

Press release

QCGN Welcomes Canadian Heritage Minister and Bids Adieu to President and Commissioner

Montreal – June 3, 2016 – Members of the Quebec Community Groups Network bid a fond farewell to President Dan Lamoureux, who stepped down after four years at the helm; and to Canada’s Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, whose extended three-year mandate ends in the fall.

“For Quebec’s English-speaking community the best testament to Fraser’s time in office is the careful attention he always gave to English-speaking Quebec as a minority,” said former QCGN President Martin Murphy, who chaired the QCGN when Fraser was appointed almost a decade ago. “Commissioner Fraser understood us and he often dared to tell Canadians and majority Quebecers what they did not want to hear. “

On that theme, Commissioner Fraser repeated his suggestion that this province should have an office dealing with the concerns of the English-speaking community. “I continue to believe it would be useful for Quebec’s government to have some sort of reference point, preferably in the bureaucratic structure, to monitor and understand the needs of Quebec’s English-speaking minority,” Fraser said this morning as he participated in a panel of official language commissioners that also included Ontario’s French Language Services Commissioner, François Boileau, and the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick, Katherine d’Entremont.

Fraser, who has spent years battling myths about Quebec’s English-speaking minority, said this community is “misconceived by some as a threat, and misunderstood by the majority community”. He noted your average English-speaking Quebecer “is older, less educated, less employed and less affluent than their francophone neighbours.”

Commissioner Fraser made the comments as more than 100 members and stakeholders of the QCGN gathered in Montreal Friday for their 21st annual meeting.

Canadian Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly dropped in before lunch to encourage QCGN and community members to take part in upcoming consultations on Canada's Action Plan to support official languages. That's the renewal of the federal government's multi-million dollar investment strategy to support official language minority communities.

"We will fully engage in the process and encourage our members and the community to get involved," said newly elected QCGN President James Shea, noting the visit was noteworthy since Joly is the first Canadian Heritage Minister to participate in an annual meeting of the QCGN. Shea met recently with Randy Boissonnault, the parliamentary secretary for Official Languages, to discuss the consultations that begin this summer.

Also on hand for Friday's event were Mount Royal MP Anthony Housefather, a former Alliance Quebec President, who insisted English-speaking Quebec must make its issues known to Members of Parliament; as well as D'Arcy McGee MNA David Birnbaum, another Alliance Quebec alumni who stated the provincial government is undeniably listening to the concerns of the English community.

Birnbaum alluded to Premier Philippe Couillard's recent praise of the English school system as he buried the controversial school reform legitimization, Bill 86. Following a year focused on the education rights of Quebec's English-speaking community, QCGN members passed a resolution vowing to continue to raise awareness of, protect, and advance the minority language education rights of Quebecers in cooperation with community partners and institutions.

During the Annual General Meeting James Shea was acclaimed as QCGN President. He is joined by new vice-president Geoffrey Chambers and new board members Kevin Dobie and James Hughes, a past winner of QCGN's Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Award. Not up for reelection and retuning to the board are Secretary Walter Duszara, Treasurer Joe Rabinovitch, Clarence Bayne, Sovita Chander, Ted Goloff, Cheryl Gosselin, Stella Kennedy, Juan-Carlos Quintana, Kate Shingler, and Irene Tschernomor.

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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