

THE DREAM THAT I SHARE

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I am the proud descendant of immigrants from Normandy. More precisely, I belong to the thirteenth generation of Gilles Lauzon who arrived in this country in 1656. My ancestor had been trained as a chaudronnier and was recruited by Maisonneuve, the founder of Montreal, known as Mont Royal at the time.

I was born in Ottawa and I have been a resident of the National Capital for most of my life. Like many residents of this proud city, I love Ottawa, its buildings, its parks, and its people. I am now in the early stage of my 75th year and I am still involved as a volunteer, fully committed to improving the lives of my concitoyens as I have been throughout my life.

We will be celebrating in just a few months the 150th anniversary of the Confederation. We have so many reasons to celebrate. Canada remains one of the safest countries in the world; our quality of life is unequalled. We value inclusiveness and we are known throughout the world as a gentle, humble, generous and caring people to name but a few of our best attributes.

Great events will mark our celebrations. For the vast majority of Canadians, it will be an occasion to rejoice and to celebrate. Unfortunately, for some of us it will be marred by a certain amount of sadness for a lack of sensitivity to a dream that many of us share.

The dream of designating this great capital of ours officially bilingual and having it entrenched in provincial legislation is shared by a majority of residents of Ottawa, as a recent poll indicated. And a great number of renowned Canadians as well as

regional, provincial and national organizations have spoken in favour of such a measure. I cannot think of a more appropriate time to implement this initiative.

We know that it is within the mandate of the Ottawa City Council to take the initiative and respond to this proposal. To date, the mayor of Ottawa has repeatedly expressed his opposition to designating his city officially bilingual.

This refusal on his part is hard to understand considering that the municipality already has in place a substantial policy on bilingualism and there are no substantial changes to be made to the content of the present policy and, as far as we understand it, there are no substantial costs associated with the adoption of the official bilingual designation.

The Mayor's position is difficult to understand on the part of a bilingual individual who has over the years repeatedly shown an in-depth understanding of the needs and the aspirations of French speaking Ottawa residents.

The idea of designating Ottawa officially bilingual is rooted in our history. It was first proposed almost half a century ago. Lester B. Pearson shared this dream. It was one of the official recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism and over the years, a succession of Commissioners of Official Languages, federal parliamentary committees as well as many prominent Canadians have advocated that Ottawa be designated officially bilingual.

Some readers might wonder why it is necessary to officially designate Ottawa bilingual when the city has had in place for many years an extensive bilingual policy.

It is first and foremost for the symbolic value that it represents

that Ottawa must adopt an official bilingual policy and to have it entrenched in provincial legislation. This will not only confer legitimacy to the policy but it would also show our mutual respect towards our two founding nations.

To phrase it differently, adopting this important legislation will be an additional source of pride for all Canadians and strengthen our sense of belonging as well as contribute to a rapprochement between our two solitudes.

Unlike any other city of our proud country, the national capital holds a special place in the minds of Canadians and in this vein, it should be an inspiring source of pride for all Canadians much like our other symbols of our Canadianness.

Further, it is imperative that Ottawa City Council takes action on this matter because we know from past experience that as governments change, so do policies. To avoid the risk of the present bilingual policy being diluted, ignored or set aside by a new municipal council less sensitive to this issue, action is required now. Designating Ottawa officially bilingual and having the Ontario Legislature update the Act of the City of Ottawa put French on an equal status with English would insure the sustainability of the policy.

Over the years, many levels of Canadian governments have demonstrated on numerous occasions their ability to adapt to changing needs of the time by making the necessary accommodations. This unique capacity for accommodation is unlike any other country in the world. It is my hope that we will once again stand united and act in our collective interest by making this dream a reality.

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