

Ottawa Report

Bilingualism could provide more balance and common sense

Bilingualism. The very word can enrage some people. It may be a policy that Canada has had for more than 20 years, but it's still making headlines.

Alberta premier Don Getty has come out against it, just when we're in the middle of a bitter debate about the future of Canada and Quebec. Now the Reform Party is reconsidering its policy, which has been to "reject enforced bilingualism". The other three national parties all support it.

And how about people in Halton-Peel? Where do we stand?

The Constituency survey which I sent to each house late last year asked that question, and the results are in: About half of the respondents want bilingualism eliminated, and about half want it made fairer and less costly. Only a relative handful like the status quo.

For many people, bilingualism

is an irritating symbol of everything wrong with Canada. For others - especially the politicians - it seems beyond criticism.

But I believe there should be no sacred cows. Nothing that people can't talk about, or find ways of improving. And, frankly, I think the time has probably come to rethink this policy.

First, let's make it clear what official bilingualism is. It is not forcing people to speak two languages. Instead, it is the right of a person who speaks French or English to talk to the federal government in their own language.

As a fundamental policy in a country founded by French and English 125 years ago, I can support that. Eliminating it now would just ensure that Canada as we know it would end. A federal government that just spoke English would be alien to over 6 million French-speaking Cana-

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dians.

And there are some examples from the past of why that is wrong. Jean-Robert Gauthier is a Liberal MP from Ottawa. He was raised by his grandparents; and his grandfather happened to be an MP. But when his grandfather spoke in Parliament, representing his francophone constituents, the record of the House of

Commons said only: "Mr. Gauthier spoke in French."

That was wrong. And it is now the correct thing that the federal government speaks both languages. But this does not mean that bilingualism the way we have it is fair. There could be more balance and common sense.

For example:

• Is it fair that bilingual federal civil servants are paid bonuses because they can speak two languages? Maybe it's time to end that discrimination.

• Does Ontario really need to be spending a few million bucks right now changing the road signs on the 401 so they're in both languages? How about using that money for the economy, instead?

• For the sake of the environment, as well as reducing costs, shouldn't we ban the practice of printing government documents in both languages? As needed,

print some in French and some in English.

• Do all labels and packages have to be bilingual? How about the health food store that wants to import from the States but can't, because of language regulations? How about the person who wants to sell brownies or preserves on a small scale?

Sure, for health and safety reasons consumers should know about hazards or directions in both languages. But let's get a grip here! Let's not get less competitive and more costly just to satisfy some gang of language cops.

By the way, nobody forced Kellogg's to put French on Corn Flakes boxes. The company did it decades before anybody knew what the word bilingualism meant - because they figured they could sell more corn flakes.

That seems about the right attitude to language, doesn't it?

Queen's Park Report

NDP continues to consult with citizens

Consultation Process Well Underway

By now you've probably seen the ads requesting your input into the 1992 provincial government programs. The various Ministries involved decided to coordinate their efforts--and budgets--and provide a one-stop approach to learning more about the thirteen economic and social initiatives for this year. For the first time, the government has set up special toll free telephone numbers to help you get involved.

Your ideas and suggestions helped our government make some changes to earlier legislation and your opinions this time will make our 1992 programs work better for you. That's why

we've been asking for your comments on the following major government initiatives.

- The Ontario Budget for 1992
- An Ontario Investment Program
- An Industrial Strategy
- A New Skills Training System
- Fair Taxes
- Agricultural Land Use Review
- Managing Ontario's Forests
- Long Term Care for Seniors and Adults with Physical Disabilities
- Labor Relations Reform
- Child Care Reform
- Waster Reduction Initiatives
- Employment Equity
- A Social Charter for Canada

Some of the ministries have almost wrapped up the consultation process while others are just beginning. To get more details

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call 1-800-268-1749 on weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. If you work in Toronto you can call 314-9000. You'll be sent material outlining the issues you're interested in. You'll also be provided with information

about meetings you can attend to discuss topics as well as where to write with your comments.

If you'd like to talk to me about any of these programs or about other provincial issues, I'd like to let you know that I'll be holding office hours in Acton once a

month at the ASSIC office. I'm also usually available for appointments in my Georgetown office on Friday mornings and in my Milton office most Friday afternoons. Please call my Milton office Tuesdays through Fridays at 878-1729 for more information.

Duignan opens Acton office

Noel Duignan, M.P.P. for Halton North, is pleased to announce that he will be holding office hours in Acton one afternoon each month.

Mr. Duignan will be available for appointments on January 31st from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the A.S.S.I.C. office at 19 Willow Street North in Acton. Beginning in February, office hours at the Acton location will be held on the fourth Friday of every month. Appointments can be made by calling his Milton constituency office at 878-1729 Tuesdays through Fridays.

Mr. Duignan has also arranged to meet with his constituents in Brookville on Wednesday January 29th at the Nassagaweya Community Centre. Area residents who wish to discuss provincial matters with him are invited to call his Milton office to book an appointment for that afternoon.

Say: "I saw it in The Herald"

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