

# Atwin gets first shot to make case for her backbench bill

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**OTTAWA** A bill being led by Fredericton **MP Jenica Atwin** that originated from a call by an 11-year-old Indigenous girl who was told that her handmade ribbon skirt was inappropriate to wear to school appears to have the support of all sides of the **House of Commons**.

Atwin has had her first chance to make the case for her backbench proposal to establish National Ribbon Skirt Day.

"What I am seeking to impart on my colleagues today is the fundamental importance of celebrating Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people, the importance of championing their resiliency, their diversity and their power on their terms," Atwin said, standing in the **House of Commons** on Tuesday evening. "That is the spirit behind ribbon skirts.

"They are a strong symbol. They are beautiful, and they carry teachings and stories. They also represent cultural and spiritual protection, like armour."

Atwin said in her own riding of Fredericton there's Wolastoq Wednesdays, where Indigenous women and girls wear ribbon skirts "with pride and reclaim spaces with meaningful cultural representation."

"This bill would give us an opportunity to celebrate and stand with Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited peoples to honour them in such a positive way and truly walk in the path of reconciliation," she said.

Atwin is sponsoring the bill that has already passed in the **Senate**.

Bill S-219 would establish Jan. 4 of every year as National Ribbon Skirt Day, a centuries-old spiritual symbol of womanhood, identity, adaptation and survival and is a way for women to honour themselves and their culture, according to the bill's text.

It notes that one of the recommendations in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls "upon all governments to acknowledge, recognize, and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their cultures and languages as inherent rights."

It stems from the activism of Isabella Kulak, an 11-year-old from Cote First Nation in Saskatchewan, who was told two years ago by an educator that her handmade ribbon skirt was inappropriate to wear for her school's "formal day."

The incident sparked a massive social media movement and eventually a **Senate** bill by Manitoba Sen. **Mary Jane McCallum**.

Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** has since called Isabella courageous for wearing her skirt to school to celebrate her culture.

It appears to have bipartisan support. "We look forward to this bill going forward," Conservative **MP Cathay Wagantall** said during debate, whose riding is home to Cote First Nation.

**Bloc Quebecois MP Marilène Gill** wore a ribbon skirt gifted to her from a Quebec First Nation.

The only pushback came from Nunavut **NDP MP Lori Idlout** who stood to say it excludes Inuit cultural practices, while calling for amendments to make sure all Indigenous cultural practices are reflected in this bill.

"New Democrats support the bill and will be suggesting some amendments," Idlout said.

Debate at second reading will continue at a later date.

Atwin said that the **NDP** concerns could be considered at the committee stage of the bill.

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