



Roadmap to Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013

**Remarks to the
Standing Committee on Official Languages
Thursday, April 22, 2010**

*Presented by Robert Donnelly,
QCGN President*

Good morning Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is good to be back to assist the Committee in its work. Today, we have been invited to participate in a discussion on the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality. As a segue, I ask you to recall our last appearance when we expressed our dismay about the lack of acknowledgment by the Federal Government of the English-speaking minority in the Speech from the Throne. In that regard, the QCGN recently submitted a complaint to the Commissioner of Official Languages about the omission and the impact the Throne Speech on March 3 could have on the official language minority community in Quebec.

I bring this up to demonstrate that, despite 40 years of the Official Languages Act, and recognition of our minority community's national standing by the Commissioner of Official Languages in his 2007-2008 Annual Report, we believe that deep-rooted misunderstanding remains regarding the English-speaking Community of Quebec as an official languages minority community. Key stakeholders see omissions in federal strategic communications such as the Throne Speech as evidence that there is, at best, a continuing political and policy confusion around how the English-speaking Community of Quebec must be supported; and, at worst, a deliberate move to dismantle the traditions of the Official Languages policy.

Not only do policy makers have a hard time imagining that English-speaking Quebecers are members of an official minority language community, many English Quebecers also have a hard time considering themselves part of a minority. But we are - and many English speaking communities and institutions are on the endangered list.

The original policy document, *The Next Act: New Momentum for Canada's Linguistic Duality*, and the funding priorities that ensued under the Action Plan and the current Roadmap initiatives have been a significant step forward in terms of the Government's attempt to inject new momentum into the promotion of linguistic duality in Canada. The most significant initiative to date in Quebec has been the effort to improve access to health and social services in English. In contrast, most departments have not been able to successfully take on the design of national policy and programs which are flexible enough to work in Quebec as well as across Canada. That has meant fewer initiatives for the English-speaking Community.

From a policy maker's perspective, the reality of the English-speaking Community of Quebec presents a particular challenge - in fact it questions the core of collective thinking about Canadian Official Language Minority Communities. The tradition that informs the beliefs and the structure of a response to official languages is based on the Francophone experience, and the foundation of that experience is a minority language that has been fiercely protected and proudly fostered for four centuries in Canada. But for English Quebec, the protection of the language is not a concern. For the English-speaking minority of Quebec, the

fundamental aim is to preserve our institutions and the communities they serve. We seek integration, demand that our children have the language skills necessary to participate fully in Quebec society, and understand that limited and rational asymmetry in programme delivery - but not design - is necessary for Quebec to flourish.

For the English-speaking official language minority, the mandates, overall policy considerations, and programme design of various federal department make interventions in Quebec problematic. For the most part, services that have a direct impact on our community fall within provincial jurisdiction. Furthermore, restrictions on federal spending powers, highlighted in the Speech from the Throne and now the subject of Bill C-507, and the devolution of federal responsibilities provide significant challenges to those charged with designing and implementing the Roadmap in Quebec. Unlike the Federal Government, our Provincial Government does have the responsibility to promote the vitality of our Community, and therefore little if any leverage can be obtained without some innovative thinking.

Under the previous Action Plan and the current Roadmap, many initiatives were not available to the English-speaking community. Among the gaps were programmes in the areas of literacy, early childhood development and immigration. There are certainly varied reasons for this situation, the Community also acknowledges that in some cases our capacity to successfully support implementation was lacking. Our community structures and support networks

are still evolving to adapt to the specific challenges and realities of being an English-speaking minority community in Quebec.

The structural challenges in government programming such as the Roadmap can be mitigated by innovative thinking and dedicated effort. For example, immigration is the subject of a Canada-Quebec Accord to which the current Roadmap is subordinate. Quebec's immigration policy does not address the demographic pressures faced by the English-speaking Community. Renewal is of importance to English communities across the Province and of critical concern to the communities off the Island of Montreal. Groundbreaking strategies are being developed to access Roadmap funding for research to inform the design of future initiatives such as a study on the ability of English-speaking communities to help attract and retain immigrants in rural Quebec. We believe that closer collaboration with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the community and the Government of Quebec is beginning to pay off – in small steps we are beginning to demonstrate that capitalizing on the Community's role as an asset could help with immigrant retention in the regions.

And now a word on evaluation...

Since the launch of the overarching priority setting initiatives such as the Action Plan and the Roadmap, we have come to recognize that there is a systemic flaw in the policy and program design which cannot be fixed by regular evaluation processes. Therefore, unless the evaluation process includes a gap analysis, nothing will change. Only an evidence-based approach will ultimately allow

department to fill in the gaps. Issues cannot be fixed at the evaluation stage therefore policy and interventions for the English-speaking Community of Quebec must be considered at the outset.

The English-speaking Community of Quebec cannot continue to rely on a half-century of research and capacity building has provided Canada's Francophone Minority. Evidence-based policy by definition relies on evidence. To ensure our vitality, the English-speaking minority needs more resources directed towards research. Whereas we feel largely absent from the Roadmap, we believe it is possible that English-speaking Quebec be given equal national consideration and equitable resources in its successor - the planning of which is now underway.

Thank you for listening to our concerns. We are available to answer any questions you may have.