

PLATFORM

“BY Youth, FOR Youth”

2019



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CONTEXT

The Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF—French-Canadian Youth Federation) is a national organisation founded in 1974. Managed by youth, for youth, the FCJF is made up of eleven associative member youth organizations active in nine provinces and two territories. It contributes to the sociocultural and identity development of French-speaking youth aged 14 to 25 through activities, pan-Canadian events – such as the Jeux de la francophonie canadienne (Canadian Francophone Games) – and youth employment programs.

Canada's Francophone youth have their country's future at heart. The FJCF's members have led a deep reflection process to bring out a certain number of key issues for the future of our youth, and for the future of Canada. For each issue, they identified a series of actions that appeared crucial. Canada's youth would like to see these issues and courses of action be brought to the forefront of the public debates leading to the next federal election, and be considered in the proposals and commitments of every candidate, leader and party that seek to form the next government.

Here is what we will be talking about in the next federal election. Here would be the broad orientations of the next federal government, by youth, for youth.

SUMMARY OF THE COURSES OF ACTION

Issue: The Environment

That the federal government provide Canada with a generational environmental action plan, and do so urgently.

Issue: The New Economy

That the government of Canada update its economic plan to better consider the new working economy.

Issue: Mental Health

That the government of Canada develop and implement an Action plan for mental health.

Issue: Connectivity

That the government of Canada put forward a Connectivity and Unity policy.

Issue: Education

That the government of Canada create a federal Department of Education.

That the government of Canada proceed with the review of the OLEP.

That the government of Canada lighten the student debt burden.

That the government of Canada, along with provincial and territorial governments, foster an increase of Francophone teachers in French, immersion, and French as a second language programs.

Context and Analysis

Canada's natural resources are an extraordinary treasure. Countless scientific studies have shown that the current environmental situation is critical and that the need for action is more than urgent. A recent study shows that warming in Canada is, on average, about double the magnitude of global warming.¹ Some researchers even estimate that, unless we undertake immediate and radical changes, we might be on the dawn of a planetary extinction.² Climate change, shrinking sources of drinking water, the erosion of biodiversity, the use of pesticides and oil drilling are among the many issues that make the environment one of the foremost concerns for a great deal of Canadians.

Youth want to see the government of Canada take concrete actions that will ensure the sustainability of natural resources in Canada and planet-wide for generations to come. We expect our country to step up as global environmental leader, which only makes sense given Canada's abundant natural riches. We feel that time is of the essence on this matter, and that immediate action is crucial.

Courses of Action

That the federal government provide Canada with a generational environmental action plan, and do so urgently.

This plan should set clear, attainable goals and feature practical measures, including:

- Banning single-use plastic in Canada;
- Imposing sanctions to companies that don't respect their obligations regarding the sustainable development plan;
- Not only respect Canada's commitments and obligations stemming from the Paris Agreement, but aim to greatly surpass them;
- Bring net greenhouse gas emissions in Canada down to zero by 2030;
- Review and update the Canada Water Act and the Action Plan for Clean Water.
- Aim for 100% renewable energy in Canada by 2050.

¹ Government of Canada, *Canada's Changing Climate Report – Executive Summary*, 2019, page 5.

² Ceballos et al., *Accelerated modern human-induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction*, American Association for Science Advancement, 2015, page 1.

We Recognize

- The adoption, by Canada and 194 other countries, of the Paris Agreement.
- The launch of Canada's mid-century long-term low-greenhouse gas development strategy.
- The Minister of Environment and Climate Change's mandate letter, which mentioned, among other things:
 - Developing a plan to fight climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Canadian government's commitment to eliminating coal as a source of electricity by 2030.
- The passage of the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act.

In the Blind Spot

- A good number of researchers agree that the Paris Agreement commitments aren't sufficient to counter the heavy trends when it comes to climate change. Canada must lead by example and go further, faster.
- Canada's mid-century long-term low-greenhouse gas development strategy³ shows important forward thinking. But the strategy's deadline (mid-century) comes much too late.
- Politics and laws surrounding water protection, namely drinking water, are dated and urgently require updates, and must be accompanied by sufficient measures to ensure water sustainability in Canada.

³ https://unfccc.int/files/focus/long-term_strategies/application/pdf/can_strategie_red.pdf

ISSUE: THE NEW ECONOMY

Context and Analysis

Canada is evolving in a highly competitive global economic context where economic success rests more and more on knowledge, education, information, technology, creativity and resilience. In such a context, the workplace and the relationship to work are rapidly changing. Flexible work conditions, ongoing professional development, the need for resilience in order to adapt to perpetual change are just some of many determining factors awaiting youth who are about to enter the workforce. Unfortunately, the current legislative framework and federal policies are ill-equipped for the realities of this new economy.

Courses of Action

That the government of Canada update its economic plan to better consider the new working economy.

Canada's economic plan must, among other things:

- Plan for the effects of the aging population on Canada's workforce and roll-out measures to help absorb the loss of revenue that could be felt in certain areas;
- Develop and implement a strategy that focuses on innovation and the integration of the latest technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to ensure the sustainability of Canada's economy;
- Protecting the right to privacy by restricting the information that a company can gather, store and sell;
- Strengthen the role of unions; assert labour law and foster access to professional development opportunities for all;
- Ensure equity and equal pay for everyone, everywhere in Canada;
- Create incentives for hiring and keeping youth in Canadian companies;
- Ensure that all internships offered in Canada are paid.

We Recognize

- The Minister's mandate letter, which mentioned, among other things:
 - The need to update the Canadian Labour Code to ensure Canadians continue to be able to rely on a set of rigorous and modern federal employment standards.
 - The need to modify the Canadian Labour Code in order to allow workers to ask their employers for flexible working conditions.
- Consultations by the federal government towards developing a Youth Policy for Canada.

In the Blind Spot

- Despite many consultations on the matter, and despite the involvement of young leaders across the country, Canada still does not have a Youth policy regarding work.
- Unpaid internships are still common in Canada. This situation is highly discriminatory towards youth.

ISSUE: MENTAL HEALTH

Context and Analysis

One out of five Canadians is currently living with a mental illness.⁴ The issue is felt especially strongly among youth, where the highest rates of mental health problems among the entire Canadian population are observed — problems that often arise at the same time youth are starting post-secondary studies or entering the workforce.⁵ To underscore the urgent need to act on the mental health front, let's add the fact that, after unintentional injuries, suicide remains the second cause of death among youth aged 15 to 34.⁶

Despite the importance of this societal issue, Canada still doesn't have a National Mental Health Strategy. As such, the differences in policies, programs and services from one province and territory to the next, and the absence of a pan-Canadian framework, are certainly among the factors that halt progress in this area. The courses of action are several: prevention, promotion and raising awareness — namely in order to combat stigmatization, increase the offer and access to health care services, re-establish one's well-being, coordination, etc.

Courses of Action

That the government of Canada develop and implement an Action plan for mental health.

This action plan should, namely:

- Help fight stigmatization against mental health;
- Foster the development and access to resources and services in French, namely in schools across the country;
- Increase public discussion and public awareness around mental health issues, everywhere in Canada.

⁴ Commission de la santé mentale du Canada, *La nécessité d'investir dans la santé mentale au Canada*, 2013, page 1.

⁵ Commission de la santé mentale du Canada, *Faire valoir les arguments en faveur des investissements dans le système de santé mentale du Canada à l'aide de considérations économiques*, 2017, p12.

⁶ Statistique Canada, *Enquête longitudinale nationale sur les enfants et les jeunes*, 2010.

We Recognize

- The minister's mandate letter which stated, among other things:
 - The importance of renewing bilateral agreements with each province and territory in order to improve access to mental health services.
- The inclusion of mental health among medical reasons allowing access to a reprieve without interest or payments on Canadian student loans (Budget 2019).
- The commitment to support the construction and ongoing operations of an addiction and mental health centre in Nunavut (Budget 2019).
- The 20-million-dollar investment (Budget 2018) supporting community projects that increase the well-being of people with dementia.
- Funding of more than 19 million dollars (Budget 2018) to improve mental health support for black communities across Canada.
- The commitment to invest 11 billion dollars (Budget 2017) in provincial and territorial governments to support home care and mental health services.

In the Blind Spot

- Since mental health is an issue that especially affects young Canadians, it's worth engaging with the Ministry of Education, school boards, schools, etc. as champions of mental health in Canada. Each of these bodies should be required to develop and implement its own policy on the mental health of youth.

ISSUE: CONNECTIVITY

Context and Analysis

In a digital society, where technology evolves at breathtaking speed and life is more and more focused on the here and now, it's important to ensure good connections among Canadians of all horizons, wherever they are in the country. For generations, Canada has been viewed worldwide as a leader when it comes to diversity. Whether it's the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Charter or the Official Languages Act, the multiculturalism policy of 1971, Canada has many examples of measures supporting diversity. Today more than ever, this country, whose population is made up of over 200 nationalities, must continue to serve as a model of connectivity⁷.

Courses of Action

That the government of Canada put forward a Connectivity and Unity policy.

This policy should, namely:

- Update the *Official Languages Act* and review its application in order to ensure its relevance for Francophone Canadians, now and in the future;
- Fund an awareness campaign promoting official languages by presenting and highlighting various accents among Canada's Francophones;
- Announcing concrete measures to foster linguistic security across the country;
- Enshrine Internet access in the Canadian Charter of Rights;
- Recognizes that respecting diversity is a fundamental value that is part of the common Canadian identity, and that pluralism is an essential part of Canada's future.

⁷ Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance internationale, *Les fruits de la diversité – l'avantage mondial du Canada*, 2017, page 1.

We Recognize

- The federal government's commitment to review and update the Official Languages Act.
- The federal government's commitment (Budget 2019) to ensure access to high-speed Internet for all Canadians by 2030.
- Canada's involvement as a founding partner of the Global Centre for Pluralism.

In the Blind Spot

- Diversity remains too often misunderstood in Canada, and certain worrisome trends such as the rise of Francophobia can be seen. It's worth leading an awareness campaign around pluralism, accents and levels of language in order to fight stigmatization and discrimination, and reinforce a sense of belonging in all Canadians. We're thinking campaigns in schools and cultural institutions across the country, but also in the media — where diversity remains too rarely seen and heard.

ISSUE: EDUCATION

Context and Analysis

Education is a worthwhile investment for Canada. Youth must be able to access quality education in order to support Canada's creative, technological and economic advantage. Access to French-language education holds a particular importance because it supports the development and vitality of Francophone and Acadian communities. Schools, colleges and universities are essential institutions and key gathering points for our communities. In order to take into consideration, the education needs of Canada's Francophonie, the federal government maintains a long-standing collaboration with provincial and territorial governments regarding minority language education.

And yet, practices when it comes to teaching French vary greatly from one province and territory to the next. The provinces and territories lack transparency and accountability when it comes to the use of public funds received from the federal government to support minority language education. Debt represents a colossal obstacle, and a financial constraint, for many who wish to continue post-secondary studies. We also note that a great number of communities are constantly suffering from a lack of Francophone teachers.

Courses of Action

That the government of Canada create a federal Department of Education.

That this Department be responsible, among other things, for ensuring national cohesion for framework programs, and the respect of French-language education standards across the country.

That the government of Canada proceed with the review of the Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP).

That this review guarantee that the funds allocated for French-language and immersion education be used for those purposes, ensure transparency and accountability regarding the use of these funds, and impose sanctions on provinces that don't comply.

That the government of Canada lighten the student debt burden.

The government's measures should include offering scholarships to students leading post-secondary studies in French in Canada.

That the government of Canada, along with provincial and territorial governments, foster an increase of Francophone teachers in French, immersion, and French as a second language programs.

We suggest two methods to reach this course of action:

- Offer grants to erase student debt or reimburse a sum equivalent to undergraduate tuition fees for those who commit to teaching in a French-language school for a given period of time;
- Launch mobility scholarships allowing Francophone teachers to accept a position with a French-language teaching institution far from their place of learning or place of residence.

We Recognize

- The increase of base funding for organizations dedicated to promoting and supporting programs for minority language teaching (Official Languages Action Plan 2018-2023).
- The creation of a micro-grant program for identity-building activities (Official Languages Action Plan 2018-2023).
- New investments seeking to develop and support teacher recruitment strategies for minority language schools (Official Languages Action Plan 2018-2023).
- The increase of funds available in the Canadian Student Grant program for students from low- and middle-income families (Budget 2019).
- The broadening of eligibility criteria for the Canadian Student Grant program in order to increase the number of students receiving non-repayable assistance (Budget 2019).
- Investments to update the Canada student loans program (Budget 2019).

In the Blind Spot

- Although revenue from tuition fees has tripled since 2001⁸, the total amount of public student debt in Canada now exceeds 28 billion dollars.⁹
- A lack of transparency persists regarding Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP) funding, making it impossible to actually know if the funds allocated by the federal government to provinces and territories for minority language teaching are truly used to that effect.

⁸ Joel Harden, *Le bien-fondé du renouvellement de l'éducation postsecondaire*, Centre canadien de politiques alternatives, mars 2017, page 5.

⁹ Fédération canadienne des étudiantes et étudiants, *L'économie politique de l'endettement étudiant au Canada*, avril 2017, page 3.