



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 249

THE SENATE

MOTION TO REAFFIRM THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR
FEDERATION IN LIGHT OF THE GOVERNMENT
OF ONTARIO'S CUTS TO FRENCH SERVICES—
DEBATE ADJOURNED

Speech by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, November 22, 2018

THE SENATE

Thursday, November 22, 2018

THE SENATE

MOTION TO REAFFIRM THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR
FEDERATION IN LIGHT OF THE GOVERNMENT
OF ONTARIO'S CUTS TO FRENCH SERVICES—
DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I too stand in support of the motion in respect of the importance of both Canada's official languages, their enshrinement in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and their central place in Canada's Official Languages Act.

Speaking as an anglophone Manitoban, or I hope, as one who might be considered a francophile, in my view, this is an urgent issue. I want to underline the need for teaching French in every level of education, preschool through post-secondary programs, undergraduate and graduate and the importance of encouraging the use of the French language throughout Canada. These needs are ongoing, indeed, essential, and not just for Canada's francophones and francophiles but for all Canadians. Our language and multicultural realities define who we are as a people and as a nation — and this, our unique being, is to be cherished, protected and expanded.

Language and culture are critical to our being, as individuals, regionally and nationally. Language and culture are inextricably tied. The expression of language and culture needs to be encouraged at home, at school, in our universities, by our newspapers, the media, our organizations and throughout society as a whole.

I hear this wherever I go — in my home city and province, in my travels across Canada, and in my international work over many years. Indeed, at this year's Arctic Parliamentary Conference in Inari, Finland, where the eight polar countries discussed issues and concerns that affect us all, language and culture joined climate change as central themes.

In my recent discussions with the deputy speaker of the Senate of France, he was particularly congratulatory to us regarding Canada's languages and our use of both English and French. I had just spoken in both languages, so was very proud to hear those accolades and observations. Working and living in both languages is who we are as a nation.

So where are we now? How do we celebrate and protect our roots? How do we enable Canadians to learn work in their first language while enabling others to learn a second or third or fourth language?

[Translation]

When I was young, there were no opportunities for anglophones to receive education in French. Fortunately, as a teenager, I had the opportunity to live with a family in France for a whole year. Things were better for my children. One of my daughters was accepted into the late immersion program in

British Columbia. It was a good program, but not advanced enough for her to be able to work in French. These programs are very important and, in my opinion, we must continue to offer and improve them. It is vital that francophones have access to education in their mother tongue.

[English]

However solid a culture and language may be, they are also always in peril, especially in today's world of conflict and changing philosophies. Culture evolves and grows, and yet it is fragile. While the reach throughout society of the use of a language or the number of students and cultural attendees are certainly measurable, the real reach of language and culture is intangible. Such experiences affect one for many years to come and often in ways unimagined. That has certainly been my personal and professional experience.

A recent report from Hill Strategies, which I received just last week, showed that almost all Canadians take part in arts and cultural activities, underlining our basic need as human beings to explore and participate in who we are, underlining for me the human right and societal obligation for accessible cultural activities, including all those of language.

My concern for the future of our languages and culture became even greater when I read yesterday that Ottawa's major francophone theatre, La Nouvelle Scène, had a \$3 million promised Ontario investment reversed. These monies were to be for the theatre's program and upgrades and to assist in covering costs of a recent upgrade. Their work has been excellent. As one audience member wrote:

[Translation]

The artistic programming offers plenty of variety. The productions are top-notch. Go spend a perfect artistic evening there.

Its mandate is described as follows:

La Nouvelle Scène Gilles Desjardins . . . is Ottawa's centre of francophone theatre . . . This performing arts centre offers a diverse program of theatrical performances by its four resident theatre companies (Théâtre du Trillium, Théâtre de la Vieille 17, Vox Théâtre, Théâtre la Catapulte), a music series, and many stage shows (theatre, music, dance, performance) presented by other companies from the Ottawa-Gatineau region, across Canada and around the world. The new theatre has two performance studios with 173 and 80 seats respectively, a rehearsal studio, a bar/courtyard that can accommodate more than 200 people . . .

[English]

This is a truly important organization in Ottawa, just as francophone theatres are across Canada, like Cercle Molière in St. Boniface.

Colleagues, I support this motion and hope you do too. We must always be on guard to ensure our languages and culture are healthy, vital and accessible to all. Please ensure we maintain and deepen the opportunities for all Canadians to be educated in and to partake in the official language of their choice and their roots and that our diverse culture is there for all.

How would those of us who are anglophone react if our English-language universities, cultural organizations and services were suddenly taken from us?

Thank you.
