Roy Urges A Bilingual State

(Special to The Town Talk)
JONQUIERE, Canada — Bilingual Louisiana State Board of Education member Anthony "Sookie" Roy of Marksville said in the heartland of French-speaking North America Sunday night that states and nations which remain unilingual "will have a hard time making it in the world that is presently taking shape."

"That is why Louisiana is so fortunate to have a basis of a million people already speaking a second language on which to build a bilingual state within a couple of generations," he said at a reception in this completely French-speaking locality 125 miles north of Quebec City. "If it chooses not to do so then it will be missing a unique opportunity to be at the forefront of progress in regard to its individual citizens, who will be more advanced human beings because of their bilingualism, and in regard to the nation as a whole which will shortly need hundreds of thousands of bilingual personnel to run its affairs both at home and abroad."

This decision, however, should be made by the people themselves, Roy said. "Do the people of a given parish want French in their schools or don't they?" he asked. "If they do then they will sign a petition in favor of a program that will do the job. If they don't then they will not sign such a petition."

But Roy said the people of his state "will not get the chance to let their wishes be known if some school officials of some French-speaking southern parishes succeed in their attempts to block the bill at present before the legislature designed specifically to petition the people on this very question."

The bill provides that on a petition by 25 percent of the registered voters of a given parish the school board of that parish will implement a program of French instruction from the first grade upwards, Roy explained. The bill also provides that upon written request to the school principal by the parents any child can be exempted from the program, he said.

He said the president-elect of the Louisiana School Board Assn., a Cajun (Acadian) from a predominantly French-speaking parish, was quoted by the Times-Picayune of New Orleans as saying that the bill is "vicious."

"If the legislature doesn't pass this 'vicious' bill we will never know what it was the people of Louisiana wanted," Roy said.

His remarks, all in French, were made while presenting certificates of appreciation signed by Edwin Edwards, Louisiana's French-speaking governor, and by James Domegeaux, chairman of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), to 18 teaching assistants from the Jonquiere region who taught French in Louisiana during the past school year upon a request made by the governor to Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa on a state visit last September.

The presentations were made during a reception welcoming a hundred Louisiana students and teachers who arrived earlier in the day for a five-week program of intensive French study.

Another 50 arrived at the same time in Riviere-du-Loup, 110 miles northeast of Quebec City and still another hundred across the ocean at Angers and Montpellier in France.

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