

A law

BEYOND PARTIES FOR THE FRANCOPHONIE

BY CAMILLE HARPER

“We worked for seven years with the NDP government to bring Bill 5 to fruition so that Francophones would be seen as assets, people who contributed to the province,” says Daniel Boucher, Executive Director of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine (SFM).

“Then Greg Selinger’s NDP government was defeated and Brian Pallister’s Progressive Conservatives came to power. But they took over the bill left by the NDP and passed it. They were all in favour. It’s very symbolic

because they were in opposition when we worked on that bill. It shows a real change in mentality towards Manitoba’s Francophonie on everyone’s part.”

A French-Language Services Policy was adopted in 1989, but it could be challenged by any government. It was when Ibrahima Diallo was Chair that the SFM began lobbying the NDP government for something stronger: legislation.

“It was a hot potato,” says Diallo. “Greg Selinger’s strategy was more like baby step diplomacy: he gave us a lot of services with the idea of introducing a law later on that would confirm what already existed.”

For Daniel Boucher, the Act is a recognition. “It gives legitimacy to our community, which has existed since before the creation of the province. It recognizes the importance and necessity of French language services and reminds us that the Francophone community must be part of the decision-making process. This law opens the door to dialogue to move issues forward.”

In fact, for the first time, the Province’s Report on French-Language Services

The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act was passed unanimously by the Manitoba Legislature on June 30, 2016.

It is a symbol of the success of the community strategy to expand Francophone space.

released on January 27, 2020, under the leadership of Minister Rochelle Squires, included 11 concrete recommendations to improve the situation. Daniel Boucher is delighted with this report: “The Province will have to be accountable for these recommendations. The Act requires that a report be prepared every year. We’re going to make much faster progress.”

Ibrahima Diallo also notes the symbolism of the word “enhancement” rather than “survival” in the title of the Act.

Most importantly, *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* has broadened the definition of “Francophone Community,” thus meeting the vision of the SFM’s *Shared Framework* 2001-2050.

The Francophone Community in Manitoba is now defined as “those persons in Manitoba whose mother tongue is French and those persons in Manitoba whose mother tongue is not French but who have a special affinity for the French language and who use it on a regular basis in their daily life.”



photo: Archives La Liberté

ROCHELLE SQUIRES ET GREG SELINGER

Provincial Conservative Francophone Affairs Minister Rochelle Squires shakes hands with former NDP Premier Greg Selinger, who introduced similar legislation just before the Progressive Conservatives took office. The Act was passed just two months later, unanimously.