

Good Afternoon Everyone

I am pleased to bring greetings and speak on behalf of Mayor Jyoti Gondek who unfortunately could not be here.

But firstly, in the spirit of reconciliation, I would like to acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

I want to also recognize that **today is the 10<sup>th</sup> Neighbor Day in Calgary** - a day when we celebrate the incredible outpour of support and generosity of neighbors following the 2013 floods. Each year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of June, we continue to celebrate one of the things that makes Calgary such a great city – **our strong and caring communities**.

Today is a very busy day and I have nine events to be at ..... so my apologies that I could spend more time at this Symposium to hear from the other speakers as Languages is one of the topics I am very interested in.

This symposium is a much needed reminder on the importance of **learning international and heritage languages**.

Language is not just for communicating – it's a **crucial tool** to build **strong identity and belonging**. Learning a second language enhances our economic development and trade opportunities, diplomacy, community outreach and engagement.

Languages tells stories .... stories of **our history, culture and heritage**.

Language learning benefits students and teaches them to become **multilingual citizens**. Canada's multilingualism is a role model around the world. Learning a second language builds **cross cultural skills** and **connects people globally**.

It is often said that **change your language and you change your thoughts**.

I speak **4 languages** fluently – English, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu.

I came to Canada as a teenager and while I did face challenges in assimilation like everyone else, **having the ability to speak several languages** helped me start conversations and make lifelong friends from different backgrounds.

The familiarity of common languages helped me create trust and connectivity. **This was fundamental in my first few years as a new immigrant.**

While assimilation in a new culture is great, the downside is the loss of language with every new generation in that country. I communicate in Punjabi and English with my sons and I know their depth in Punjabi language is not the same as mine.

That is why organizations like **Southern Alberta Heritage Language Association** are so important in supporting the teaching and preserving of international and heritage languages beyond the family – including Indigenous languages that are also facing a huge loss due to mainstream languages.

The work you do with community language schools is crucial to provide the continuity of multiple languages between **home, school and community.**

Governments and businesses understand this and we are now seeing how communications are targeted in commonly spoken languages due to the **social and economic** influence and impact of our multicultural societies.

The City of Calgary 311 offers support in **more than 200 languages** and our website can be accessed through **over 130 languages.**

I want to share a great story of success that many of you might know about but I want to still share it as this is **such a good story on the importance of multi languages.**

My Ward – **Ward 5 is the most linguistically diverse** Ward in Calgary.

The neighborhoods of upper Northeast Calgary struggled through the **worst infection rates in the province** because many people worked in **front line jobs like trucking, taxi, retail, health care** and others.

Through the concerted efforts of hundreds of staff and volunteers from the City, Province, local non-profits, grass roots organizations and faith places, **Northeast Calgary ended with the highest vaccination rate among those eligible – 99.3%. The highest in the country!**

One of the key reasons this happened was due to the **provision of information in multiple languages** simplified through different modes of tradition and non-traditional communication to convince people to roll up their sleeves.

This to date remains **one of the best examples** in recent times on the power of using multiple languages to create impact.

A quote I once read beautifully summarizes the essence of languages ..... **Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things but learning another way to think about things.**

Thank you for the invitation and I wish you have a very productive symposium.  
I look forward to staying in touch and learning about your continued successes.