

## Quebec Election 2022 Blog #2

### QCGN HOSTS VIRTUAL TOWN HALL WITH COLIN STANDISH

**Sept 1, 2022** – The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) last night hosted a virtual town hall with Colin Standish, leader of the new Canadian Party of Quebec (CaPQ). This online forum provided Quebecers with an opportunity to ask Standish questions and at the same time convey to him their concerns ahead of the Oct. 3 provincial election.

Standish opened the discussion by introducing his party's objectives. He wishes to heal divisions sown by the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), he declared. He expressed his wish to repeal Bills 21, 40, and 96 in their entirety and replace them with legislation to achieve the same objectives without infringing on the rights of minorities. The CaPQ, Standish added, is "a party of principle" that is fighting for "symmetrical bilingualism" and is striving to restore respect for linguistic rights, religious rights, and the integrity of the Canadian Constitution. Moreover, he stated, if elected his party would enact an *English Language Services Act*. This legislation, he said, would ensure regional bilingualism, equal access to employment for all Quebecers, and equitable access across the province to government services in English.

#### Rights and Access to Justice

The CaPQ is a coalition of English-speakers, newcomers to Quebec, and members of Indigenous communities, Standish said. Asked what he hopes the party will achieve given the unlikelihood that it will obtain official party status in the National Assembly, Standish reiterated that the CaPQ would use its voice in Quebec's legislature to speak for the otherwise voiceless.

Standish was asked for details about how his party intends to encourage federal intervention in efforts to reverse unconstitutional elements of Bills 21, 40, and 96. He responded that the CaPQ would work with the federal government to hold it accountable to protect the rights of Quebec's linguistic and religious minorities. No matter the size of the party's caucus following this election, he asserted, the CaPQ can make a real impact on Quebec's political and social landscape.

He was questioned regarding potential doubts among the public about voting for a freshly formed political party. "The future of the country is at stake" in the upcoming election, he responded, notably Canada's support for official bilingualism and its respect for minorities. Standish was asked whether his party is taking votes away from the federalist Liberal Party of Quebec and thus potentially providing the CAQ with a larger proportion of National Assembly seats. Voting for "the status quo" is not the solution, he responded. Many English-speaking Quebecers, he added, consider they have been "fundamentally betrayed" by the actions of the

Liberal Party on Bill 96. Standish also took the opportunity to express his party's commitment to formally recognize the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* if it were to form the next provincial government.

## **Education**

Asked what he would do to enhance English-language education in Quebec, Standish committed to repeal Bill 40. This is the CAQ legislation that aims to abolish school boards. Many legal experts have concluded this violates the Constitutional right of Quebec's English-speaking community to manage and control its educational institutions.

He was asked whether his party wants to appeal to French-speaking Quebecers. Many candidates running under the CaPQ banner have francophone backgrounds, Standish responded. He underlined his party's commitment to freedom of choice, to ensure that anyone may choose to send their children to either English- or French-language schools. Many French-speaking Quebecers wish their children to attend English-language schools and become bilingual, he stated.

Standish was questioned about the effect of such a policy on the future of the French language in Quebec. Forcing or coercing the children of newcomers to attend school in one official language over another, Standish responded, violates their constitutional and international human rights. He emphasized his party's intention to "shift the orthodoxy" on language in Quebec, to engage in robust ways to promote the French language while protecting the rights of all Quebecers.

## **Health and Social Services**

Standish was asked what steps he would take to accelerate the implementation of the new access programs for English-language health and social services. Thus far, Standish said, these programs have been "buried in bureaucracy." He said that the new criteria of proving one's status as a "historic Anglo" (through proof of having received English-language education in Canada) to obtain English-language health services would result in confusion on the ground and may limit accessibility for those who have the right to these services in English.

Citing his background as a native Townshippier, Standish characterized as "inadequate" the current on-the-ground reality for health care in English in Quebec. Rights currently provided to English-speakers in Quebec's health-care system are undermined by the network's "bureaucratic macrostructures," he added. To rectify this to some extent, Standish said, the *English Language Services Act* envisioned by the CaPQ would ensure that English-speaking Quebecers would have more representation on advisory bodies across Quebec's governmental organizations.

## **Vitality of the English-speaking Community**

Standish was asked how he aims to support the vitality of English-speaking Quebecers. He said that under the *English Language Services Act*, the public would be provided with an ombudsman to whom they could file complaints about inequities in accessing services in English in Quebec. Standish was asked whether he would abolish the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF). He responded that his party would “restructure” the Office, so that it would promote the French language in an incentivizing manner rather than use punitive measures to enforce the use of French.

In his concluding remarks, Standish said there is more to being a Quebecer than simply the language one speaks. He described this election as “a referendum on Bill 96,” under which Quebecers must make a collective decision to not accept second-class citizenship for Quebec’s linguistic, religious, and ethnic minorities. Standish invited Quebecers to vote for respect – be it for minority rights or language rights. This, he added, constitutes a fundamental value for which the CaPQ and the party’s MNAs will fight if elected.