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## Bittle apologizes for 'unfounded and inappropriate' tweet

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While acknowledging comments he posted on Twitter last week implying University of Ottawa law professor Michael Geist was racist went too far, St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle said he was goaded by online bullying.

"I got bullied by a bully and got baited into a tweet," Bittle said.

Geist denied being a bully, adding none of his recent tweets were directed at Bittle. A heated discussion between them was related to a recent controversy about an anti-racism project run by the Community Media Advocacy Centre (CMAC) that had been funded by the federal government.

Housing, Diversity and Inclusion Minister Ahmed Hussen pulled funding for the program after the centre's senior consultant, Laith Marouf, made antisemitic statements on social media. But Geist called on Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez to comment on the controversy, as well.

Bittle weighed in on the discussion, accusing Geist of misleading people be-

cause Rodriguez is not the minister responsible for the program.

"Blinded by hate for Pablo? Is it because the minister responsible looks like this?" Bittle wrote in a tweet that included a photo of Hussen.

Bittle later deleted the tweet and replaced it with an apology, saying the comments were made in a moment of anger, and the implication about Geist "was unfounded and inappropriate."

"I hold myself to a higher standard for the office that I hold, and I apologize to Professor Geist," he wrote.

In an interview Tuesday, Bittle said his tweet was the result of growing frustration after previous interactions with Geist.

"There was frustration, there was anger for the suggestion that my friend was antisemitic, even though it's not his file. It's all of that wrapped into it. But I did go too far."

It's not the first time Bittle has become involved in online feuds, including with Geist.

Chris Bittle Michael Geist.

"There's no love lost between the two of us," Bittle said. "I don't deal well with bullies, having dealt with that in my past. I'm someone who stands up and speaks their mind and I'm usually most aggressive on Twitter when it comes to issues of racism and misogyny."

Geist responded to Bittle's comments about bullying in an email, Tuesday, saying he "did not direct any tweets at Bittle."

He said he never mentioned him, he doesn't follow him on Twitter "and have muted his tweets for months."

"It was only after other Twitter users pointed to the tweet that I saw it," Geist said. "To claim he was baited or bullied by me is patently false."

Geist said his call for Rodriguez to discuss the CMAC controversy has since been echoed by Liberal MP Anthony Housefather from the Mount Royal riding, but Bittle "hasn't attacked him for saying so."

He said the Jewish community has also

begun to express concern about the silence, and Bittle "may be the only Liberal MP to defend saying nothing on this issue."

"Bittle has been actively involved in the online hate issue at the heritage committee. Given this incident, I believe it raises the question as to whether he has disqualified himself from playing a lead role on that legislation," Geist added.

Bittle said the government "fundamentally did the right thing" in its handling of the CMAC program controversy.

"I think we need to look into how that happened, and I take Minister Hussen at his word, that he wants to get to the bottom of it," he said. "Ahmed is someone who has been subjected to discrimination in his past, as a Somalia refugee in Canada, and has risen above it. He is someone who understands what people go through and what the consequences of hate are. He's someone who is qualified to look into it and make sure that this type of thing doesn't happen again."

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