, who would eventually become the director of the tambura group in 1953, playing a major role in developing our folklore program into one of the largest in North America when he retired in 2006. Today, our folklore program has over 150 students in its youth and adult groups, and is the oldest Croatian folklore program on this continent.

These immigrants were joined by political and economic migrants who arrived in Ontario in large numbers from the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s. This generation was successful in expanding the network of Croatian clubs, organization, societies, Croatian-language schools and Roman Catholic parishes and communities across Ontario. These organizations helped strengthen our Croatian identity in Canada at a time when it was difficult for Croats in the ancestral homeland to fully celebrate their Croatian culture under Communist rule. In the aftermath of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the mid-1990s, Ontario welcomed a new wave of Croatian migrants and refugees.

Bill 81 has generated a great deal of support and enthusiasm within the Croatian community in Ontario. We are confident that Croatian Heritage Day will serve as a focal point for the community to celebrate its identity. In the second reading of the bill, members of the Legislature cited many examples of Croatian Canadians who have made incredible contributions to business, medicine, science, sports and culture in Ontario. Our community is proud of their achievements, and we hope that through

initiatives such as Croatian Heritage Day, more Ontarians will learn of the accomplishments of these individuals and their contributions to the betterment of Ontario and Canada. We also hope that Croatian Heritage Day will provide Ontarians an opportunity to learn more about Ontario's vibrant Croatian community and to develop a broader awareness of our heritage, our culture, our identity and our history.

Our community looks forward to celebrating Croatian Heritage Day with all Ontarians. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, sir, for your presentation.

We will now move to the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton. Jason, please. Thank you.

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Good morning, honourable Chair and honoured members of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. It is an honour to be here today to provide my support for the private member's Bill 81, the Croatian Heritage Day Act, initiated by MPP Donna Skelly to proclaim May 30 Croatian Heritage Day in Ontario.

My name is Jason Grbavac, and I am the director of public and member relations at the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton, more commonly known as Hamilton Croatia. On behalf of our executive committee and the entire membership, which consists of over 1,000 people, I can't stress enough the significance of this proposed bill. This bill holds immense importance not only for Croatians in Ontario but for all those who value community, heritage and the struggles faced by individuals in pursuit of a better life.

Hamilton Croatia was first established in 1957 to promote sports and Croatian culture for the benefit of their community in southern Ontario and across Canada. Since that time, our organization has grown to become one of the largest Croatian organizations in North America. As many of you are likely aware, the early 1990s was a very difficult time for Croatia as it struggled for its quest for independence through a war of aggression that took place as communism fell across Europe. Croatia strived for peace and the establishment of a democratic nation, upon which it was forced to defend that dream through a conflict that took the lives of many.

Hamilton Croatia played an active role during those difficult years, raising both funds and, perhaps more importantly, awareness here in Ontario and throughout North America of the dire situation affecting so many of their loved ones back in their beloved Croatia. One specific fundraising initiative launched by Hamilton Croatia was the purchase of an ambulance in one of the cities severely impacted by the conflict, which was later recognized by both the International Red Cross and the first Croatian democratic government as a significant signal of support from the diaspora. The Croatian communities in Ontario continued to play an instrumental role in supporting their homeland, standing firm against aggression and advocating for peace until peace was achieved several years later.

From the ashes of that conflict arose a new era of nation-building, where the Croatian people worked tirelessly to establish a democratic nation state involving the efforts and relationships that were built within communities abroad, like those here in Ontario. Through their determination and dedication, Croatians forged a path forward toward a better future, one rooted in the values of freedom, democracy and justice. The Croatian nation's journey from a war-torn land to being welcomed into the European family is a testament to the spirit of its people around the world, including those here in Ontario.

During those difficult years, Canada was very supportive of the Croatian dream of independence, and it is fitting that, through this bill, Ontario is leading the recognition of such a critical day in Croatia's history. May 30 symbolizes many things for Croatians, one of which is the establishment of a free and independent democratic nation-state, which has been celebrated by Croatian communities across the globe since 1990 and will now be recognized in Ontario officially with the passing of Bill 81.

1110

For me, personally, being born in Canada, before Croatia was an independent country, I remember how difficult it was trying to explain to someone what being Croatian meant or even where Croatia was located on a map. The conversation nowadays is not, "Where is Croatia?"; the discussion has shifted to, "Hey, I've been there. It's amazing," or "I want to go there. Can you help me plan my trip?"

Many Canadian Croatians have invested countless hours in organizations across this province promoting the rich history, culture and traditions of our ancestors. This takes many forms, including practising our faith, participating in sports and folklore, music and learning the Croatian language. I have two small children who turn 10 and eight years old next month, and my wife and so many others across Ontario like us are actively involved in many of these programs and find the time to carry on many of the important traditions and community relationships that are formed.

At the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton, one particularly significant milestone to share with you took place back in May 2019, when our organization hosted the then-sitting President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during the first ever state visit of a Croatian president to Canada. That event really hit home for me and how far we have come as a community, and how the active involvement in preserving our rich Croatian heritage and traditions ensures ties between our two nations remain strong. This was also evident through a financial donation made by the Republic of Croatia to the building project at our Hamilton community centre, which we were told was the first time Croatia sent funds for a capital project outside of its borders.

For Croatians who have immigrated to Ontario in search of a better of life, this bill holds immense significance. It recognizes their sacrifices, honours their

heritage and acknowledges their invaluable contributions to their adopted homeland. It serves as a reminder that their struggles, resilience and achievements are not only acknowledged but celebrated.

In Hamilton, Croatia stands as a beacon of unity, fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging for Croatians and friends of the Croatian community in Ontario. In fact, a growing number of our membership and community volunteers are actually of non-Croatian descent, as our efforts towards family, community and belonging resonate with many others in Ontario who have chosen to join our organization. By supporting this bill, we affirm our commitment to the principles of multiculturalism, diversity and the enrichment of our society through the celebration of our collective heritage.

This proposed bill holds great significance for the Croatian community in Ontario. I congratulate and fully support this initiative, as I believe it serves as a testament to the importance of preserving cultural heritage, promoting unity and fostering a sense of belonging. I encourage the committee to support this bill whole-heartedly, embracing the diverse tapestry of our province and cherishing the contributions of all its communities, which, to me, is one of the best parts about being Canadian.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Our next presenter, committee members, is the executive director from the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce. Sir, when you're ready, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: Good morning, honourable Chair and members. The history of my family's Croatian heritage in Ontario dates back to the 1960s and 1970s with the arrival of my father, Mirko Grbešić, to Canada in 1965 at the age of 19 after having decided to flee oppression from Tito's Yugoslavia, and my mother following suit in 1974 at the age of 21, joining thousands of other Croatians who immigrated to the developing mining, steel and pulp towns in northern Ontario, including Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Port Arthur, Schumacher, Timmins, Kapuskasing and Kirkland Lake.

With very little education and no money or tangible assets to their names, my parents settled in Sudbury, where my father worked for more than 30 years in the mines, smelters and refineries of Inco during the day, and, for a good part of those years, at the Frood Hotel and Croatian Centre late into the nights and over the weekends, while my mother primarily cared for her family and her three children.

Our story from northern Ontario is not that dissimilar to the stories of other Croats who came to various parts of our beautiful province, leaving behind the familiarity of home in search of a better life and prosperity, whether it was in the auto industry in Windsor, London, Oakville and Oshawa; the steel industry in Hamilton; manufacturing industries in Toronto, Mississauga, Oakville, Kitchener and St. Catharines; or the real estate and construction industries across Ontario. Our parents sought opportu-

nities and worked hard to support themselves and financially help their families back home; instilled their Croatian language, culture and heritage into their children; and shared their Croatian culture and heritage with fellow Canadians, while spreading word of the struggle of the Croatian people in their motherland with anyone who would listen, contributing to the dream of attaining freedom, democracy and independence for Croatia and its people.

These are the stories of ordinary people, the large majority of whom, just like my parents and the parents of my spouse Iva, came with very little education or a lack of professional credentials, little to no knowledge of the English or French language, and little support outside of what was offered to them by members of their own local Croatian communities. They worked hard. They focused on their families and their faith. They valued and took seriously their democratic rights, including the right to vote and to protest, which were rights not afforded to them in the communist system.

It felt like, when I was younger, while my friends were going to play hockey at the playground, I was joining my parents for another demonstration and protest, trying to bring about change, really ingraining in our children the importance of education, hard work, perseverance and positively contributing to society as a whole, making the best of the opportunity afforded to them, while never forgetting their Croatian roots and the historic struggle of their small but proud Croatian nation.

People of Croatian heritage not only helped build and shape Ontario, but managed to accomplish notable achievements and make significant contributions including, among others:

- in sports, the likes of NHL and Stanley Cup winners Frank and Pete Mahovlich, from Timmins; my cousin Tony Hrkac, from Thunder Bay; Canadian heavyweight boxing champion George Chuvalo, from Toronto; Canadian women's figure skating champion Sandra Bezic, from Toronto; and the 1976 North American Soccer League champions Toronto Metros-Croatia;

- in politics, the likes of Janko Peric, former member of Parliament for Cambridge; Bob Bratina, former member of Parliament for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the former mayor of Hamilton; John Sola, former MPP of Mississauga East; and Berry Vrbancic, the present mayor of Kitchener;

- and finally in business, the likes of the president and CEO of CIBC, Victor Dodig, of Toronto; and entrepreneur Robert Herjavec, of Toronto again, who is known for his time on Shark Tank in the US and Dragons' Den in Canada.

For a smaller ethnic community, we have produced notable contributors and definitely punch above our weight class. As an executive director of the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce, which was founded in 1991 and has emerged as the voice of Croatian Canadian business in Canada, I've spent time with many business executives, professionals, entrepreneurs and business owners of Croatian heritage across Ontario.

It is truly impressive to witness how much can be achieved in one generation when you have the right mix of education, desire, hard work, environment and opportunity. In one generation, the sacrifice of our parents translated in some cases from village life in the old country, to the next generation being in charge of a leading Canadian financial institution; or leaders in their fields on Bay Street; within scientific circles or within political spheres across our province; or, in my case, as a partner of Stikeman Elliott, a globally recognized leader in Canadian law.

The presence of our Croatian community in Ontario is felt through the active engagement at 13 Croatian Catholic churches, several community centres and parks, and through the efforts of many not-for-profit and charitable organizations, including, among others, Croatian folklore groups, soccer teams and language schools. Some of the more popular events promoting Croatian heritage in Ontario include:

- the Canadian Croatian Folklore Festival, hosted by the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation–East;

- the Croatian-North American Soccer Tournament, hosted by the Croatian National Soccer Federation of Canada and USA;

- the Business Excellence Awards evening and the Taste of Croatia Golf Tournament, hosted by the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce;

- not to mention the several thousands of people that pack the Croatian church parks in Norval for the St. Anthony's Feast and in Mississauga for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrations.

In addition, there are countless events, concerts, festivals and tournaments that take place everywhere across various communities, including, notably, the Croatian pavilion at Mississauga's Carassauga Festival, one of the largest multicultural showcases in Ontario and all of Canada.

1120

Croatians around the world fulfilled their dream of a free Croatia, starting with the first post-communist multi-party Parliament being constituted in Croatia on May 30, 1990, followed in May 1991 with the Croatian independence referendum and then its recognition by countries around the world, including Canada, in January 1992.

Following the war of independence that was imposed on Croatia in order to free itself from the clutches of the former Yugoslavia, Croatian communities have actively contributed to the building of a positive and friendly relationship between Canada and Croatia, which has since joined NATO in 2009 and the European Union in 2013 and has entered into various bilateral agreements—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, sir, for your presentation. That concludes the seven minutes you had for your presentation.

We're now going to move on to our next round of questions. I have the official opposition. MPP Armstrong, please.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to thank you for your presentation. I see how passionate Ivan is, and I'll let

you complete your presentation with some of my time. Please carry on.

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: Thank you very much. They ventured into various bilateral agreements and strengthened community relations with Canada, most recently by supporting the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and becoming the third EU member state to ratify CETA.

Taking all this into account and with May 30 marking the celebration of Statehood Day in Croatia, the proclamation of May 30 as Croatian Heritage Day in Ontario would provide an opportunity not only to recognize and celebrate the cultural history and contributions of people of Croatian heritage in Ontario but to serve as a reminder of the opportunity Ontario has provided to members of our community to date and a way to thank our parents and previous generations of people of Croatian heritage for the deep roots that they have planted in the province of Ontario, which will continue to grow and contribute to our shared prosperity.

As a father of four, I expect that Croatian Heritage Day in Ontario will help my children and future generations preserve their Croatian cultural identity while at the same time being proud Canadians, making Ontario richer and stronger.

I thank you in advance for considering and supporting Bill 81, which is of significance to our Croatian people in Ontario and will serve as a symbol of recognition and inspiration for future generations of Canadians of Croatian descent.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you. Back to MPP Armstrong, please.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you so much. I want to thank you all for your presentations and enthusiasm around Bill 81 and what it means to the Croatian community to have this pass.

I do want to pivot to the sports part of it, and I say that because, in London, we have a sports club, the London-St. Thomas Croatia Soccer Club, and they've formed a partnership with the Dinamo Zagreb Academy in Croatia. It was to provide youth an opportunity to earn an opportunity to go to Croatia and learn a different style of soccer, European soccer. In 2022, we had two players in the London-St. Thomas Croatia Soccer Club attend. They were just thrilled with the opportunity that they provided, and the practice in the different styles of soccer really enhanced their game.

I just wondered, through the chamber and the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton, do you also have those partnerships with academies in Croatia?

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: I would be happy to answer the first part and ask my colleague Jason to answer the second part.

Last weekend, there was 1,100 youth that participated in a Croatian soccer tournament in Norval, Ontario, where we have a number of soccer fields along with our community centre. The day was attended by, I would say, over 5,000 attendees, including parents, grandparents and well-wishers. Interestingly enough, the Croatian soccer federation representatives came from Croatia to attend the

tournament and also to hold a camp in Hamilton, which Jason can also speak about.

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Thank you for the question. Absolutely, I'm familiar with the London-St. Thomas initiative with Dinamo Zagreb. It was—I heard the same—a really excellent opportunity for those young athletes to participate and be trained in addition to the styles here in North America. So that was great to hear.

As Ivan was mentioning, the Croatian Football Federation has sent a few of its top coaches, if you will, to spend some time with us. We were really excited to host those coaches at the Hamilton Croatian Sports and Community Centre over what was a really busy week because, as Ivan mentioned, we wrapped up the weekend soccer tournament and then Monday morning, 7:30 a.m., we started with the camp for kids, from Monday through to Friday. Absolutely, those relationships exist. I think that's a really tangible example of how Canada, Ontario and Croatian communities remain closely connected.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Just one last observation: Is your tie—

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Yes, you have to tie it exactly right or else you don't do it well. Yes, this was a gift from my mother when my parents went back home one year, so I wear it with pride.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you. That's my question.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Any further questions? MPP Burch, please. You've got a time check of 2:45.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Great. Thank you, Chair. A quick question for Ivan from the Croatian National Home: We have a Croatian National Home in Welland—I'm from Niagara—that is quite active and in a beautiful location in Niagara-on-the-Lake, which you've probably been to, with a big soccer field. We just had a festival open house there in May.

My question is around something that MPP Skelly raised in her presentation, which was the success of the Croatian community in getting young people involved. You've probably partially answered that talking about sports, but as someone who used to run a multicultural centre and heritage festival, I've noticed that different cultures have different levels of success in involving young people. A lot of them have a lot of trouble keeping going because a lot of their volunteers are getting older. To what do you attribute the success of the Croatian community in getting young people involved in the culture and in your events and keeping that pride in the Croatian community going?

Mr. Ivan Luksic: Thank you very much for the question. I want to thank you as well. I was in the Legislature when you made your remarks in support of Croatian Heritage Day. Thank you for your remarks at second reading.

I would say that the Croatian community has a strong sense of pride and I think that that has transcended everything we do. Whether it's sports at the Croatian Sports and Community Centre of Hamilton, whether it's us with the Croatian National Home in Hamilton, there's

always been a focus on youth. There's always been a focus on ensuring that there is a transition. If you look at the faces that are presenting today in support of Croatian Heritage Day, we're on the younger side of the spectrum and I think that's very important. That's an important lesson that our elders learned in the community, to let the new generation revitalize the community and make it relevant.

I can say, as president of Croatian National Home, we have just always focused on our youth, ensuring that they are welcome members in our folklore program, developing a curriculum, organizing trips, making it fun for them to celebrate their culture. Our senior group, which is our teenaged group of tamburaši, who play the tambura and dance Croatian dances, just returned from a trip in Indianapolis this past weekend, where they performed at a festival with groups from all across—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, sir, for that response. I'm sorry, I'm going to need to cut you off because the time for the official opposition has concluded.

I now will move on to our independent. MPP McMahon, you have 4.5 minutes for your questions.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm going to be really quick. Thank you so much for your presentations, all three groups, and for coming in. Impressive information you regaled us with today and scintillating stories—very, very thankful for that and your taking the time. Your passion for your homeland really shows through in your words. It's an honour and a privilege to listen to you. You know, in Toronto and beyond, our motto is, "Diversity is Our Strength." We would like every day to be a heritage day, so let's figure that out.

Jason, just a quick thing about your travel advice: It's very funny that you're being asked that. I have my best friends in Lumbarda right now, on the beach. I'm very jealous. I wish we could have had the committee there.

We have a short time, it's one minute each, rapid round of fire: What is one thing that you would suggest for all Ontarians to do, when Bill 81 passes, on Croatian Heritage Day next year? Just give me one thing that we can do to celebrate Croatia.

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Sure. Maybe I can start and have my colleagues build off that perhaps. I think, for me, Croatian Heritage Day is a lot about the recognition of the pursuit for those that were searching for a better life. I'm a first-generation Canadian. Both of my parents as well as Ivan's were born in Croatia and came over at different years in the—my mother when she was six and my father a little later in his life. They met in Hamilton.

1130

I think it's just important that the awareness and the recognition of a day dedicated to the heritage of the Croatian people means a lot. There's a lot more behind perhaps the food and the soccer. There's a lot of, I guess, challenges and the pursuit of a life that, as Ivan mentioned, wasn't easy to establish: coming over, not knowing the language and not having the means that we're afforded

today through the education. So I think, for me, it would be the recognition of that pursuit.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

Mr. Ivan Luksic: If I can jump in, I would say come to one of our community centres. Come to a picnic. Come to one of the celebrations within the community to partake in Croatian Heritage Day.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you—in a very short period of time. I still have more time.

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: My focus would be on youth. I think it would be important to bring Croatian Canadian kids in front of the Ontario Legislature, just as we've shown up for the last two years in growing numbers; for them to see the importance of the Croatian flag going up across from the Canadian flag in front of a legislature in a free, democratic Canada; for them to each bring one Croatian friend from school to join them so that they, too, can learn their story, the story of their parents and our Croatian community through the generations that have been here.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Lastly, how do I say "Thank you" in Croatian?

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: Hvala.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Hvala?

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: Yes, that's it.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Hvala. That's an easy one.

MPP Martin?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP McMahon, you have 12 seconds for another question.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I did have a list. And with that, hvala. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you. Now, will the government—do I see a hand going up? MPP Pang, please. Thank you.

Mr. Billy Pang: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for your presentation. As a first-generation immigrant, I think having a heritage month for your own culture is really important. You just mentioned about your next generation. As an immigrant, I think one of the most important missions is to help our next generation to inherit their heritage. So I want to know, whoever can answer that, how to help your next generation to inherit the heritage.

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: I'm going to take that question. I think we would continue what was undertaken by our parents many years ago. They realized back then the importance of safeguarding our culture, safeguarding sport and language. So we would want to continue with the focal programs that we already have for our kids: these soccer programs that we already have for our kids, the Croatian-language school programs that we have for our kids.

On top of that, they've drilled in our heads the importance of education and the importance of working hard and making it further in life than they did and not squandering the opportunity provided to us. At the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce, we put a lot of focus on scholarships. We put a lot of focus on mentoring and

making sure that the next generation don't forget all the sacrifice and the efforts of those that came before them.

Mr. Ivan Luksic: If I could add just a little bit there, I'm speaking as a little bit different than Ivan and Jason. My mother's parents came here in 1928 and 1930. They instilled values in my mother to maintain her Croatian background. Her first language in Canada was Croatian. My father was a Croatian immigrant who came in the 1960s. We were encouraged to be active in the Croatian National Home folklore program, in church, in Croatian school. My children are also active in the community through soccer, folklore, church. They've been to Croatian school as well and they've been to Croatia. So I think where there's a will, there's a way. I think we have to encourage parents to take ownership that the values they were raised with they should instill in their children.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further questions from the government? Mr. Clerk, I don't see any hands going up from the government. They've got 5:02.

I seek consensus of the committee: We're going to proceed to the second round of questions. Yes? Then we're on with the official opposition, please. MPP Andrew.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you so much, gentlemen, all three of you, for a fantastic presentation. I also want to comment on your tie, Ivan. As a former faculty of fashion at TMU—formerly Ryerson—I love it. I love the red and white checkers, and I know that that has such significance to Croatian communities.

I wanted to ask a question to Ivan as well from the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce: Can you tell us a bit about how the Croatian business community that you know for so many years—how they have thrived. Can you give us a sense of what we can do as a province or as communities across Ontario—even our community here in St. Paul's, we have many diverse small business owners who are always looking for new customers of their background, but also they're always open to allies and guests. Tell us the magic of Croatian business owners.

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: It's a very interesting question. I think the work ethic that was imposed from an early age is very important, but I think the other thing that's important for especially first-generation immigrants and their children is that they really have no choice. You really have no choice, so failing is not an option.

We work very hard on ensuring not only that our Croatian businesses work together within Ontario, making a very tight network of relationships, but ensuring that we pair the relationships that we've established over the years outside of the community with members in our community, which is very helpful. And now that the war has passed and Croatia is recognized in the world for our standing in the world, they're tying it to its business opportunities overseas. So it's almost a three-pronged approach: focusing on business within the community, focusing on business within our broader Ontario community and now expanding that to business overseas.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you so very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further questions? You have four minutes and 54 seconds, official opposition. No? Okay, thank you.

Moving now to the independent, you have four minutes—4.5. Thank you.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Don't forget the point five.

Some of you mentioned, especially Ivan from the Croatian chamber of commerce, that all of you have stories. Can you just share a little bit of your parents' struggles when they first arrived in Canada, how proud they must be of you now, and how significant to them this day will be when it passes?

Mr. Ivan Grbešić: Absolutely. I can recount to you my dad's first day off the boat. After fleeing from Yugoslavia into Austria, working in an Austrian labour camp to make enough money to pay for his boat ride across to Canada, he arrived in Montreal. He was taught on the boat "Je ne parle pas français," because he thought he was coming to French-speaking Montreal. When he got off the boat, they came to him at the dock and offered him a job and the gentleman was speaking to him in English. My dad said to him, "Je ne parle pas français." One of his colleagues said to him, "He's speaking to you in English," and my dad said, "I felt this small. So I will make sure that if I ever have children in this beautiful country, they will speak both French and English."

We were all sent to French school from an early age, and that was when my sister's grade 1 teacher said that she will never speak French and she will never prosper in the language. She went on to be the top French student both in elementary school and in high school.

So language is definitely one of the changes. But hard work is what I remember the most. I remember my father leaving to go work in the mines, in the smelter, early in the morning and coming back in the afternoon and basically going across the street to the Froot Hotel and working as a bartender, and in the early evening working at the hall at the Croatian Centre. It was to the point where we had a phone line running from the Croatian Centre to our house, which was across the street, so that my mother didn't have to go sit in the office at the Croatian Centre. She could do that from the comfort of her home.

These were all things, I can tell you, that I, as a partner at a downtown Bay Street law firm, do not face. Do I work as hard? My father thinks I work a little bit harder, but you cannot compare sitting in an office 52 floors up overlooking a beautiful city to going underground and doing what they dealt with.

1140

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

Mr. Ivan Luksic: I remember personally, with respect to my father leaving his beloved homeland, he reported himself as a refugee in the city of Trieste in Italy and subsequently had to be in jail for a couple of weeks until they could verify his identity. I think that's unfathomable today. Eventually, he was sent to a camp, Campo Latina, in the centre middle part of Italy and, eventually, he was accepted to come to Canada. Going from an area of

poverty and political repression—and we can go into a lot of stories. It's not something I can experience because we've had a beautiful life here. But it comes from a father that would work seven days a week, and work Christmas evening in order to get overtime to be able to save for the family.

My mother's story is a little different. She was first-generation in a family that struggled. Her brother had developmental disabilities at a time when those things were hidden, and so they struggled financially. I think they're immensely proud of us—at least I hope so. Both my sister and I are college professors, and they always instilled the values, similar to Ivan, similar to Jason, about the importance of hard work, doing well in school and just doing your best to make society a better place.

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Thank you for the question. Just a quick update on my family's travels over: My mother came when she was six years old with her entire family from the village, if you will. Coming that early in life, she was afforded the opportunity to participate in our school system here in Ontario, so she worked her way up to becoming a human resources personnel manager at Stelco. My father, who came a little later in his life in his mid-twenties—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, Jason. I need to cut you off there. I'm going to go to the government side, and I'm hopeful that one of the members will allow you to continue your answer, please. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Can you please continue your—

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Thank you very much. So my father's story was a little bit different in terms of him coming a little later, and so found a job in the construction industry with his brother, and similar to the story that Ivan just walked us through in terms of working seven days a week—maybe he worked six days a week and he kept a day for church and day for soccer. I know that was important to him. It was a constant reminder of the work ethic and the family values that they both instilled. So that's a little bit about my family's experience. Thanks for the question.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP McMahon. Now, we're with the government side for further questions, please. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Mr. Chair, through you, again, I would like to congratulate the Croatian community for having a day of recognition by our government. I would like to maybe also put some light on the many activities that Croatians have in Mississauga, in the Croatian park at Eglinton and Mississauga Road or the bigger Croatian park and cathedral on Steeles and Winston Churchill. All the Mississauga communities enjoy doing summer activities in one of the parks; it's open for public reservations for events and stuff.

I would like to ask you, as an institutional representation of the Croatian community here in Ontario, how did the Croatians manage to give a good example for all the other communities and be that active, ahead of the line, having these kinds of activities, having community

centres, where every other community's goal is having that?

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Maybe I can start. I think for me, it's twofold. One is having a vision and taking the steps to enact on that plan and on that vision, and the community centre which is now part of one of our parishes that Ivan mentioned here in Ontario at Winston Churchill and Steeles, and Norval Croatia centre is exactly that. These were families in the 1970s who took a chance, who perhaps mortgaged their homes and bought that property, which is today a very important centre for Croatians in Ontario. There are other centres similar to that where I think the vision was important.

The other piece, to me, is the inclusiveness, the continuing willingness to grow and to expand. So when I think back to the Hamilton Croatian sports and community centre's early days, it was likely a soccer-focused, perhaps even gentlemen's-style club, whereas today, my wife and my mother participating in bocce leagues at our community centre. Both of our sons are participating in soccer and folklore. I'm up there a few days a week, so if anyone wants to find me, they know where to.

So I think it's that. It's making sure that community centres across Ontario have that appeal to families and to multi-generations, which allows for the transition to perhaps a younger organization, as the question was asked a little bit earlier.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Just a quick note here: I would like to thank you for your submission and also just send greetings to the community, congratulating the community. Despite the fact that you had many wars and many genocides, and the end of the Second World War and many other historical events which can put you down, your community came close together and created a very nice community here in Canada. Thank you very much and congratulations.

I'll move it to my colleague Laura.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further questions, please, from the government? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Mr. Chair. First, I want to thank all of the contributors today. One thing that I value more than anything these days is time, and for you to come here on a beautiful summer's day when you have choices—I know you're all very professional in presenting yourselves, so you obviously could possibly have other things going on. We truly appreciate you coming here today and providing your testimony, albeit virtually or here.

You touched on so many strong issues for me, and I actually want to correct the record. One of the Ivans referred to the Croatians as being ordinary people, and they are by no means ordinary. I think that the steadfast resilience of the community and those people who have come and built something is just phenomenal. I've see this first-hand, and do you know what? I will have none of that.

So one of the things that you touched upon—I believe it was Jason, if that's appropriate, to call you Jason. You talked about the community and the impact, everything the centre brings to families, multiple generations. You also

talked about inclusiveness for all the community and how it brings out so many different children, and I know this first-hand. My son's best friend is second-generation Croatian, and we're now a part of that kind of circle. You can speak to the different individuals that are now exposed to your culture as a result of this centre.

Mr. Jason Grbavac: Absolutely. Thank you for the question. I think with an organization that carries an ethnic name, there may be a certain—perhaps not a stigma, but an expectation that you have some sort of a familial connection with Croatia to be allowed to participate. We work hard to try to break down those barriers. Participating in our soccer programs, participating in our athletic—I know I can speak, perhaps, for Ivan: Folklore is definitely not a requirement. We are active in our communities, trying to promote the offering of our community centre to others.

One example on the sports side for the community I represent is that the city of Hamilton has a challenge sometimes finding field times for a lot of teams that exist in Hamilton—

Ms. Laura Smith: I should correct the record: Every organization has a challenge finding field time.

Sorry. Continue.

Mr. Jason Grbavac: So we work with the city of Hamilton to ensure that if there's capacity at our park, that field time is made available to other clubs. So we're going to continue that dialogue with municipalities across the province.

Ms. Laura Smith: I don't know if anybody has anything to contribute to that. We've got two Ivans and a Jason, so maybe one of the others wants to speak to this.

Mr. Ivan Luksic: If I could just chime in: I think it's important, in addition to inclusivity, to really take ownership of the community. Far too often, we see organizations where people hang on, and then they haven't fostered that inclusivity in getting new volunteers, people that are willing to make a contribution, because they haven't been heard.

I think throughout the Croatian community in Ontario, whether it's sport, folklore, our different clubs, our parishes, you see a new generation coming through, and that's very important for it to continue—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, sir, for your response. That concludes our time for questions and answers.

Committee members, thank you very much for your participation in the questions that we've had thus far. We have one more presenter after lunch at 1 o'clock, and then we'll proceed into clause-by-clause.

That concludes our business for this morning. The committee is now recessed until 1 p.m. If you could please be in the room at about five to 1, I'd be very grateful. Thank you.

This committee is recessed until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1150 to 1300.

CANADIAN CROATIAN FOLKLORE FEDERATION

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're resuming the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. Our next presenter, scheduled for 1 o'clock, is the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation. I believe that the presenter is presenting to us virtually, Clerk?

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes, please. Can we please bring up that person? Thank you.

Welcome. Can you please, for the record, identify yourself for Hansard? Thank you.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Yes, good afternoon. My name is Jeanne Valetic, and I'm representing the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation and Carassauga's Pavilion Croatia.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. You're going to have seven minutes for your presentation, followed by questions from the members of the official opposition, the representative from the independents and then from the members of the government.

Please start your presentation. Thank you.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Good afternoon. The best way to preserve intangible cultural heritage is to share it with others. Chair and other members of the committee, my name is Jeanne Valetic. On behalf of the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation and Carassauga's Pavilion Croatia, it is my pleasure and privilege to express our support for Croatian Heritage Day in the province of Ontario.

[*Inaudible*] folklore created over centuries. The federation has been celebrating multiculturalism in the great province of Ontario for over 50 years. It recognizes that the power and value of folklore is an integral part of the world's heritage of humanity as defined by UNESCO. [*Inaudible*] foreign languages, as well as an educational component of organizing seminars and training courses in order to protect these authentic and unique traditions, as well as to enrich and connect our communities.

The federation's annual folklore festival, held on the Victoria Day weekend in a different city in Ontario, is a family-friendly cultural festival. The federation's membership of 18 groups from across the province, with hundreds of individual members of all ages, helps preserve and promote Croatian identity, heritage and culture [*inaudible*]. At the same time, we encourage our groups to be active in charitable work, cultural festivals and social events in their own cities.

Growing up in Mississauga, participating in local events, instilled in us by parents and grandparents, was always a priority, which was encouraged and enjoyed: Caravan, Carabram, Carassauga, Christmas parades, city heritage festivals, Canada Day celebrations. Certainly, the participation of our groups at the Canada 150 parade in Toronto was a special and memorable celebration. These local events provide a way to encourage multi-

generations—second, third, even fourth—to explore their ancestry, as well as to understand their civic pride and responsibility. Our groups and organizations throughout Ontario readily and regularly participate in charitable work, from outreach programs to Easter food drives to Christmas carolling at senior centres, amongst many others. In 2024, we will be hosting our 50th jubilee festival on the Victoria Day weekend in May.

The contribution of particular sports, arts, science, business and entertainment figures of Croatian descent in Ontario has been well-documented and continues to grow, and will be, or has been, addressed by my colleagues. Indeed, the history of Croats in Ontario runs deeply and a great deal is known about the settlers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who came to Canada in search of a better life and worked tirelessly in such sectors as natural resources, such as forestry and fishing.

I'd like to mention just one example that's related to Mississauga specifically. This involves the immigrants, mainly male, who came in the 1920s and 1930s to Mississauga, which was [inaudible]. Their wives followed and inherited the difficult work of harvesting cherries on the farms around the brickyard, and some women kept boarding houses. During the late 1930s, Croatian immigrants began to move out of the brickyard's village and into the surrounding farmland. Interestingly, these became small, self-sufficient communities where only Croatian was spoken. World War II saw Croatian women move into semi-skilled labour positions in munitions and aircraft factories and so forth. Years later, more conventional immigration waves began to take place.

As a result, today, organizations in our community, as well as our folklore groups, have been celebrating 40th, 50th anniversaries and more, demonstrating longevity and perseverance and dedication. But all this drive comes from the initial settlers, who instilled a great respect of heritage [inaudible] and contribution to the province of Ontario and the great country of Canada. One of the finest results of this integration is that we proudly call ourselves Canadian Croatians and continue to conscientiously act as a bridge between our home and our homeland.

Festivals, of course, remain the dominant format of performing traditional music and dance culture. Since 1986, the Carassauga Festival in Mississauga has been celebrating multiculturalism in Ontario. Recognized as Canada's largest multicultural festival, Carassauga's vision is to organize a citywide family-friendly festival suitable for all ages to promote understanding, respect and co-operation among all Canadians of different heritage. This solidifies folklore from a contemporary perspective [inaudible].

Pavilion Croatia was a founding member of this festival and, along with only three other pavilions, is the longest running pavilion. [Inaudible] the Croatian community has been given an opportunity to promote [inaudible] cultural expressions. As circumstances change, we have also been able to co-operate with other ethnic groups and have combined traditions with other pavilions.

Part of Carassauga's mandate is to encourage pavilions to participate in the cultural, charitable and social activities of the city of Mississauga, and we have delighted to do so for almost four decades and look forward to many more years. Indeed, Pavilion Croatia's objective is to contribute [inaudible] Ontario.

As mentioned, next year, the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation will be celebrating its 50th festival on the Victoria Day weekend, an event which will draw hundreds of participants, performers and a wide audience. Carassauga—Pavilion Croatia—is held one week later. As both events take place [inaudible] May 30, you can imagine how pleased and proud we would be to formally promote this day at our jubilee festival and at our pavilion.

Maintaining cultural heritage is not without its challenges. It requires dedication, effort and a sense of purpose and direction. As assimilation continues in a rapidly changing world, this opportunity to provide stability becomes even more vital. Institutionalizing Croatian Heritage Day in the province would serve a dual purpose: It would affirm the past and continued efforts of our organizations and groups, as well as encourage future achievements and contributions of generations to come.

We thank the honorable member from Flamborough—Glanbrook, Ms. Skelly, for her exceptional efforts in introducing Bill 81 and all the members who have supported this bill and look forward to hearing of your positive consideration.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for your presentation. This round of questions will start with the official opposition, followed by the independent and then the government: 7.5 minutes for the official opposition, 4.5 for the independent and 7.5 for the members of the government. Any questions before we start? I see none.

I have a hand up. MPP Armstrong, please, followed by MPP Andrew.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Jeanne, for your presentation. I just wanted to ask an inquisitive question about the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation. Can you go into a little bit of detail as to the dress that the folklore dancers wear and some of the special meanings and symbols from their clothing?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: That's a very interesting question. Thank you for that.

The folklore costumes that Croatia has, I believe, are unprecedented in the world, such that every village of every region has its own specific costume which is linked often geographically to—

Failure of sound system.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Can you hear me?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes, we can, thank you. We're having some difficulty or challenges with your bandwidth, but please continue. Thank you.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: That's all right—such that each region or village has its own costume, and it's often linked to the richness of the environment and where it actually is. For example, the costumes in eastern Croatia, which is Slavonia, typically being the breadbasket of Croatia, the

costumes there are very ornate, often containing things like wool thread and huge decorations. The costumes towards the coast, as an example, particularly in some of the fishing villages, because it's a lot hotter—some of those areas are a lot [*inaudible*] therefore those costumes are different. The areas in north Croatia are shorter. They're typically also reflective of the areas which are around Croatia. Wherever you go in that country, there are hundreds and hundreds of different costumes.

1310

The folklore federation's aim is to try to protect that as much as we can and protect the authenticity of those costumes, and to share them. Indeed, it's one of the great things that we have in our pavilion, where we do a display of the costumes that we have—all authentic. I know that it has become a really interesting point for people to come and take photos. What we have in terms of the richness, the treasury of those costumes is unprecedented.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP Armstrong.

We'll turn now, please, to MPP Andrew, when you're ready. Thank you.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you so much, Jeanne, for your presentation. It has been a pleasure and honour to sit here today and listen to how inspiring, how motivating, how hard-working, creative and diligent members of our Croatian community here in Ontario are.

I wanted to ask you, just following up on MPP Armstrong's questions around Croatian fashion designers: I know there are fashion designers like Stephan Caras. I know that there is Cro Canada that also acknowledges and celebrates the fashion of Croatian communities.

I'm wondering if there are any particular Croatian fashion designers that we should be aware of in Ontario. As you may know, fashion is one of those beautiful art forms that currently do not get support from the Ontario Arts Council, because it doesn't qualify as an art, but many designers would say that fashion is absolutely an art form. I'm wondering if you can shine some light on fashion designers that we should be celebrating, and not only their sartorial choices around their clothing, but also accessories, and the stories and the folklore around certain pieces of head adornments: jewels, earrings, pendants, those sorts of things.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: It's a very good question, actually. If we're talking about fashion in terms of folklore costumes, or fashion in terms of modern everyday dress, it's two different components. For fashion in terms of folklore costumes, some of these things are centuries-old and have developed throughout hundreds of years. And yes, the people who had more wealth had more beautiful, more decorated, more ornate costumes.

Typically, we try to, as much as possible, get authentic costumes from Croatia, or at least made in Croatia. Some things are made here, but certainly not the weaving, the stitching, the embroidery, the lovely things that are made out of various beads and jewels. That, we can't do here so much. We do try to promote Croatian artists and [*inaudible*] Croatia as much as we possibly can.

From a more modern, contemporary approach, there are a lot of up-and-coming designers, and thank you for mentioning that, actually. I'd like to point to one of them that's called Etno Butik Mara, for example. What they do is take traditional Croatian elements—so traditional Croatian script, which is called “glagolitic,” for example—and incorporate that into modern outfits, such that you can find handbags and purses and coats, and even wedding dresses, that sort of thing, and they incorporate those elements. That's one thing that has actually expanded rapidly in this last little while. There are a number of talented people on both sides, both the folklore side and the modern, up-to-date fashion sense.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you so much for that, Jeanne. Circling back to the traditional meaning of folklore, can you tell me about the magic of having inter-generational storytelling and cultural heritage pieces between young people, seniors and adults? Can you tell me how vital that is to keep the rich identity of the Croatian community here in Ontario alive, and not only just for Croatian Ontario, but to bring in friends and have allies learn that storytelling and folklore?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: That's a very interesting question. Thank you for that. We've been noticing this particularly as we approach our 50th festival, which is next year. We now have performing groups who not only have the children performing, but their parents are performing and their grandparents who were part of the groups when they first started are performing. It's very often that we see multi-generations performing on the stage together in the same group. That's something that has become more apparent as years go by. It's absolutely vital, as you say, that we keep promoting this element of it, because certain things, as I was mentioning—preserving folklore, as we know, is not without challenges. We are losing little bits. We are losing language. Assimilation is taking place.

It's important that all of the generations come together under such organizations as the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation in order to keep pursuing some of those traditions, passing them on to the children, such that children are performing on stages with their grandchildren, which is certainly something that never happened 50 years ago. It's something that's happening more readily now. They're learning songs. They're learning the customs. They're learning the dances. Each time, I think that their lives are becoming more and more enriched by understanding the vast—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for that response.

We're going to move now to our independent. MPP McMahon, please, you have four minutes—4.5 minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: You keep tricking me. Thank you.

Thanks, Jeanne, for all your great information. My seatmate just covered off the topic of fashion. You painted a beautiful, colourful picture in our heads and our minds, which we hope to see at another festivity in the future when this bill passes.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Absolutely.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I just wanted some questions about the federation. You mentioned there are

18 groups and hundreds of members in Ontario. Can you just elaborate on that for us?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: We have groups that are from Ottawa to several in Hamilton to Windsor to Kitchener to Mississauga to Toronto to Oakville. We've had groups in Sudbury, Welland, St. Catharines, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins throughout the years. Each community is encouraged to create, and they all often did, because when our ancestors—or our parents, actually—first started coming to Canada, they brought with them the traditions that they understood, which were their faith and their language and their culture. It was just natural these people would gather in their gathering places, be it their church or their other institutions, and simply automatically drew people together. It was how they were able to share good things that were happening, and perhaps not such good things that were happening in their daily lives.

Each city or town was then able to produce a folklore group. We have many groups that have celebrated, and they're now celebrating 48th and 50th anniversaries. Indeed, you heard from one of my colleagues, I believe, earlier today, who was talking about the Croatian National Home in Hamilton. It has been there for almost 95 years. It's a very important element in keeping our groups going as much as they can, try to encourage our young people to participate in the groups and sharing our culture with the rest of our fellow Ontarians.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: You mentioned Caravan and Carassauga. Is that the Caravan that used to exist in Toronto with the pavilions? Is that what you're talking about? And is Carassauga similar?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Yes, that's right. Caravan was the first one, and that existed at—I don't even know. I think it might have started in the early 1970s. We did have two pavilions, actually; the Croatian people had two pavilions at Caravan. It hasn't been in existence for a while. Subsequently, Carabram was formed and, of course, Carassauga in 1986. We've been most active in Carassauga and, as I mentioned, we were one of the founding pavilions of that Carassauga festival. We're very proud of that, that we've been able to maintain that for almost 40 years now.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Amazing. I love that festival, and I think maybe with the new Croatian Heritage Day, we should bring it back in Toronto.

You were mentioning you have the jubilee festival, your 50th anniversary of your festival, next year. What kinds of activities and events do you think you will be showcasing now, especially with the passing of Bill 81?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: What a joy it would be to be able to promote the passing of that bill at our 50th festival. Typically, what we have—as I mentioned, it goes from city to city in the province of Ontario. The festival will be a little bit of a different format this year. We ordinarily have a two-day folklore performance, and it may be, actually, coming down to a one-day folklore performance, with an added element of perhaps creating the biggest circle dance that we have in our folklore. It's called a kolo. It's a wheel. It represents a circle.

1320

The goal is really to create the largest kolo in North America and get this [*inaudible*]. So we're looking

forward to that, and of course the banquets and the dances and the social aspects that are associated with that. So it's really, really quite a fantastic event, and to have the ability to celebrate the 50th is something that we're very much looking forward to.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: You'll have to send us an invite. We'd all like to part of that circle.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Absolutely.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I now need to move to the government side for questioning. I have MPP Thanigasalam, please.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thanks to Jeanne for your presentation and for the work that you've been doing.

My question is regarding how the Croatian folklore has been passed down to the next generation, especially in the diaspora, among the Croatian community. Because it's always important to pass down this important heritage and culture to the new generation who are living away from home.

That's my main question, but just two other curious questions, if you can please add: Could you please discuss the importance of the heart-shaped, the colourful decorated biscuits—I think it's called licitarska? What is the significance of that? And also, what kind of roles do Croatian costumes like narodna nošnja play in the culture of Croatia?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Very, very good questions. As you mentioned, the licitar is actually authentic Croatian gingerbread that's protected by UNESCO as one of the intangible cultural heritage items, and it's something that's [*inaudible*] Croatia, which is Zagreb, and you will sometimes see the hearts. They're dipped in red, and then they have designs that are put on them. They're very, very attractive for souvenirs. People often keep them around the house. They're lovely as gifts. So that's a very interesting point that you bring up there.

As far as passing down our traditions to future generations, it's of vital importance to us. And to that end, we constantly encourage young people to come as early as they can. Almost as soon as they can walk, they join our folklore groups. They're encouraged to join, and we take great effort in preserving the folklore and offering an educational component, and by that, we often bring in instructors from Croatia to teach people so that we can better equip future teachers to pass on and to learn more. There are a lot of [*inaudible*]. We also encourage people to take those [*inaudible*] bring together as much information as they possibly can. It is a challenge sometimes, and yet it's also very rewarding. We have very young teachers. We have young children who [*inaudible*] may have mentioned they are no longer connected with the language [*inaudible*] traditions.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you. I heard some parts of the answers, and you were breaking up. But I really appreciate your answer.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further questions from the government, please? I don't see any other questions from the government.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: No further questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I appreciate that very much.

MPP Armstrong, please.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're now on the second round of questioning. You have seven minutes and 25 seconds.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have some curiosity questions. I always find it very fascinating to talk about other cultures because we're so different but yet we're so similar.

The folklore dance group—you had mentioned the youngest can start walking. One of my questions is, how young is the youngest member of your folklore dance group and how mature is the most mature member of your folklore group?

You mentioned the jubilee and the travel from different cities. Do you know which city will be hosting that 50th jubilee festival this year?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Mississauga.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Not London?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: That will be in 2024.

As for the age group, there are some groups that take—they call it kinder dance. They'll take children as young as three and four years of age. They don't dance, but what they do is they actually show—and what they're taught—is sort of typical Croatian children's games. That's the element, because they're too small, really, to actually learn how to do a proper dance. Then they'll start, as they get a little bit older—five, six, seven—actually doing dances. So three and four we have that are starting.

On the other end, it's unlimited. We also have adult dance groups. Basically, so long as you can come, you're more than welcome to be there.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Is there a particular age at the other end of the spectrum that is still dancing?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: No.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: No?

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: No. We have people that are into their seventies, and if nothing else, they can come and sing or they can come and play instruments, if they don't feel like dancing. There's no limit [*inaudible*].

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: You're as young as you think you are.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP Armstrong. Further questions from the opposition? I see none.

I'm now going to move to the independent, please. You have 4.5 minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Just carrying on on that theme, Jeanne, of education and youth, I'm wondering how much outreach and connections the Canadian Croatian Folklore Federation has with the school boards, if you have the capacity to go to them or they can come to you, or how they can get a share of the rich history of Croatia with all schools across Ontario.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: That's actually a very good point, and perhaps it's something that we haven't quite considered, relying sort of on the traditional means of getting the information out to our communities. I know a lot of schools actually do have their heritage days and whatnot. Our members, at least from my own group, have participated in a lot of these school events, where people of different ethnic groups come to share their cultures. But I haven't thought about that, and I will certainly give that due consideration because I think there is something in what you have just suggested that will be very beneficial to us.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I think most of us here would be happy to share your information and your activities with our schools so that they can learn as much as we have today, if not more. Thank you very much for your time. "Hvala" is another word.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Hvala, yes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We'll now move to the government. Further questions? I don't see any further questions, so I will now conclude the period for questions. Thank you very much to our presenter for being on today. We're now going to move to another part of our meeting.

Ms. Jeanne Valetic: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're just transitioning staff here for a moment. Thank you.

Counsel has now joined us, committee members, and the reason for that is that we're moving now to conduct clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 81, An Act to proclaim Croatian Heritage Day.

I'll put the question to each of you: Are there any comments or questions to any section of the bill, and if so, to which section? Now is the time to put your hand up if you have questions. Clerk, please note that I don't see any.

We'll now begin clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. I'll put the questions:

Shall section 1 carry? Any debate on section 1? No. Carried.

Shall section 2 carry? Any debate? Okay. Carried.

Shall section 3 carry? Carried.

Shall the preamble carry? Carried.

Shall the title carry? Carried.

Shall the bill carry? Carried.

Shall I report the bill to the House? Carried.

That concludes our business for this afternoon. The committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on July 11, 2023.

Let me thank everyone for your participation today. The questions were excellent, the presenters were excellent, and I think, speaking for myself, I learned a lot today about the heritage of the Croatian community overall. Thank you so much.

This meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1331.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

Chair / Présidente

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

MPP Laura Mae Lindo (Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre ND)

MPP Jill Andrew (Toronto–St. Paul’s ND)

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal (Brampton East / Brampton-Est PC)

Mr. Joel Harden (Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre ND)

Mr. Kevin Holland (Thunder Bay–Atikokan PC)

MPP Laura Mae Lindo (Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre ND)

Mr. Graham McGregor (Brampton North / Brampton-Nord PC)

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon (Beaches–East York L)

Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)

Mr. Sheref Sabawy (Mississauga–Erin Mills PC)

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Ms. Laura Smith (Thornhill PC)

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam (Scarborough–Rouge Park PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong (London–Fanshawe ND)

Mr. Jeff Burch (Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre ND)

Mr. Lorne Coe (Whitby PC)

Mrs. Robin Martin (Eglinton–Lawrence PC)

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu (Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest PC)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Isaiah Thorning

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Stefania Arlotto, legislative counsel

Ms. Ellen Wankiewicz, research officer,

Research Services