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Institute of Marriage and Family Canada marks fifth anniversary

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When the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada (IMFC) set up shop five years ago in Ottawa, same-sex marriage had recently become law and the Conservatives had won their first election victory.

As the IMFC marked its 5th anniversary, executive director Dave Quist recalled how many thought that once marriage was redefined, there was nothing left to do in the shoring up of traditional marriage and family.

But the IMFC forged ahead with research on such issues as the effect of cohabitation on family stability and the impact of divorce on children, Quist said. He stressed the need for continued research into the hard social science data that could encourage government policy that would uphold strong marriages and families.

He noted that today courts are looking into whether prohibitions against polygamy are constitutional and cohabitation is on the rise.

Several federal politicians, including a present and two former cabinet ministers, were on hand to thank the think tank for its contribution to the public policy debate.

"This organization has helped fill an enormous vacuum on so many issues," said Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, who was among several federal politicians who attended the event.

Kenney said elected officials need to hear the kind of research the IMFC provides. He noted how the family, as Edmund Burke had described, was one of the basic little "platoons" that forms the bulwark of human liberty. He noted the family exists before the state, but that it has been too easy for governments to lose sight of that truth.

He noted the family is the society social program for daycare because it operates on the principle of self-giving, "a principle no government and no state can emulate."

Kenney pointed out how many organizations seem to be outliers when they first come on the scene, but their research becomes accepted wisdom in a few decades. He warned that important research does not influence fundamental policy debates overnight.

Former Human Resources Minister Monte Solberg spoke of how the budget for his department was \$91 billion a year and is probably around \$100 billion now. He had 26,000 employees. "It's very hard to limit what governments can competently do," he said.

Governments are "good at cutting checks, but hopeless at complex social problems," he said.

After 40 years of trying to solve problems, it is clear governments "lack the intimate concern and self-giving love when it comes to dealing with people," he said. His work "confirmed his skepticism about the ability of government to replace family."

Before the IMFC provided the research, "we knew people were wrong but we couldn't present the evidence," he said.

Solberg said that Conservatives have been "allergic" to dealing with issues such as poverty and homelessness, but how important it is to reinvigorate civil society to take a role in addressing those problems.

"We have a responsibility to reach out and help people," he said. But he warned of the huge financial repercussions of 100s of billions of debt.

Liberal MP John McKay noted how some have raised questions about whether faith groups should try to influence public policy. He has been working with his party and with faith groups to stress the legitimate role faith groups have in the public square. He congratulated IMFC for doing a good job of finding language and research material that "assert a legitimacy in the marketplace of ideas."

Former Liberal cabinet minister David Kilgour noted that facts are often contested and that there is research to support almost any point of view. But he stressed that "bad public policy is the result of lack of good public policy research."

Quist said the IMFC's next five years will focus on several key areas impacting the family, including education and demographics.. "We're all getting older," he said, noting that it will not be long before there are only two or three taxpayers supporting every one retiree. "That's not sustainable."

Demographics will also affect a labor shortage with impacts on issues such as euthanasia and palliative care. The impact on the family will be immense, he said.

The IMFC will also focus on family finances as the rising cost of debt creates social uncertainty and the high cost of living prompts couples to put off having children, he said.

Two high profile writers also highlighted the importance of IMFC's work.

National Post Columnist Barbara Kay spoke of how her journey as a columnist covering social trends led her to focus on the ideology that animated so much of public policy discourse in Canada, and permeated so many Canadian institutions, including governments, the judiciary, the media and education. She said they are "all drinking from the same ideological well: Marxist imbued feminism."

Kay said policies such as no-fault divorce, the treating of common law marriages as equivalent to marriage, gay unions and the rise of single-motherhood could all be "attributed to feminism," as could "transgressive sexuality and the early sexualization of children."

Feminism includes a conspiracy theory that "scapegoats heterosexual men," she said.

The culture is shifting rightward, she said, and families are now becoming a central focus, even if most of the media still treats feminisms "anti-human nostrums as received wisdom."

She sees reasons for optimism. "The women's studies classes are emptying out," she said. "Educated middle class women want husbands and children and they don't want to feel guilty about it."

Kay noted, however, that while educated women are marrying before having children, poorer women "have been many generations removed" from the successful formula of first getting an education, then marrying, and then getting pregnant. But postponing pregnancy has also led to a boom in fertility clinics and women are not being told of how their fertility rapidly declines after age 30, she added.

William Gairdner, author of 10 books, including *The Trouble With Canada - Still*, spoke on the importance of social bonding within the family and its role in creating a stable and free civil society. He warned that statism seeks to dissolve the "privilege of the private family" and make all private privileges public, to transfer one's bonds to the state.

Social bonding is fragmenting into individual units, he said. The solution to the social fragmentation is to reinforce what he called the Four "F"s: freedom, family, free enterprise and faith.