



Like



Tweet



Share

[Click here to view this newsletter in your browser](#)



# Network News

The news that matters to  
English-speaking Quebecers



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

From QCGN President Eva Ludvig



It is astonishing to see how so much can change so fast, whether as citizens of the world, as Canadians and as English-speaking Quebecers

We expected turbulence in 2025, and we got it – and likely, quite a bit more than we had bargained for before Groundhog Day. The "Fasten Seat Belt" sign is on, and it is unlikely to be turned off any time soon!

But, while we are consumed by the lunacy of an unprovoked trade war with the United States, we must press on. There are some other, very large items on our QCGN plate this year.

First, it's our 30th birthday, and we'll be celebrating! But before we get there, there are the matters of two leadership conventions (both federal and Quebec Liberals), a federal election likely sooner than expected, new provincial legislation focused on identity and integration issues that arrived last Thursday, a provincial budget that promises to be an austerity budget in everything but name (significant health-care and education cuts are already being felt), municipal elections in the fall, and some significant activity in the courts, at various levels. We were in the Quebec Court of Appeal last week after the Legault government appealed a ruling favourable to us and others on Bill 40, the law to abolish school boards.

Also coming at us are expected discussions about whether there should be a separate constitution for Quebec (made more likely by last week's introduction of Bill 84, vague legislation requiring immigrants to embrace Quebec culture), further measures to establish the use of languages other than French in every provincial

department – something that didn't go over well when the government tried that with health and social services last year – and issues with the continuing implementation of the new federal Official Languages Act.

So, it's clear we don't have time to sit around and shiver in the cold!

---

## Thanks to Commissioner Théberge

However, there is some good news I am pleased to report that our retiring Commission for Official Languages, **Raymond Théberge**, has agreed to stay on for an additional six months beyond the scheduled expiry of his seven-year term last week. His decision means we won't be without a commissioner while Parliament isn't sitting because of prorogation and the expected election to follow. I want to thank him for his continuing commitment to serve official-language minority communities on so many levels.

I also look forward to reminding federal political parties during the election that in considering a replacement for M. Théberge, tradition holds that the next commissioner would be a bilingual English-speaker.



---

## Another day, another identity law

By: Me. Gerry Sklavounos



Last week's introduction of a much-ballyhooed bill to establish a Quebec model for the integration of immigrants is for the moment a quite vague piece of work that sets the platitudes, but not the specifics, about the need for what the government calls a more coherent approach to ensuring newcomers to Quebec embrace French, the Quebec culture and understand that the "Quebec nation" does not operate under a multicultural model à la the rest of Canada. Immigration and French-language Minister **Jean-François Roberge** has characterized Canadian multiculturalism as "vicious" in the eyes of a Quebec trying to preserve and enhance

its culture and language.

The law at this stage is deceptively benign, opening a range of questions about unspecified details. How, and how far will the government go in enforcing this? We don't know. Will the use of the notwithstanding clause be required once the more specific regulations and accompanying policies are brought forward? We don't know.

How will the fact of this bill's primacy affect Quebec's legal framework? We don't know. Who decides what is acceptable cultural activity that doesn't include traditional Quebec elements and what is not? We don't know.

All Quebecers should be concerned that M. Roberge feel it necessary to make this law superior to Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Why he did that remains unclear. And we are also troubled by signals that government will use potentially coercive provisions regarding the financing of groups and activities to determine adherence to the law.

The **QCGN** will seek to appear before National Assembly hearings on this bill.

Finally, we're not being facetious when asking whether, in addition to the so-called Language Police who enforce provisions of the French Language Charter, Quebec will now add the Culture Police to enforce the eventual rules and policies in Bill 1984. You can [read the press release that we put out on this issue here](#).

## SCOC agrees to hear Bill 21 appeal

By: Me. Gerry Sklavounos

One of those significant court cases moved along in a big way last month when the Supreme Court of Canada announced it had granted leave to appeal the Quebec Court of Appeal's decision that upheld Bill 21. This law, regarding the secularism of the state in Quebec, forbids the wearing of ostentatious religious symbols by provincial government employees in positions of authority – lawmakers, judges, police officers and, notably, teachers. Much has been made of how the law affects observant Muslim women to the greatest degree, because it forbids so many of them from wearing a hijab or other traditional Muslim attire, in the classroom. Not only are we interested in the gender angle under Section 28 of the Charter but of course Section 23 which is so relevant in terms of the autonomy of our English-language School Boards.

As an intervenor in the case, along with Me. **Julius Grey**, the **QCGN** is extremely pleased by the top court's decision. This case deals with the fundamental rights of minority groups, and as such, merits the consideration of our highest court. We look forward to seeing the next steps unfolding and being part of the challenge.

## Bill 40 back on the docket

By: Me. Gerry Sklavounos

From January 27 to 29, the Quebec Court of Appeal heard an appeal by the provincial government against a Superior Court decision that struck down portions of Bill 40, the law that aimed to replace all school boards with centrally run service centres, and abolishing school board elections.

The law was successfully challenged by the [Quebec English School Boards Association](#) (QESBA), **QCGN**, as well as other groups that successfully argued that Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms grants a degree of autonomy and independence to the English-speaking minority of Quebec in the control and management of its school boards and their elections and that the government could not curtail these by legislative act. Me. **Marion Sandilands** of Conway Litigation intervened before the court on **QCGN**'s behalf on January 29.

We are also paying close attention to other court matters, including one seeking to compel the federal government to remain a participant in a case challenging the constitutionality of Quebec's Bill 96 language law.

## Speaking of the notwithstanding clause...

By: Me. Gerry Sklavounos

Those who are interested might take note that a [petition is being circulated](#) calling upon the House of Commons to:

1. Never pre-emptively use Section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the notwithstanding clause which allows governments to violate parts of the Charter without courts striking down legislation) in any federal legislation; and
2. Commit to a parliamentary review process if Section 33 is used pre-emptively by provincial and territorial governments, to ensure that the legislation using Section 33 does not infringe on the rights of Canadians.

Quebec has been one of the more frequent users of the clause, and Bills 21 and 96 were both pre-emptively protected by it.

## Momentum Building...but slowly

Following our members' vote late last year that ratified our plans to rebrand in 2025, much work has begun on the design tasks, website planning, and communications cascades that will culminate in the launch of the **QCGN**'s new name.

Planning for this launch is being carried out simultaneously with our activities dedicated to representation and advocacy on behalf of English-speaking communities across Quebec throughout the expected federal election campaign, as well as activities in our representation to the provincial government. Thus, we are now planning to officially introduce our new name and fresh look across our network and to the broader public in the late Spring once the post-election dust has cleared.

In the lead up to the rebranding, we will continue to look to our members for feedback, through periodic consultation and participation in focus groups. We want to validate approaches and ideas to ensure our launch is a success within our network – and beyond. Stay tuned for opportunities to weigh in!



## The cupboard is, apparently, bare



Groaning under the weight of a record \$11-billion deficit, the provincial government will not be in a mood to spend vast new sums when its budget comes down in a few months. That has been made abundantly clear by, for example, measures already taken to trim the \$1.5-billion deficit in health and social services (the agency that manages health care in the West Island has just announced the elimination of 160 positions).

So when the **QCGN** makes a February 3rd pre-budget presentation to Finance Minister **Eric Girard** (who is also minister responsible for relations with Quebec's English-speaking community), we will not seek funding increases, but will focus on four or five policy changes that wouldn't cost the government a dime, but would make life better for those on behalf of whom we'll be speaking: the English-speaking people of Quebec. We will have more to say about that in public in the days and weeks ahead

## If the definition fits...

The Oxford English Dictionary defines juggernaut as a large and powerful force or institution that cannot be controlled. It seems an apt descriptor for what appears to be an inevitable federal election on our doorstep in early May.

Whether prompted by a minority Liberal government being defeated after the March 24th resumption of a prorogued House of Commons, or by the newly chosen Liberal leader seeking a dissolution of Parliament to launch an immediate election soon after his or her selection on March 9, most observers think we'll be trekking to the polls in early May, probably the 5th or the 12th.

The **QCGN**, in its role of advocate for the English-speaking communities of Quebec, takes elections seriously. They are our best opportunity to engage with all parties about issues that are important to our community. So, we surveyed our organizations, individual members, and a broad swath of the community at large to see if the federal issues we feel are important matched the views of members and friends. We were pleased to see that we are in almost perfect sync and are proceeding with the drafting of a brief we will present to all political parties before the election is called.

Once the writ is dropped, we'll make that message public and do what we can to ensure the matters of greatest concern to our community are aired during the election campaign. It will not be easy, of course. This election will be overwhelmed by economic, not the linguistic, identity or constitutional issues that touch us so deeply.



## Court Challenges Program's 2023–24 annual report

By: Stephen Thompson



The federal **Court Challenges Program** is charged with supporting test cases of national significance and to affirm and clarify certain official-language and human rights in Canada. According to its newly published 2023–24 annual report, the program supported more than 170 active cases in that period and invested \$4.2 million in legal battles that ran from early litigation stages to hearings before the Supreme Court of Canada. For the first time, the CCP published a list of completed cases, giving us a clearer

view of its contributions.

The CCP focused on two key pillars: human rights and official-language rights. On the former front, the program funded cases addressing the accessibility of government services for people with disabilities and the equality rights of vulnerable populations. The official-language rights branch tackled issues like equitable linguistic access to government services and the rights of minority-language communities to quality education.

Specifically, the CPP provides funding to cases that affirm and clarify official-language rights enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Sections 16–23), the Constitution Act, 1867, the Manitoba Act, 1870, and the **Official Languages Act**.

These rights include access to services in both official languages, the advancement of English and French, and protections for minority-language communities. In 2023–24, \$1.71 million was allocated to official-language rights cases, funding test case development, trials, appeals, and interventions.

As it falls under our mandate to safeguard these rights, the **QCGN** was happy to see a significant boost to this funding by the Department of Canadian Heritage in 2023, leading to an expansion of staff and an ability to enhance both legal support (funding more cases as well as taking on a larger share of the litigants' costs) and public outreach, resulting in a record number of Canadians seeking assistance.



## Quebec Community Groups Network

*Copyright © 2025 QCGN, All rights reserved.*

Canada

*The QCGN is funded by the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage.*

Powered by **Yapla**