

Brief to House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages

Re. Linguistic Duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017

November 29, 2012

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Good Morning Mr. Chair and respected committee members.

Thank you for inviting Canadian Parents for French to attend these hearings on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017. I am honored to have been provided this opportunity to speak to you.

I would like to start with the following quotation from Official Languages Commissioner Fraser:

“... the *Official Languages Act* is now into its fifth decade, it is still a challenge for someone to recognize linguistic duality as a Canadian value and as a key element in Canada’s identity. For that understanding to be broadened, it is important that the government do a better job of stressing the importance of Canada’s official languages, increasing the opportunities for second-language learning and strengthening the presence of both languages...”

Je crois que ces mots illustrent la raison pour laquelle il existe un besoin réel et urgent de profiter des célébrations du 150^e anniversaire de la Confédération canadienne pour souligner la valeur des langues officielles à tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes. En tant que réseau pancanadien de parents bénévoles possédant des décennies d’expérience dans l’organisation d’événements socioculturels célébrant notre dualité linguistique, c’est avec plaisir que CPF vous parle aujourd’hui des pratiques exemplaires qui lui sont siennes. Canadian Parents for French souhaite qu’elles puissent contribuer à la planification des célébrations du 150^e anniversaire de la Confédération canadienne.

1. Canadian Parents For French and pan-Canadian Events supporting linguistic duality

CPF organise des centaines d’activités chaque année dans les écoles et les collectivités de partout au Canada. Par souci de concision, je n’en nommerai que quelques-unes menées par notre bureau national ou par les bureaux de CPF, en omettant les nombreuses, mais non moins importantes menées par les parents bénévoles, les arrondissements scolaires et les écoles.

- Our *Concours d’art oratoire* is a decades-old competition in which FSL students from across the country write and deliver a speech in French. Approximately 80,000 children take part in Concours, from the individual classroom to the national finals here in Ottawa. Many Francophones also compete in Concours, in the French First Language category of the competition.
- *Allons en France* is another CPF pan-Canadian competition. Organized in partnership with the Embassy of France, this writing competition requires students to incorporate words from a list of ten preselected words. The contest originally required students to write a 300-word text in French on a specific theme. This year, we have modernized the competition by replacing the 300-word text with four Tweets which must incorporate at least two words from the list.

- CPF –BC & YK, later joined by CPF Alberta, ran two projects called *Bilingualism Rocks* and *Bilingualism Rocks Two*. For two years, francophone performers from Quebec, Yukon and Alberta toured two provinces and one territory, visiting dozens of communities, and playing to thousands of children. The aim of *Bilingualism Rocks* was to bring young Canadians together in cultural celebration, establishing and extending relationships between young Francophones and Francophiles.

As an aside, CPF national in partnership with a number of CPF branches and Canadian Youth for French, has applied for funding for a project called *O Canada*, which is *Bilingualism Rocks* writ large. If approved, *O Canada* will engage students in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario by focussing on the historical, cultural and artistic legitimacy of the Francophone presence throughout Canada and its impact on Francophiles.

Two more projects I wish to bring to your attention come from our Nova Scotia branch:

- *Speak for Yourself/Parle, c'est l'idéal* is a bilingual play developed by the Resource Centre for Artists, Newfoundland, and Canadian Parents for French. The play has a strong interactive component which invites audience members, to come on the stage and represent themselves. In other words, they become *spect-actors*, rather than merely spectators.
- The *Action Media* project made junior high students aware of Francophone culture and the value of linguistic duality. Students researched a Francophone musician, genre of French music or Francophone historical figure in Nova Scotia. With the aid of Radio-Halifax-Métro, more than one hundred students prepared scripts and recorded three-minute audio presentations which were broadcast throughout March and April.

Ce que démontrent toutes ces activités est un profond désir partout au pays de voir la langue française faire partie du contenu, même dans les régions, et peut-être particulièrement dans ces régions, où le français ne fait pas partie de la réalité quotidienne. C'est le fait de satisfaire à cette demande qui a fait de CPF un des plus importants organismes de promotion d'artistes francophones et bilingues.

2. CPF's ideas on 150th Anniversary Celebration of Canada's Confederation

Dans son rapport intitulé *Le 150^e anniversaire du Canada en 2017*, le Comité permanent du patrimoine canadien de la Chambre des communes a divisé ses recommandations en quatre catégories. Nous donnerons notre opinion sur trois d'entre elles, soit la planification, l'héritage et la participation.

Planification

Dans le cadre de l'organisation de ses activités, CPF a été en mesure d'adapter certaines pratiques qui nous ont aidés à élaborer nos programmes. Du fait que nous sommes l'un des plus importants organismes de promotion d'artistes francophones et bilingues, notre réussite s'explique par les cinq points énumérés ci-dessous.

1. Nous reconnaissons qu'une demande existe et qu'elle doit être satisfaite.
2. Nous adaptons le contenu à la capacité linguistique des auditoires. Des artistes, dans le cadre du programme *Bilingualism Rocks*, par exemple, ont pu se produire devant des auditoires de jeunes francophones. Ils se sont aussi produits devant des étudiants anglophones possédant peu ou pas de connaissances en français et souvent, devant des auditoires mixtes.
3. Nous jumelons des éléments éducatifs avec des activités, comme des ateliers, des séances d'études ou des séances d'information.

4. Nous répétons nos activités. Peut-être s'agit-il d'une activité de nos auditoires scolaires; après tout, le Carnaval de Prince George est toujours nouveau et palpitant pour les cohortes successives d'étudiants de troisième année.
5. Nous recourons aux services d'artistes bilingues. J'ai déjà mentionné que nous sommes devenus un important organisme de promotion d'artistes francophones et bilingues. Je tiens à souligner qu'un grand nombre des artistes qui se produisent lors de nos activités, qu'ils soient chanteurs, acteurs, clowns ou fées des ballons, parlent le français comme langue seconde ou autre. Ainsi, nos activités sont des modèles de bilinguisme pour les auditoires de partout au pays.

Par conséquent, nous proposons que le gouvernement fédéral, lors de la planification des célébrations du 150^e anniversaire de la Confédération canadienne, tienne compte des recommandations ci-dessous.

- *Adapter les programmes de langue française en fonction des particularités régionales.*

La réussite des programmes comme *Bilingualism Rocks* et *Speak for yourself* repose sur la création d'une activité pouvant s'adapter aux différentes collectivités, en dépit de la différence des profils linguistiques. Il s'agit de rendre ces activités accessibles à divers auditoires en créant un équilibre linguistique adaptable. Ces deux programmes ont été des réussites dans toutes les collectivités visitées, la preuve en étant que la demande a été renouvelée pour l'année suivante.

- *Établir la fondation du 150^e anniversaire en organisant des activités avant 2017.*

Un grand nombre des activités mentionnées par M^{me} Nicole Bourget, SMA à Patrimoine canadien, lors de son témoignage devant le Comité, ont une réelle importance pour de nombreux Canadiens et Canadiennes partout au pays. Par exemple, notre bureau de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard travaille déjà à des façons d'intégrer l'anniversaire de la Conférence de Charlottetown à ses programmes à venir.

Bien que ce travail soit encore à l'étape de l'élaboration, notre bureau de l'Î.-P.-É. travaille à ce qui suit :

1. Un concours de compositions sur la façon dont les langues officielles ont façonné notre pays.
2. Un concours de vidéos pancanadien dans le cadre duquel des étudiants personnifieront un des vingt-cinq délégués à la Conférence de Charlottetown. Des outils Web comme YouTube pourraient être utilisés pour illustrer et évaluer ces vidéos, les cinq principaux gagnants obtenant peut-être un voyage à l'Î.-P.-É. pour faire des présentations dans les écoles.
3. Création d'un partenariat avec Le français pour l'avenir (FFF) dans le cadre du programme des Ambassadeurs, la moitié des délégués personnifiant les délégués à la conférence de 1864 et l'autre moitié à celle de la confédération d'aujourd'hui : Si nous n'étions pas un pays, qu'est-ce que chaque province apporterait ou demanderait.
4. Lier le Concours d'art oratoire provincial aux activités d'anniversaire de 2014.
5. Tenir le Concours d'art oratoire national à l'Î.-P.-É. la même année avec des présentations thématiques.

En tirant parti de ces autres activités de la même façon, le gouvernement fédéral peut susciter une attente positive des célébrations du 150^e anniversaire de la Confédération canadienne.

Legacies

The legacy surrounding the 150th anniversary celebration should be a great one. In every testimony thus far, witnesses have stressed how we should remember these events as something special. In her

presentation to the committee, FCFA President, Marie France Kenney, stated how she still has her passport from the centennial celebration of Confederation. In a recent episode of Dragons' Den all the 'dragons' began singing Canada's Centennial celebration song.

These examples illustrate the emotional potency of celebrations. Though we do not flaunt our pride, Canadians care about our identity. And much like Expo 67 or more recently the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, the 150th anniversary of Confederation – to which we would integrate the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference – offers an opportunity for reinforcing our common national identity. In addition, this sesquicentennial is a wonderful way for two entire generations of Canadians to bridge the centennial and our bicentennial in 2067

The Centennial's legacy was primarily a bricks and mortar legacy. Think of all the museums, theatres municipal parks and other facilities across Canada dating from that time. For 2017, Canadian Parents for French thinks our legacy should be a stronger sense of linguistic duality though a greater recognition of individual official-languages bilingualism as a nation-building characteristic.

We would like to see the legacy of the 150th celebration of Canada's Confederation to consist of:

- *An official bilingual National Anthem, one which would be adopted and sung at all federal government and National events; and*
- *A changing of the current model of optional access to French second language education to a substantive right, which would allow all children in Canada the option to learn French in the program of their choice.*

Participation

Linguistic duality needs to an additive element to the 150th celebrations, which should be for all: young or old, new immigrants, Canadian citizens, French-, English-, or other language- speaking, should be part of these celebrations.

The federal government can promote linguistic duality in a number of simple ways:

- *All federally funded activities should integrate official languages in significant and public ways.*

We would encourage the federal government to assume that in all parts of Canada English and French are both spoken. The assumption that not enough people speak French in a community diminishes the ability of all Canadians to live both their official languages – whether it was what they learned in core French, through reading cereal boxes, as an adult learner or a French immersion student or graduate. French is alive in our communities – it needs an opportunity to show itself.

While not all communities across Canada have an even distribution of French and English speakers, we should still incorporate both languages to some degree. The impact of inclusion is twofold: the most obvious way is that it displays our linguistic duality, but it also illustrates respect to the minority language speakers in that despite their numbers they are still an important part of Canada's linguistic landscape.

- *Federally funded events should reach the remote parts of Canada.*

Through all of Canadian Parents for French's travelling shows we have learned one important lesson. There is an appetite for French culture throughout Canada. Many of the remote areas visited by *Bilingualism Rocks* were very receptive to French and French culture. There should be a strong policy of

not assuming that because an area is English speaking there won't be any appreciation for French programming.

We would like to see federally funded events either create a platform which can be accessed by all Canadians, or the creation of a touring group which would visit the remote areas of Canada to promote the celebration and Canada's linguistic duality.

- *Use new media and technologies to engage audiences.*

The new iteration of *Allons en France*, and *Action Media* from its inception, both recognize new media as pervasive social integrators, especially for young.

In the case of *Action Media*, exposing youth to new technologies resulted in a high participation rate, and strong youth engagement.

- *Model bilingual behaviour.*

More and more Canadians claim both official languages as a first language – still hoping for a linguistic category of officially bilingual, and more and more Canadians study, work and live in their second official language. Let's recognize and celebrate that fact. In the case of large scale events, why not have MCs work in their second language instead of the current practice of Francophones speaking French and Anglophones speaking English. Why not have French, English and bilingual versions of promotional messages – say television spots. People from both linguistic communities are usually intensely proud of their second-language accomplishments – we should be encouraging them at every turn by appropriate modelling.

These small examples illustrate the importance of looking beyond traditional means of communications in order to engage with new generations of youth.

3. General Conclusion

A strong national identity is something to celebrate – and a key part of who we are as Canadians is officially bilingual and as such Canadian Parents for French believe that linguistic duality during the celebrations in 2017 should be strongly represented. With the integration of new technologies to attract younger generations, new linguistic legacies can be created. The lessons we have learned to be successful proponents of linguistic duality through our events, we believe, are universal. Our vision of these celebrations is that both French and English speakers can access all the events funded by the Canadian government without difficulty.

Canada's 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation is about our country and what makes it proud and unique. French is part of all Canadians' heritage (somewhat forgotten and sometimes on purpose) and we need to remind people of that. French immersion students often talk about learning their country's history through another set of eyes and it helps them understand more, explains their space and time. We could not be Canadians if we did not embrace our official languages – maybe it's a gift we need to give back - showcasing official languages in events all across and over Canada, a gift to pay forward - creating opportunities for our young to be that next prime minister, athlete, or trailblazer - and a gift to open up and celebrate over that year - by recognizing bilingual graduates and singing a bilingual national anthem.

Thank you.