

Statement from the Quebec Community Groups Network following the passing of Mauril Bélanger

For immediate release

Montreal – August 17, 2016 – The Quebec Community Groups Network today expressed its deep sadness at the passing of MP Mauril Bélanger, a true champion for language rights in Canada.

Bélanger was a beloved politician, winning by landslides in eight successive elections in Ottawa-Vanier. Appointed to Cabinet in 2003, not only did he follow the illustrious footsteps of former Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier in the same riding, but he carried on one of the Senator's ambitious private member's bill to amend the Official Languages Act. Under Mauril's keen leadership, Canadian parliamentarians voted to enhance the Act for the first time since 1988 by amending Part VII in November 2005. As a result of this transformative change, Federal institutions are now obligated to take "positive measures" to translate the government's commitment to promoting linguistic duality and community development into action. As the Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser noted in this 2006-07 Annual Report at the time "this legislative change ushers in a new era for Official Languages in Canada."

"I had the privilege of working with the team in the Privy Council Office that supported Mauril in his desire to renew the Act," commented QCGN's Director General Sylvia Martin-Laforge. "It was inspiring to see both his dogged determination and his strategic mastery as he maneuvered the file throughout the machinery of Parliament. There is work that Mauril began that needs to be continued, it's a shame that he will no longer be there to lead the charge."

"Always a strong ally to Quebec, Mauril assisted our community while a member of the House Committee on Official Languages," added Martin-Laforge. "He knew that our minority status was often somewhat questioned by fellow members from all parties, and he made it his business to ensure that our issues received equal attention. He was attentive and respectful of the uniqueness of our community. He always made it his business to become more knowledgeable of our community's challenges, its priorities, and understood that we need to be equally visible in Canada's official languages landscape."

“He truly did his best to recognize official language communities and that included Quebec’s English-speaking community,” commented QCGN President Jim Shea, noting that a little more than a week before his passing, the jury for QCGN’s Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Award agreed to extend a special honour to Bélanger for his service to English-speaking Quebec. In her note to the jury, former colleague Anne Scotton wrote that he was a “thoughtful, principled fighter for the causes he champions and a passionate defender of rights and freedom in this country. His skills in setting out the circumstances and the situation through his popular straightforward language - both English and French - are well known. His powers of persuasion were most evident to me in the work he did at the time of his responsibilities as Minister for Official Languages.”

Quebec’s English-speaking community is deeply indebted to Mauril Bélanger for his lifelong commitment to linguistic duality and the QCGN extends its heartfelt sympathies to his family, friends and colleagues.

The Quebec Community Groups Network is a not-for-profit organization bringing together 48 English-language community organizations across Quebec. A centre of evidence-based expertise and collective action, QCGN identifies, explores and addresses strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of the English-speaking community of Quebec. It also encourages dialogue and collaboration among its member organizations, individuals, community groups, institutions and leaders.

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