The International Congress of French-Speaking Nations was a resounding success, probably exceeding the expectations of those responsible for putting it together. After all, inducing the representatives of various nations throughout the world to come to Lafayette for a meeting was quite a project! But it worked out fine, and the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana deserves plaudits from all Louisianians interested in true bilingualism for sponsoring an historic venture.

We say “true bilingualism” because there have been times in the past when token approaches were made to revive the moribund French language in Louisiana. It will take more than stop-gap measures, provincial thinking, and sectional rivalries to bring about a renaissance of la belle langue Française dans la Louisiane.

This is really what the Congress was all about, an in-depth, significant, multi-lateral approach toward once again raising French to the honored position it once held here and still holds throughout the world. It is indeed incongruous that in Louisiana, a state steeped in French tradition, history and culture, the language itself is less esteemed than in parts of the world where the French ethos is completely foreign. The Congress went a long way toward re-establishing the highly respected and dignified position once held by the French language in our midst.

We have often pointed out editorially the obvious benefits of a bilingual state—cultural, educational, economic. Just as important, it’s a question of pride in one’s heritage, an undefinable feeling yet one that plays a large part in the lives of a people.

We are happy to note that Gov.-Elect Edwards has pledged to continue the program begun by CODOFIL, a program that touches the lives of every citizen of Louisiana. The rebirth of the French language is above factional politics. Because of mistakes committed generations ago, the French language was almost dealt a death blow, and a quick recovery is not expected. The important thing is that remedial steps have been taken and, in time, French will again be a living language throughout the state.

It was emphasized during the Congress that support at the local level was absolutely necessary if a French renaissance was to become a reality. Many school boards in Louisiana have taken steps to institute the teaching of French in their schools. Not enough of these schools are in Acadiana, the very heart of the French-speaking populace. Perhaps public and school officials in these areas take the language for granted, but such an attitude will only hasten the extinction of French. We would strongly recommend that more area school boards institute the teaching of French, beginning in the earliest grades and extending through the course of secondary education.

Over and over, this was the thesis of the speakers at the Congress. When all the speeches were done, all the panelists finished with their discussions, all the mutual compliments exchanged, all the crawfish eaten, and all the parliamentary and social amenities observed, the consensus reached was that the French language can be reborn in Louisiana and that the sooner we start, the sooner will we reap the benefits.