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EMSB document refusing to recognize Quebec as nation draws ire from politicians

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A sign for the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) is shown at its administration building in Montreal, Sunday, May 3, 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Canada and around the world. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Graham Hughes

A resolution by the English Montreal School Board asking the Quebec government withdraw Bill 96 has drawn the ire of Premier Francois Legault, Bloc Leader Yves-François Blanchet and Montreal mayoral candidate Denis Coderre.

The EMSB is contesting the legality of Bill 96 and calling on Ottawa to refer it to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Bill 96 is the Legault government's proposed **reforms to the province's language law** (<https://montreal.citynews.ca/2021/05/13/quebec-tables-revamp-of-french-language-law-toughens-rules-for-businesses-schools/>). It is the province's attempt to amend the country's supreme law by affirming Quebec as a nation with French as its official language.

The legislation has stirred up debate as experts worry that constitutional acknowledgment of a distinct society would push courts to interpret laws differently in Quebec or hand it greater provincial power.

In its resolution (<https://www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/articles/emsb-calls-on-quebec-government-to-withdraw-bill-96>), the EMSB says "Quebec is not a "nation". It never has been. ... The only precise word to use regarding Quebec's reality is 'province.'

"If English is to be respected, then we – those who are English speakers – must demand that all those who use our language do so correctly and with respect."

EMSB Commissioner Joe Ortona, who was dropped as a candidate in the upcoming municipal election as a result of the document, said he would recommend to fellow EMSB commissioners that they redact the resolution and delete the challenge to Quebec's nationhood.

Ortona said the EMSB would "continue to urge the Quebec government to withdraw Bill 96."

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(<https://montreal.citynews.ca/2021/05/26/singh-says-quebecs-proposed-constitutional-change-important-but-symbolic/>)
- **Quebec premier argues province has power to amend constitution in letter to Trudeau**
(<https://montreal.citynews.ca/2021/05/15/quebec-premier-argues-province-has-power-to-amend-constitution-in-letter-to-trudeau/>)

Blanchet was the first to react to the document Tuesday morning, changing his schedule to specifically address it. He called it an “insult and “disrespectful.”

Mayoral candidate Coderre responded to the resolution by dropping Ortona as a candidate for Ensemble Montreal in the Nov. 7 election.

Ortona said he was disappointed by Coderre's decision.

“In looking ahead, I will continue to speak out in favour of an inclusive Quebec where the use of French is promoted,” Ortona said in an EMSB statement. “At the same time, I will not back down from promoting the interests and the views of English-speaking Quebecers.

“As for my candidacy in the Loyola district, it was not by accident that I chose to run there. My reputation as a defender of English rights was well known by Ensemble Montréal. Many supporters want me to stay in the race as an independent and I am now in reflection where that is concerned.”

WATCH: Premier Legault's response to EMSB resolution (answer in French begins at 23:46)

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Later Tuesday, in a press conference dedicated to stopping the spread of COVID-19 in Quebec, Premier Legault called the EMSB a “radical group” that was “disconnected” from the province.

“Even at the federal level, they recognize Quebec is a nation,” said Legault. “I was happy to see Denis Coderre respond by sacking his candidate from the EMSB.”

With files from Patrice Bergeron, La Presse Canadienne

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