

**WARTIME INTERNMENT CAMPS — ITALIAN COMMUNITY**

*Statement*

**HON PIERRE YANG (North Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary)** [5.42 pm]: President, thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words tonight. On 16 November 2023, I had the opportunity to discuss the Canadian responses concerning wartime internments of Canadians of Italian cultural heritage. On that occasion, I stated that Canadians can stand really tall and proud for addressing historical injustices and I commended and acknowledged the Canadian nation for what it has done.

Today I wish to continue by moving to the United States to look at the government and official responses in that country in relation to Americans of Italian cultural heritage and their wartime internment during World War II. To just rehash a bit, 418 people of Italian cultural heritage were interned in the United States. In addition, some 600 000 Americans of Italian cultural heritage were subjected to discriminatory policies, such as curfews, searches and property seizures.

After some five decades, the United States Congress passed the Wartime Violation of Italian American Civil Liberties Act in 1997, which contained some important statements. I wish to quote some of them. The act states —

(1) The freedom of more than 600,000 Italian-born immigrants in the United States and their families was restricted during World War II by Government measures that branded them “enemy aliens” and included carrying identification cards, travel restrictions, and seizure of personal property.

...

(3) During World War II thousands of Italian American immigrants were arrested, and hundreds were interned in military camps.

...

(6) The impact of the wartime experience was devastating to Italian American communities in the United States, and its effects are still being felt.

On this point I wish to make a few reflections in a few minutes. It continues —

(7) A deliberate policy kept these measures from the public during the war. Even 50 years later much information is still classified, the full story remains unknown to the public, and it has never been acknowledged in any official capacity by the United States Government.

This act also called on the President of the United States, and I quote —

... on behalf of the United States Government, formally acknowledge that these events during World War II represented a fundamental injustice against Italian Americans.

In response to the act, the United States Department of Justice compiled and presented a report in November 2001 that detailed the people who were interned and relocated. Nonetheless, there was no follow up after the report until the attempt in 2017.

As I mentioned earlier, I wish to make a few reflections. In our daily lives we all have our worries. We worry about the mortgage, fuel, rent and cost-of-living issues, as we have heard today in the fantastic motion moved by my good friend Hon Sandra Carr. We worry about our children, their school and their results at school. We have worries at work, but they are not the only things that our communities worry about. Your Asian neighbour may get told off and asked to go back to their own country. Your African friend may get called names. Our First Nations brothers and sisters have to deal with things from time to time as well. But it is not as though they do not have the same cost-of-living issues that everyone else has; in fact, on top of the cost-of-living issues that everyone has in this state, they have extras to deal with.

Social justice and historical injustice is no less an important or significant part of our community. We had a motion yesterday. I will not refer to it in any detail. We were all here. It was attacking a part of our community. It was not on, and I was glad to see that it was resoundingly defeated. We know that the reporting of racial discrimination and vilification incidents is not the same as the number of incidents that happen in the community, but these things happen. We have to delve into the details a little bit more. We cannot just look at the official records. Case in point, Senator Pauline Hanson made a speech in the Senate today. It was reported in the ABC news on this date, 21 March 2024. I quote —

One Nation Senator Pauline Hanson has returned to some of the most controversial comments she has delivered in her parliamentary career in a speech to the Senate this morning.

...

In her 1996 speech when she was elected as the member for the Queensland seat of Oxley, Senator Hanson said she believed Australia was “in danger of being swamped by Asians”.

Those comments prompted a strong response, and some MP's left the chamber during her address. Today, she returned to the comments and the reaction they prompted.

Senator Hanson said —

“I also warned we were in danger of being swamped by immigration from Asia ...

“I was called racist, of course, by the major parties and big media who are in lockstep of a ‘big Australia’.

“But today 7 out of the top 10 source countries for immigration to Australia are in Asia...

“Was I right? Well, you'd never admit it, but yes I am.”

That motion was defeated 38 votes to three, and the three supporters were of course two One Nation senators plus United Australia Party senator, Ralph Babet.

I think Senator Hanson is a little bit more nuanced these days. If we look at her words in 1996, they were a little bit more direct. I will use the remaining time I have today to refer to her first speech in 1996. She said—

I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians. Between 1984 and 1995, 40 per cent of all migrants coming into this country were of Asian origin. They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate. Of course, I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country. A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united. The world is full of failed and tragic examples, ranging from Ireland to Bosnia to Africa and, closer to home, Papua New Guinea. America and Great Britain are currently paying the price.

I condemn the words of Senator Hanson from 1996 and also from today. I conclude my remarks.