



# Federalism is the political foundation of Canada's success

OPINION

Federalism is anathema to the Quebec separatist movement precisely because it works so well.



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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau leads Canada's premiers to a news conference during the First Ministers Meeting in Vancouver, B.C., Thursday, March. 3, 2016. JONATHAN HAYWARD/CP.

Foreign commentators are saying what we have known for a long time: Canada is a great country. The celebration of Canada's sesquicentennial provides an opportunity for reflection on the meaning of our nation, an opportunity to take pride in a country we have built — together.

The true greatness of a nation is not measured in economic statistics, nor displayed in military might, but rather in how well a nation takes care of its population, particularly the less fortunate. A millionaire can live well anywhere. The chance at the good life is far more problematic for everyone else. Government cannot guarantee that everyone experiences happiness, but it can commit itself to ensuring for everyone the right to pursue a happy life.

Health and education are crucial to any chance at that happy life. Few countries do what Canada does in this regard for everyone living within its borders. Canada fundamentally believes that health and education are not businesses, but rather vital human imperatives that must be provided as social entitlements. Canada's strong free market economy generates the wealth that makes these social entitlements possible.

The greatness of a nation is also revealed in the character of its people. The hallmarks of the Canadian character are humility, respect and understated pride in our country, a vast land of magnificent landscapes and boundless promise for its people. A nation of this sort does not spring up randomly. We are a country guided by historically shared values where differences of opinion are resolved by dialogue and the search for common ground. The political foundation of the Canadian success story is federalism. Federalism is anathema to the Quebec separatist movement precisely because it works so well. Though there is no denying the importance of the French language, there is more to Quebec than language.

The so-called defenders of "Quebec values" come up short in defining what values they claim to be defending. The true values of Quebec are not difficult to discern or define.

Quebec is no more and no less a liberal democratic society sharing the company of other liberal democratic societies that occupy this planet, to the envy of people living in states that are neither liberal nor democratic. A liberal democratic society believes in freely elected governments dedicated to the rule of law and respect for individual rights. The sovereign governed in a federal liberal democracy decide that the government's mandate to enable people to live freely and pursue the good life is best achieved by fragmenting political power. The jurisdiction to get things done is divided between two governmental authorities, national and local, neither one being the subordinate of the other, each answerable to their respective electorates — a parity of shared power. The governments of Canada and Quebec have been getting things done this way for 150 years. How government gets things done is tempered by a constitutional guarantee of respect for individual rights. Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms ensures respect for individual rights and in effect diverts power from our governments to the governed. The safeguarding of individual rights is entrusted to our independent courts. A unique bilingual judiciary has existed in Quebec since Confederation. To this day, judges and lawyers speak in seamless flow the languages of choice of civil litigants or criminally accused persons in the course of legal proceedings. Federalism has seen us through two world wars, the Great Depression, the Quiet Revolution, the October Crisis and two divisive Quebec referendums. The separatist alternative garners little political relevance in the Quebec of today. There is a reason why federalism has endured for 150 years in Quebec and will continue to sustain the Quebec of tomorrow. Because federalism is a good idea — and Canada is a great country.

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