

December 5, 2016

To Marianne Wilkinson

Dear Mrs Wilkinson,

Last week (November 26), I read a revealing article in *Le Droit* about the demand to designate Ottawa, the capital of Canada, as an officially bilingual city. The article identified the councillors who were clearly in favour of Ottawa being officially bilingual (five members). It also identified those who are of the "yes/no" group (yes when asked privately, and "maybe yes, maybe no, it depends" when asked publicly). Then there's the last group comprised of those councillors who are adamantly against the proposal. Mayor Watson is well known for his inflexible opposition to the proposal, as you are also. I was not surprised to see your name as one being against Ottawa being officially bilingual. What astounded me though is the reason you used to justify your opposition. You are against the proposal because French is only one language among many other languages spoken in your ward and since French is only one language among many others, in all fairness, there's no reason to favour French. I find it sad and very weak as an argument to put the blame on your constituents who speak other languages. It's your right to be against the proposal, but please, have the courage to admit the real reason which motivates your opposition which is simply that you are against French. Don't blame it on the people of other cultures and languages. If your reasoning is correct, English then, being also one language among others spoken in your ward, is therefore no more, no less important. But you know very well, only too well I'm sure, what

the Canadian reality is and what the Canadian history is. English and French are of a different status in Canada. Your argument shows a severe lack of knowledge of Canada's history or, if not, then you are very selective in your perception of it. According to our history, culture and constitution, Canada has only two official languages, English and French, not other languages, as important as they may be. Don't you find it ironic and incoherent to be in a country where English and French are the two official languages and yet, its capital is not?

A final note : People of other cultures and languages are not the ones objecting to French because, as I often notice, they speak two, three or more languages and they very rarely say 'I'm sorry, I don't speak French, because they do speak to me in French.'

I have always supported the reasonable approach to bilingual services in Ottawa (including Kanata) as a way in providing them when needed without higher costs. I have a good rapport with francophone residents in my ward and the two francophone schools and am not against French people – many of which are personal friends. You have taken a comment on other languages in my ward as being my total view which is not the case. It was simply that the fact is that there are 2x the number of Chinese speaking residents in Kanata North than francophones. When needed I do provide service in French and have supported City services in that language at City facilities in Kanata North.

Marianne

December 7, 2016

Dear Mrs Wilkinson,

I thank you very much for your prompt reply to my e-mail. I do not wish to start a debate on the subject, so what follows will be my last comments. I have to respond to the reasons you invoke to justify your opposition, because your comments show precisely and

most clearly why it is important to designate Ottawa, the capital of Canada, as an officially bilingual city. The purpose of my first e-mail was not to complain about the lack of services in French that are offered by the city of Ottawa. But since you bring the subject of services, I have to react.

1. The first sentence of your reply says it all. You « always supported the reasonable approach to bilingual services in Ottawa... as a way in providing them when needed without higher costs. »

Precisely ! You see the actual policy as a favour, as privileges given generously to the French community to accommodate its needs providing that it doesn't cost too much... That's exactly why things need to change. The actual policy offers « privileges » that depend on the good will of the people. These given privileges can be taken away or diminished at the will of whoever is in a position of authority at City Hall and does not agree with the policy, and I'm sure you know that it is a possible reality. There are privileges and there are rights ! That's the big difference. As things are now, the French community is at the mercy of the good will of the people providing it doesn't cost too much. A city officially bilingual would protect the policy and it would not add new services nor add new costs. We are sensible enough to recognise the limit of our demands, but we would like to be recognize as equals, as the Canadian constitution affirms it. As it stands now, whether you admit it or not, we are second class citizens as far as the actual linguistic policy is concerned. The capital of Canada should be an example for the whole country... and to the world, for that matter (ask Mr Watson for the e-mail I sent him on October 5, 2016, you'll see why).

2. You say that there are 2 times the numbers of Chinese speaking residents than francophone residents in Kanata North. It

should not matter whether there are 2, 3 or more Chinese speaking people in the city or any other language spoken for that matter. Since when does the number matter when rights are concerned? The Canadian Constitution protects English AND French as Canada's official languages. Moreover, that you have many French speaking friends, as I have many English speaking friends, or that you have a good rapport with the francophone residents, is irrelevant to the matter. It's only normal for a councillor to have the best of rapport possible with all its residents.

3. The cost. Like a coin, it has two sides. Yes, there's a price for services, all services, and they do cost the tax payers, I know very well when I receive my tax bill, **BUT** a city officially bilingual would be an economic asset, a proven fact that is never mentioned, purposely or not, when debating the question. Why do you think Ontario asked to be a member of the OIF (l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie) and has been accepted as recently as last November? It's certainly not just for the love of French, but rather because now, being a member of the OIF, Ontario sees the economic benefits and its doors opening to other countries for partnership and deals. There's more. For your information, because you might not know this, Ottawa could also be a member the AIMF (l'Association internationale des Maires francophones) a group of more than 200 cities from 48 countries, cities such as LaFayette (USA), Alexandria, Cairo and Port-Saïd (Egypt), Brussels, Geneva, Lausanne, Pnom Penh, Hanoi (Vietnam), cities from New-Brunswick, Quebec and Manitoba... and so many others, and yet, Ottawa, the capital of Canada where French and English are constitutionally the two official languages, is absent. All missed opportunities for Ottawa.

Sad isn't it, because the economic benefits largely outweigh the cost of the actual policy.

So, to conclude, I try to find logical and rational reasons that could explain the opposition that too many councillors have regarding the demand to declare Ottawa officially bilingual, and I cannot honestly find one reason. I suspect though that fear is the underlying motive. Fear of a backlash from some groups maybe ? Or fear of change or fear of a French domination ? Or fear of giving too much rights, of losing jobs ?...

If you read me through, I thank you sincerely.

I do wish you a Merry Christmas and may the New Year 2017 be one of prosperity and peace for you and your family.

Sincerely,

Rhéal Sabourin