

Speaking Notes for the Honourable Maria Chaput, Senator

Canadian Parents for French B.C. & Yukon – Conference & AGM

Thursday, October 18, 2012 / Le jeudi 18 octobre 2012

Bonjour,

Quel plaisir aujourd'hui de me retrouver parmi mes chers amis de Canadian Parents for French!

Je suis la présidente du comité sénatorial des langues officielles, et en février dernier, nous avons reçu la visite de Mesdames Pool et Vaseleniuk et de Monsieur Lewis au comité, et laissez-moi vous dire qu'ils ont laissé toute une impression.

Aujourd'hui, je vous adresse la parole à titre de sénatrice individuelle.

It's therefore a great honour for me to be with you today for the launch of your CPF BC & Yukon Conference: *French Is A Right*.

Canadian Parents for French is, I believe, at the forefront of a new Canadian reality – one in which bilingualism helps bridge the so-called “two solitudes” and unites Canada and us all.

In fact, Gordon McIvor, a noted Francophile and president of the *Alliance Française de Toronto*, explained in a letter published in *The Star* that his students “have one thing in common: a desire to broaden their horizons by mastering one of the most beautiful and successful languages in the history of mankind, which is an official language of their country as well. They would appreciate the words of author and philosopher John Raulston Saul, who likes to ask why anyone would purposely close a door being opened for them, thereby reducing one's options in life.”

I commend all of you for opening this door for your children, even if it means, for those among you who don't speak French that they now have a secret language to speak at home among siblings.

As a Francophone from Manitoba, I come of course from a different background, but our respective struggles share many common traits, and provide great potential for cooperation.

In fact, during CPF's presentation to the Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages, I could not help but note that many of the concerns stated were in fact concerns that I held as well, and who have since then been presented in Bill S-211, which I tabled in the Senate this past spring.

One of its key elements – and the only one that I will speak of today – is the proposed broadening of linguistic definitions used by the government. By that, I mean that the government should no longer count the number of people who have French or English as the “First official language spoken” in a given area, but should rather consider the entire population that speaks French or English.

We now live in an era where we are no longer identifying individuals as Francophones or Anglophones, but are rather focusing on the vitality of the French linguistic space. Let’s look at how many people are speaking French, whether it’s their mother tongue, the language they use at work, or their language of choice.

Canadian Parents for French is a beautiful example of an initiative that allows many Canadians to live a part of their life in French. In British-Columbia for example, where the federal government recognizes 70 000 Francophones, we know – and you certainly all know – that there are 300 000 people who speak French. In the Yukon, only 1 200 Francophones are recognized as such, while there are over 3 500 people who speak French. I believe it is high time that the federal government realizes and adapts to this changing demographic and linguistic landscape.

Community organizations such as CPF, of course, are at the forefront of these new changes. Across the country, Canadians have realized and understood that learning both official languages is a wonderful and noble achievement. It is remarkable that so many organizations, in their own ways and shaped by their own particular environments and challenges, are reaching towards this same goal. Some are focusing on community efforts; others are collaborating with school boards and principals; while others have chosen a political course of action. It is imperative that all these actors, all those committed to expanding education in both French and English in Canada, collaborate to achieve results for our children. Our diversity as Canadians, after all, has always been our greatest strength.

Je vous remercie de votre invitation. Je vous souhaite du succès dans votre initiative qui est des plus nobles, et je souhaite surtout un bon parcours en français à vos enfants.