

Rhéal Sabourin

De : "Rhéal Sabourin"
Date : 17 août 2014 09:33
À : <dreevely@ottawacitizen.com>
Objet : Bilingualism...

Dear Mr. Reevely,

I read your article this morning, twice in fact to be sure that I understood well your thoughts, and I'm still not sure where you stand on the matter, if you are in fact in favour of having a city officially bilingual or not, OR, if you think that the actual policy is sufficient and serves the French community well enough as it is now. But still, I would like to share a few thoughts with you, if I may.

It's ironic that we, as French Canadians, still have to argue to defend the necessity of such a basic right that would recognize us as equal partners. In section D, page 10 of the *Ottawa Citizen*, Ian Capstick wrote an article, just besides John E. Trent's article which defends the case for official bilingualism, titled : *Gay Pride's progress and its potential* (subtitle : *We need to keep talking about equal rights for all Canadians*). EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL CANADIANS ! It's funny, when it gets to OUR rights, we seem to forget that. I would be accused very rapidly of discrimination if I were to criticize the gays' rights. And Mr. Capstick adds : *We're proud of who we are, even if the rest of society isn't ready to accept us yet*. Now, this quote could well be for us too. We will celebrate next year 400 years of French presence in what is now Ontario. 400 years ! and we are still considered a foreign language !

The City of Ottawa is more than the City Hall which has the responsibility to offer services in French 'where there's any real demand'. It goes much beyond the possibility 'to register a kitten in French' ! A city officially bilingual would be more than a mere symbol, it would send a clear message to all, not just to the bureaucrats who have to make sure that the basic and rightful services are delivered. We all pay the same taxes. The message would be clear to all that there are rights and there should be no compromises on that matter, as it is in Ian Capstick's case. Not long ago, I had an experience in a store that illustrates how far we still have to go in order to be respected. When I addressed the young lady(18 at the most) at the counter in French, she bluntly said : Sorry, don't speak French (the usual answer !). I expressed my surprise since, being a former school principal, I know enough to know that every English speaking child has the opportunity to learn French in school, so I told her that. Her reply : *'I chose (note the verb !) not to learn French and if I wanted to speak French I would go to Quebec.'* Now, you and I know very well what she really meant. In other words, if I wanted to speak French, all I had to do was to go to Quebec. Period ! If that is not discrimination, than I don't know what the word means. I must not generalize from her comments, but they are more frequent than we would like to admit. I'm 69 years old, and here, a young lady (!!) is telling me that I'm not welcomed in my own province. No, the city of Ottawa, the capital of a country OFFICIALLY BILINGUAL, would send a clear and unequivocal MESSAGE that there are rights and they are respected. There are many situations in Canada where I do have reserves or objections, but rights being rights, I do respect them.

Finally, to conclude my remarks, I propose a little test (a revealing one in fact) for you if you want. Go to any restaurant on the Market and do two things. ONE : look at the menu... than ask for a menu in French. There is

2014-08-19

a service that exists to help restaurant owners to translate their menus, but they rarely use this free service. SECONDLY : listen to the conversations (discreetly !) around your table. You will probably hear many clients speaking in French. So, even though many clients are French speaking, restaurateurs don't bother to offer them that basic respect. (In California and in Florida, I was surprised to see menus in English and Spanish, and yet these states are still OFFICIALLY ENGLISH). The reason is very simple. The message that mayor Watson is sending is that we should be satisfied with what is as it is... and no more !

I thank you for your time if you are still reading me.

Rhéal Sabourin