

## **STATEMENT BY WILLIAM JOHNSON, PRESIDENT OF ALLIANCE QUEBEC**

in reply to an attack by Gary Richards, president of the Townshippers' Association.

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**February 4, 1999** - In today's edition of *Le Devoir*, Gary Richards, president of the Townshippers' Association, is quoted as attacking Alliance Quebec and its president, William Johnson. According to the report, Mr. Richards contacted yesterday the office of Heritage Minister Sheila Copps to oppose Alliance Quebec's request for an increased grant and to denounce Alliance Quebec's actions. Here is what Mr. Richards said, according to *Le Devoir*:

"Les initiatives d'Alliance Québec, et les déclarations de son président, nuisent à tous les anglophones du Québec, dit Gary Richards, du moins à ceux qui, comme c'est le cas dans les Cantons-de-l'Est, se sont toujours efforcés de vivre en bons voisins avec les francophones. Mais maintenant, lorsque les médias nous contactent, c'est uniquement pour nous demander de réagir aux initiatives d'Alliance Québec!"

Mr. Richards disagrees with Alliance Quebec's decision last month to take the Quebec government to court for not adopting the plans guaranteeing access to English health and social services. The law requires that revised plans be adopted by the Quebec Cabinet "at least every three years," but the plans supposedly in force across the province were adopted in 1989. Repeated government promises to adopt updated plans were repeatedly broken.

"Est-ce une bonne idée d'agir ainsi alors qu'il y a une nouvelle ministre de la Santé, avec laquelle on n'a même pas encore discuté?", dit Gary Richards. C'est avec ce genre de chose que nous ne sommes pas d'accord."

Let it be noted that Alliance Quebec's decision to go to court to defend the right to English health services was supported, in whole or in part, by editorials in *The Gazette*, *Le Devoir* and *La Presse*. The decision was taken by the 40-member board of directors of Alliance Quebec, after every form of request, pleas, urgings, telephone calls, letters, press conferences, reminders, rebukes, warnings, and even a *Mise en demeure*, went unheeded.

Adopting revised access plans to English health and social services is not a responsibility of the Minister of Health, it is a responsibility of the Quebec Government, and it was the Quebec Government, not the Minister of Health and Social Services, that repeatedly failed to adopt by Cabinet decree the English access plans and gave new reasons for stalling.

But there is more at issue here than defending English health services. Mr. Richards apparently disagrees with Alliance Quebec's insistence on defending English as one of Quebec's two historic and official languages..

Here is what Mr. Richards said when he appeared in Ottawa last Dec. 8 before the Parliamentary Committee on Official Languages, with Sheila Finestone presiding the hearings:

"The Townshippers' Association strongly feels that if Quebec were to become totally bilingual again, it would result in the demise of the French language within a decade. We don't want to see that."

(Transcript of the hearings of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages, Tuesday, December 8, 1998, page 8)

Alliance Quebec makes no apologies for defending bilingualism in Quebec and rejects the notion that it would lead to the demise of French. To reject bilingualism is to reject the place of English in Quebec life. I am confident that Alliance Quebec has the support of the vast majority of English-speaking Quebecers, both for its appeal to the courts to defend the right to health and social services in English, and for its defence of English as part of Quebec's history, Quebec's constitution and Quebec's identity.