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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 28 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is in a hybrid format. Members will attend in person or with the Zoom application.

[*Translation*]

In light of the recommendations from health authorities regarding the pandemic, all those attending the meeting in person should follow the directives of the Board of Internal Economy. I thank the members in advance for their co-operation.

[*English*]

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me. Note that we may need to suspend for a few minutes, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, May 30, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

I would now like to welcome the first witnesses.

Today we have Linda Cardinal, Associate Vice-Rector of Research at the Université de l'Ontario français, and Stéphanie Chouinard, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Royal Military College of Canada and Queen's University.

Welcome, ladies.

The meeting will be somewhat shortened as a result of the voting. You nevertheless have five minutes for your opening statements. Then we will begin the first round of questions.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating in the meeting by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike. When speaking,

please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute to prevent echoing in the room.

As previously mentioned, you will be allowed a maximum of five minutes.

We will begin with Linda Cardinal.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal (Associate Vice-Rector of Research, Université de l'Ontario français, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages and colleagues, good afternoon to you all.

Thank you for this invitation to present my analysis of Bill C-13. Since I believe you have received my brief, I will skip immediately to my conclusions.

There are significant deficiencies in the way official languages are managed across the country. One need only think of the problems government employees encounter working in French in the federal public service, the various processes for appointments to positions where French-language proficiency is of secondary importance and the Canadian government's failures in francophone immigration, particularly regarding international francophone students. I believe that Bill C-13 could help meet these challenges and that the next phase will be to prepare regulations, directives and programs for its implementation. For these reasons, I encourage you to pass Bill C-13 without delay.

In my presentation, I would also like to draw to your attention a few administrative recommendations, including proposals for essential measures to assist in implementing Bill C-13. These recommendations are designed to institutionalize official languages leadership to a greater degree within the federal government.

Before discussing my recommendations, I would note that, for nearly five years now, all government and non-government actors have worked toward modernizing the Official Languages Act. The bill before you represents a reasonable compromise among all stakeholders. It includes necessary and realistic objectives for advancing official languages, including French, across the country. For example, it acknowledges the vulnerability of French, the necessity of francophone immigration targets and the use of French as a scientific language. It could help bring about the cultural change needed within the federal government by providing support for the French language and the francophonie.

However, we can't wait for a perfect statute before changing official languages culture across the country. As Machiavelli would have it, no law will ever deliver us completely from differences of opinion.

Furthermore, government employees, not members of Parliament, will do the work of implementing Bill C-13. They must be given realistic objectives with which to do their work. As I said earlier, they will be responsible for developing regulations, tools and programs in order to alter practices on the ground. This is why I oppose the idea, proposed by certain stakeholders, of housing a central agency in the Treasury Board. In my opinion, that proposal runs counter to the rules of the federal government. The coordination mechanism proposed in the bill is more reasonable and realistic. The Treasury Board can't deliver programs, and it can't have authority over the policies and programs of other departments, but it can verify and monitor the administrative requirements of the other departments.

Such a major transfer of responsibility for official languages to the Treasury Board would delay implementation of Bill C-13 and even block it in certain instances, given the natural disinclination within a large organization to welcome change. Instead, I hope that the departments, including Canadian Heritage, the Treasury Board Secretariat, Justice Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Statistics Canada, the Privy Council Office and Employment and Social Development Canada, in particular, its work program, will continue co-operating to establish a coordination and accountability framework for the implementation of Bill C-13. Based on the action plan, the Canadian government can also establish timelines, a calendar for implementing its objectives and measurable targets.

I recommend striking an official languages and francophone committee within cabinet whose role would be to establish a mechanism for consulting the ministers who have responsibilities for official languages and the francophonie, to convey clear directives to those persons with respect to federal-provincial agreements and to review the process for appointing bilingual persons to executive positions.

Bill C-13 includes realistic and reasonable targets and strikes a reasonable balance between the principles of formal and substantive equality, principles that the francophone minority communities have long demanded, particularly recognition of the vulnerability of French as an official language relative to English and the importance of giving the Official Languages Act a restorative character in addition to confirming the principle of substantive equality.

● (1615)

The reference to the principle of substantive equality in Bill C-13 confirms that the advancement of equality between English and French in Canada includes the use of differentiated means, particularly in order to meet the needs of the minorities...

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Ms. Cardinal, but please conclude your presentation.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Of course.

To sum up, I propose that the Canadian government intervene in immigration in particular. More specifically, I recommend that it in-

troduce a francophone immigration program, distinct from other immigration programs, in which the spaces allotted to that program would be included.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Cardinal.

Ms. Chouinard, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Royal Military College of Canada and Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, members of the committee and colleagues.

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

Many of you have heard me speak in previous consultations on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, an important project that should enjoy bipartisan support but that, for many reasons, has been mishandled for the past five years.

I have also written on the subject in newspapers and news magazines across the country in recent years. For the members of the committee, I have sent the clerk a short press review in which I explore in greater depth a number of aspects of the former Bill C-32 and Bill C-13, which I won't have time to address in my statement, such as the role of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and that of French Canadian civil diplomacy. However, I urge you to take a look at it should it interest you.

For the sake of concision, I will focus on three points this afternoon.

First, allow me to say a few words about the principle of substantive equality, which underlies many aspects of the bill.

For the first time, we now have an express legislative acknowledgement of a principle that has long been at work in official languages governance: to achieve equality between the official languages, one of them merits different support, particularly with regard to minority institutions, which play a completely different role than that performed by institutions in a majority sociolinguistic context. This is a major advance in the official language field, one that guarantees, in particular, that the legislative framework will reflect the interpretation of the Supreme Court, where this principle has been relied upon since the late 2000s.

However, there is an abiding misunderstanding in the general population of the meaning of substantive equality, judging by the reactions the bill has triggered in English Canada. There is a genuine need for public education on the meaning and implications of substantive equality to prevent the new version of the Official Languages Act from being interpreted as a mere rejection of the official and equal status of English and French. I think there's an urgent need for clarification in the current political context in order to prevent potential backlash against the French language outside Quebec.

Second, I want to note the federal government's wish to commit to enhancing opportunities for access to post-secondary education in the minority official language. For years now, this field has been in a crisis that peaked with the Laurentian University debacle in 2021. We all know how positively the vitality of our communities is affected when minority youth have a chance to pursue their studies beyond grade 12 in their own language.

The federal government commendably wishes to be part of the solution so these institutions can pull back from the edge of the abyss and at last plan for the future. However, it is critical that the federal government not release the provinces from their responsibility to invest in what is still their area of jurisdiction.

Your committee heard me discuss this topic last June, nearly one year ago to the day, during your study on federal support for minority post-secondary institutions. I felt the point was important enough for me to repeat it. In the long term, a disengagement by the provinces from minority post-secondary education could potentially mean those institutions would have to start over from scratch. We must ensure that federal government investment remains foundational.

Lastly, with regard to proposed section 44.1, which concerns francophone immigration, I find the language used in the bill disappointing. I don't think it goes far enough toward making the necessary changes to the policies and practices of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in the Canadian francophonie that are unacceptable and, in some instances, even disgraceful. We are already living with the result of nearly two decades of inadequate action in the field, and the target set in 2003 is so far from ever being met that the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada felt it had to sound the alarm this past winter. The new Official Languages Act should be decidedly more directive so it can ensure that we not only meet actually restorative targets that enable us to maintain the demographic weight of francophones outside Quebec relative to the majority society, but also that we can provide our communities with the support they need to welcome and support these newcomers appropriately.

In conclusion, despite these remarks, I would like to leave you with a final message: don't let perfection be the enemy of the good. Here we are 34 years after the last amendment of the Official Languages Act, and it is high time we saw a modernization of the act. Although it can definitely be improved, Bill C-13 would be a major step toward securing the future of English and French in Canada.

It is my hope that, in 2022, we can leave our mark on the history of the official languages with an act that has at last been modernized and that will finally help us move forward to a future in which the two official languages are more strongly supported and defended across the country.

Thank you. I will be pleased to continue the discussion.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cardinal and Ms. Chouinard.

We will now begin the first round of questions. This time, each party will have six minutes, during which you may explain your positions at greater length.

I give the floor to Mr. Lehoux for six minutes.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

My first question is for you, Ms. Cardinal. The minister appointed you to a committee that makes recommendations to her. Earlier I sensed some pressure from you to expedite the process. I find this situation a bit peculiar.

How do you view it all, Ms. Cardinal?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: In other words, you're asking me if I have a conflict of interest here.

I sat on the minister's expert panel on Bill C-32, not on the panel on Bill C-13. Don't be my parrot. What I'm saying is that my impression is that Bill C-13 is a very promising compromise that—

Mr. Richard Lehoux: That's fine. That answers my question, Ms. Cardinal. Never mind, I'm not worried; I'm just asking questions.

Your expert panel recommended to the government that a private business should be able to opt for the federal or provincial language regime.

Should it or shouldn't it? Why would a private business be able to choose one of those two regimes?

• (1625)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: It seems to me you're referring to federally regulated private businesses in sectors such as communications, transportation, banking, agriculture and so on. However, I think the question should be put to the minister. There will be two regimes, but at the same time...

Mr. Richard Lehoux: But I'm putting it to you, Ms. Cardinal.

How do you see it? If the answer is yes, why is that the case? If it's no, tell me why you're giving me that answer.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: To whom should I say yes or no? I don't understand your question.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I'm talking about the choice given to a private business. Some businesses in my industry are concerned about this. They don't really know where to turn.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I think we have an interesting case study here. Ms. Petitpas Taylor will have to talk to Ms. LeBel to determine whether to enter into an agreement with the Quebec government on all aspects pertaining to the application of the new Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act. I think that would be the best course.

If businesses choose one regime over another, that's their choice. It's a choice that's up to businesses. If you want to avoid any confusion or difficulty, it seems to me an agreement should be reached between the Quebec and federal governments. That wouldn't be done within the parameters of this act, but it could be done later through dialogue between the federal and provincial governments.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Ms. Cardinal.

Ms. Chouinard, you mentioned training problems during your presentation. I'd like you to tell us more about that aspect.

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard: I imagine you want to discuss post-secondary education.

Since the committee conducted a study on post-secondary education and the underfunding of minority postsecondary institutions last summer, it's already aware of those issues. A number of post-secondary institutions, especially the Campus Saint-Jean in Alberta, the Université de Moncton in New Brunswick and more recently, Université Laurentienne in Ontario, sounded the alarm a few years ago when some 60 French-language programs were cut. I believe more than 100 of my colleagues were unceremoniously shown the door.

As you know, in the wording of part VII of this bill, the federal government commits to supporting minority and bilingual institutions. I think that's an important issue. The federal government can definitely provide foundational support to those institutions. However, it's important that the provinces not disengage entirely from this area, which it is still their jurisdiction.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Is Bill C-13 missing provisions on language clauses?

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard: It's not necessarily missing any in the text of the bill itself. We'll mainly have to see what comes later. The federal government can definitely make commitments in a piece of legislation. I think that's commendable. However, it's when the act is implemented that we'll have to ensure that the provinces are still partners and that they don't just let the federal government make all the decisions on the financial support granted to those institutions.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: With regard to French as the common language of work, you've written that Bill C-13 would transfer responsibility for implementing those rights to workers or their unions. Would you please explain that at greater length?

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard: I don't think I wrote that.

The Chair: That will be all for the moment, Mr. Lehoux.

Arielle Kayabaga will ask the next questions.

You have the floor for six minutes, Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank the witnesses who are here today.

I'd like to tell Ms. Cardinal that I was at the opening of the Université de l'Ontario français. As a Franco-Ontarian, I was proud to see that. Thank you for being here today.

I'll start with you, Ms. Cardinal.

You discussed francophone immigration, which is an issue. We want to increase the levels of francophone immigration to Canada, particularly outside Quebec. As we all know, most of the francophones in the world live in Africa. Given that context, what other recommendations would you add with regard to Bill C-13?

• (1630)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you very much for your question, and congratulations on your election.

I don't recommend that the government add anything to the bill. I want it to be passed as soon as possible because the longer we wait, the faster the communities decline. In other words, the longer you delay its adoption, the more the francophone communities decline. We have to act every day if we want to avoid declining. That's my general message.

However, a distinct francophone integration program has to be established. I mentioned a francophone economic immigration program in my brief, but that's a mistake. The immigration policy provides for an economic immigration program and programs for specific immigrant classes. So I don't see why we couldn't do the same thing for the Canadian francophone: establish a francophone integration program distinct from all other programs. The spaces allocated to that program would be included in the plan for immigration levels, and the program should be part of the forthcoming policy. That's essential.

We could introduce pilot projects, decide to set targets that are less ambitious at the federal level but very ambitious locally in places such as Moncton, Ottawa, Toronto and Saint-Boniface. We could also establish pilot projects with teams that would oversee the ongoing development of those programs in targeted regions.

There is one thing we mustn't overlook, and we've discussed it with you on numerous occasions: first, we have to consider how to align this policy with others. I'm thinking in particular of the general immigration policy and foreign affairs policy. We lack chancelleries, embassies and staff on the ground in Africa. We only have one office for all Africans wishing to come to Canada to study, among other things. We have to expand our services. I'm not the only person requesting this. People are asking for the same thing in other sectors where people work in international relations. We have to increase the number of opportunities offered to people who want to apply to come to Canada, particularly as international students. There is one single office, and it's located in Dakar. It may not be enough, particularly when we know that people come from across Africa. And Paris isn't the place where African students can file their applications either.

So this is quite an important aspect. We must establish ambitious targets. We need to reach for the sky on this and ensure that the francophone immigration policy is harmonized with all other issues. Canada will thus be able to meet its francophone immigration objectives, particularly with regard to students.

We have a basic contradiction right now. We ultimately want African francophones who come to study in Canada to help offset our labour shortage, but, at the same time, we tell them they have to return to their country immediately after completing their education. We impose all kinds of restrictions and then tell them they can come and study here if ever Canada might be part of their career plans. So there are some major policy contradictions here.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I agree with you: this bill has to be passed very soon.

You mentioned that the bill was realistic. What are the current deficiencies that this bill would correct?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: All bills have deficiencies. I don't want to underscore the deficiencies; I want to emphasize what's good.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I meant existing deficiencies that this bill would help correct.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Oh, I see.

I'm one of the many people who said that the objectives of the Official Languages Act of 1988 were excellent. The problem is in the implementation. In addition, the government has equipped itself with tools that don't correspond to the objects of the act. For example, we had to wait 13 years for the government to start implementing part VII of the act. Once it had started, it established action plans, but the action plans were subject to the ideologies of the political parties, as a result of which their directions constantly changed. It's very difficult in the circumstances to establish measurable objectives that reveal the impact of...

• (1635)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Ms. Cardinal, I have only a few seconds left. I'm going to let you complete your thought, but I wanted to thank you for understanding the importance of supporting and adopting this bill.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you, but I won't be expanding on the subject. I'm going to give others an opportunity to ask questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cardinal.

Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga.

The second vice-chair of the committee, Mario Beaulieu, will be the next speaker.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Cardinal, you've previously written that "the future of French in North America is being determined in Quebec because it is the only francophone state on the continent. Its survival will likely depend on either the creation of a sovereign francophone state or a redefinition of Canadian federalism in which the territorial principle plays a larger role."

Do you still think that?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Yes, absolutely.

I know only a fool never changes his mind, and I know I can change mine, but I'm entirely comfortable with what I wrote. What's more, Mr. Beaulieu, since you quote the same passage every time I appear before this committee, I'm starting to be familiar with it.

I absolutely agree that the future of French is being determined in Quebec, particularly in Montreal. That's the first thing.

Second, I think that Canadian federalism has to be as flexible as possible because we know that, when federalism allows national minorities or minority nations a little flexibility, societies are more democratic. You can see that around the world.

Third, the territorial principle is definitely important. The 19th century theoreticians such as Otto Bauer and Karl Renner always said that it's the territory that's important for minorities. In our case, we have trouble with the territory, of course, but we also have the principle of institutional completeness. In francophone minority communities, we need institutions that are managed by and for francophones. That's what has to be reinforced. As regards positive measures and institutional completeness, the purpose of the bill is precisely to reinforce—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Ms. Cardinal. I apologize for interrupting, but we don't have much time to ask our questions.

You say there's a broad understanding on the principle of territoriality in Quebec, but if that's the case, why did the Quebec government feel compelled to submit its demands last week? It previously released a document on its broader orientations, but, except for some superficial considerations, it contains nothing on the subject. This is what Quebec is trying to do, but the government of the Canadian majority is imposing its language law and instead promoting English as an official language in Quebec.

How can you think we need to pass this bill quickly, when it doesn't meet Quebec's demands and will do nothing to reverse the decline of French in Quebec?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I don't know if I can really change your mind since you've previously said you'd vote against the bill.

I never said we were living in the best of all possible worlds. The Official Languages Act applies to the areas of federal government jurisdiction across the country. It guarantees the advancement of English and French. It should not be forgotten that the new bill acknowledges the fact that French is a vulnerable language across North America and in Canada. That includes Quebec. I think that acknowledgement constitutes major progress.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We acknowledge that principle, but what we requested was that only one of the two official languages be considered a minority language. However, that's not at all what's in Bill C-13, which still employs the concept of an official language minority to define anglophones in Quebec. Consequently, all of the federal government's actions in Quebec are designed to reinforce English there. The positive measures for French-speaking Quebec are more negative because their sole aim is to reinforce English in Quebec. If that doesn't change, the federal government will continue to be a very prominent factor in the anglicization of Quebec.

• (1640)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I don't know exactly how you want me to answer you.

First of all, this bill should be viewed as a compromise. It acknowledges that substantive equality is one of the principles that must guide the way language rights are interpreted. It recognizes the substantive equality of English and French based on the objective of the progressive equality of the two languages.

The bill could also have significant benefits for French as a scientific language in Quebec. Nothing in the bill would require the federal government to promote French as a scientific language in Quebec, quite the contrary: the federal government must promote French as a scientific language across the country.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: With respect to scientific languages, we note that 40% of federal government research grants go to anglophones, but that's beyond the scope of the Official Languages Act.

My next question is for you, Ms. Chouinard.

You've written at length about the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, which was something of a missed opportunity. I think André Laurendeau wanted special status for Quebec. That's consistent with the position of the Quebec government, which demands that Quebec alone be responsible for language planning within its borders.

Aren't we be headed for another missed opportunity under Bill C-13?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds in which to answer.

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard: Mr. Beaulieu, I think you've mistaken me for someone else. You're probably talking about Valérie Lapointe-Gagnon, who is a historian on the Campus Saint-Jean and who has written an excellent book on the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission.

I'll stop there since I only had 20 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chouinard.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ashton from Manitoba for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us today.

My first question is for Ms. Chouinard.

The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne criticized the official languages in education program in its presentation to the committee. That program doesn't fund institutions based on their mission, but rather by project, and does so with mandatory matching contributions from the provinces.

Mr. Normand noted that it would be constitutional to enter into agreements directly with the educational institutions in order to provide them with better funding because that would meet the federal government's mandate under part VII of the Official Languages Act.

Ms. Chouinard, you appeared before the committee a little more than a year ago to tell us about the deficiencies in funding for post-secondary educational institutions. You explained that post-secondary education in francophone communities across Canada was in crisis and that the federal government needed to step in to resolve it. We agree with what you told the committee. We think the government could play that role by including language clauses in its agreements with the provinces or by defending French and francophones' rights, as the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada proposes.

What do you think of the FCFA's proposal to add language clauses to the bill and to define the federal government's responsibilities in its agreements with the provinces?

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard: Thank you for that question.

Yes, I alluded to that appearance in my statement.

Language clauses would definitely help solve the problem and enable the federal government to make foundational investments in post-secondary education while ensuring that the provinces don't disengage and that they continue to invest as much as they should in the institutions within their own borders. The federal government could provide additional assistance to help those institutions meet the special challenges they face in minority communities.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Ms. Chouinard.

My next question is for Ms. Cardinal.

Similarly, you told the committee last year that part VII of the Official Languages Act would enable the federal government to use its spending power to ensure that francophone minority communities have access to funding. The Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023, for example, is based on that.

Would it be consistent with the federal government's mission if it entered into agreements with institutions that provide services to minority language communities?

• (1645)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you very much for that question, Ms. Ashton. In many respects, it's related to the one you asked Ms. Chouinard.

Part VII is clear. The term "positive measures" is clear and means any measure that can enhance the vitality of the linguistic minorities. Part VII must also be viewed in light of an objective to assist the minority communities, particularly those in the Canadian francophonie. The aim is to establish institutions and services that are managed by and for francophones. I think that's the measure that must be used to determine precisely whether the objective is achieved. So if you entered into agreements with institutions, universities and communities to provide services managed by and for francophones, that would really be very good.

Regulations will have to be made once the bill passes. As regards language clauses, I think that the ministers who negotiate agreements with the provinces should be instructed to ensure that they contain those clauses. Very specific instructions will have to come from the Office of the Prime Minister.

As for the action plan, support for the development of community institutions is one element that clearly emerged from the consultations. I've taken part in some consultations, and there will be more of them. The communities have a very clear idea of what they want in the way of services by and for the communities, and they must be trusted.

We've discussed student mobility scholarship programs, national student scholarship programs, international student scholarship programs and so on. The list is very long and the needs are enormous. It will be possible to take the next step once the bill is passed.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Chouinard.

You said that the immigration policy outlined in the bill was incomplete. Do you think we should use stronger language to set restorative targets for francophone communities?

In addition, if the policies fail, it will be because their implementation failed. If the bill goes further, the government will be forced to ensure that its policies are consistent with the act, hence the importance of using strong language.

Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I absolutely agree with you. What we want to add to part VII regarding immigration will tend in the right direction. However, the bill must contain stronger language given the obvious lack of action on immigration in the past 20 years. It will also have to be followed by policies that must be implemented. Consequently, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada will have to monitor francophone immigration much more closely.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Thank you very much, Ms. Chouinard and Ms. Cardinal. This isn't the first time we've had you here, and you've shared your knowledge with us with passion, as you do every time.

As I said at the outset, our meeting will be shortened as result of voting in the House of Commons. Should you have any information that you were unable to give us and that you consider relevant, please send it to the clerk, who will then forward it to us.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Contrary to what we've done in previous meetings, we haven't discussed whether we're continuing our meeting until 6:00 p.m.

The Chair: You've raised a good point.

I should have mentioned that we'll be unable to continue today's meeting beyond 5:30 p.m. owing to technical reasons. It's impossible. That's why we've shortened the time allowed for each group of witnesses, and it's now approximately 40 minutes rather than an hour.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I had some questions for Ms. Cardinal, but won't be able to ask them. Is that what you're telling me?

The Chair: Yes, unfortunately, that's what I'm saying.

Thanks once again to the witnesses.

We're going to suspend the meeting to make way for the next presenters.

• (1645) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting.

I'd now like to welcome the witnesses we'll be hearing over the next hour.

We'll begin with two representatives from the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario: the President, Mr. Carol Jolin, and the Executive Director, Mr. Peter Hominuk. We also have Mr. Martin Théberge, the President of the Société nationale de l'Acadie. All these witnesses are appearing in person, while Ms. Véronique Mallet, the Executive Director of the Société nationale de l'Acadie, will be attending virtually.

As usual, each organization will have of up to five minutes for its opening address. After that, the witnesses can give us their information by answering questions from the committee members.

To begin, I'll give the floor to the President of the Association de la francophonie de l'Ontario, for five minutes.

Mr. Carol Jolin (President, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): Mr. Chair, Hon. members, good afternoon. I am truly pleased to be able to see you in person.

I am happy to be able to join you as you study Bill C-13. I'd like to thank you for having invited the AF0, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, to testify in connection with your work. As an advocacy organization, we represent approximately 744,000 Franco-Ontarians.

With me today is the AFO's Executive Director, Mr. Peter Hominuk.

The AFO welcomed the tabling of Bill C-13 on March 1. The Franco-Ontarian community and its partners in other provinces and territories have been working for over six years to convince the government of the importance of modernizing the Official Languages Act.

As written, the bill contains interesting initiatives for our community, such as bilingualism for Supreme Court judges, a review of the act every 10 years, as is the case henceforth in Ontario, and the entrenchment of the Court Challenges Program.

As the committee carries on with its study of this bill, which is dear to the francophone communities, I would like to take this opportunity to speak about the importance of certain amendments proposed by the FCFA, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, which we support because they address important issues that we consider essential if the bill is to have the maximum possible impact once adopted.

The most important aspect has to do with the role of the Treasury Board as the central coordinating agency for the implementation of this act. The second addresses the importance of Bill C-13 in the development of Franco-Ontarian communities, particularly in inter-governmental agreements. The third and final important issue is the francophone immigration policy.

There is a fundamental problem with the act that has persisted for 50 years, and it's the fact that Canadian Heritage cannot require other government departments to do anything. We strongly recommend that the Treasury Board be designated in the bill as the only central agency responsible for implementing the act and for centralizing all coordination powers.

I want to be clear about this: we don't want to take away the policy role performed by Canadian Heritage, nor reduce its capacity to develop and administer programs. However, Canadian Heritage cannot, owing to its very nature, oversee consistent implementation of the act in all the other departments. Only a central agency can do that effectively.

The matter of incorporating the language clauses also deserves your consideration. As written, Bill C-13 does not require the negotiation of language clauses in federal-provincial-territorial agreements. And yet these clauses are essential for ensuring compliance with federal official languages commitments when funds are given to the provinces and territories. A recent example of this can be found in the federal-provincial negotiations on child care. We still don't know whether the child care program contains language clauses. Things remain somewhat vague. At the moment, the modernization of the act gives the government an opportunity to strengthen the linguistic duality and require that it be taken into consideration in agreements signed with the provinces and territories, which bodes well for all francophones in Canada.

I will end my address by talking about immigration.

Francophone immigration is one of the keys to maintaining the vitality of francophones in minority communities. The bill states that the immigration policy has to include a target and accountability measures, but objectives are not specified.

As you know, the federal francophone immigration target has not come close to being met, and has not for many years. If the trend continues, the government will be unsuccessful in meeting the 2023 target, and this will contribute hugely to the decline in the demographic weight of our community.

One of the consequences of failing to meet targets is further shrinking of the francophone and bilingual workforce. This has an impact on every sector: the private sector, the public sector, and even not-for-profit organizations, for example. There are simply not enough skilled workers to serve francophones. To counteract this shortage, immigration is essential, as is the full education continuum, from early childhood to post-secondary education.

The bill should specify the goals of the francophone immigration policy being put forward in the new version of the act. If that is done, the new act might breathe new life into our communities.

Thank you for your attention. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jolin. You've kept to your speaking time by taking only 4 minutes and 40 seconds.

I'll go now to Mr. Théberge, from the Société nationale de l'Acadie, the SNA, who has the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Théberge (President, Société nationale de l'Acadie): Good afternoon.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the SNA's vision of Bill C-13. I'm not about to give you a lengthy presentation on our organization. I will simply point out that the SNA has, since 1881, spoken out on behalf of the Acadian people, whose values and interests it defends.

Bill C-13, to amend the Official Languages Act, places an emphasis on acknowledging the uniqueness of the French fact in Canada, on establishing substantive equality between French and English, and also on the need to develop strong institutions to protect the vitality of French in Canada. We believe that this calls for the asymmetrical development of official languages to give French, which happens to be more vulnerable, the resources it needs to prosper.

This means forceful action appropriately supported by Acadian civil diplomacy, which is an important tool for the development of our communities.

Civil diplomacy contributes to identity building. When the people of Acadia see that they are represented internationally, it makes them fully aware of their imagined country. Without official state institutions, people learn about Acadia when the SNA attends international events alongside heads of state; when its flag is flown in France, Belgium, Louisiana or Switzerland; when it has a presence at the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie or UNESCO. The resulting pride and sense of identity are essential to community engagement.

Acadia's international efforts also build its legitimacy among citizens and in the anglophone majority. The summit of the Francophonie, and visits by heads of state, are all indicative of Acadia's appeal. A number of provincial ministers recently accompanied the SNA on an official mission in France. They had the opportunity to meet the President of the French Republic and some of their French counterparts, which would have been unthinkable under different circumstances. All of this enhances the appreciation of Acadia at home.

After Brexit, which made France the gateway to Europe, Acadia has also become a regional economic development partner. France's consulate general in the Atlantic provinces, which came about as a result of that country's desire to support Acadia, has been very productive in terms of partnerships between French and Canadian firms, whether they belong to francophones or anglophones. The forthcoming establishment of a French international school in the Atlantic region is another example of major investments resulting from our special relationship with France.

Civil diplomacy is also a major promotional vehicle for Acadia. Our Atlantic committee on francophone immigration promotes Acadia as a place that can host immigrants from the international Francophonie. It is an essential tool for achieving francophone immigration targets in Canada.

Similarly, our society for the promotion of Acadian artists internationally enables our artists to make a name for themselves abroad. It also puts them in touch with producers, agents and directors of venues from the international Francophonie.

Not only that, but the Office de la mobilité internationale en Acadie mentors young francophones and francophiles in an international mobility project. For example, in the 2018-2019 year alone, the office hosted two young trainees from France's civic service, while two Acadians spent a semester studying in France, and another two went on internships to Louisiana and Belgium.

All of these pivotal efforts are a challenge, because they are currently being done more as a result of enthusiasm and personal commitment than financial support. This state of affairs prevents the SNA from availing itself of opportunities that are important for the people of Acadia and Canada alike.

As for Bill C-13, the SNA is emphatic that it is important for the Canadian government to acknowledge the specific identity of Acadia and its mouthpiece, the SNA, as a special player from the standpoint of civil diplomacy, and to provide it with the resources it requires to pursue its work.

We are in the final stages of drafting our brief and will send it to you as soon as it is ready. I'd like to end by clearly summarizing the

recommendations that will be in our brief, and which are the outcome of what I have just presented to you.

We therefore recommend that the Canadian government acknowledge the distinctiveness of Acadia as a civil diplomacy stakeholder; that it recognize the SNA in its advocacy role on behalf of the Acadian nation by embodying this civil diplomacy; that it acknowledge the special relationship between France and Acadia, and that this acknowledgement be accompanied by appropriate support.

We further recommend that the Government of Canada develop a cross-functional civil diplomacy strategy that includes civil society and government sector stakeholders in various areas, including the economy, culture, education and immigration.

In addition, we recommend that civil society activities like the promotion of Acadian artists, the mobility of young Acadians, and francophone immigration to Acadia, be funded from both national and international perspectives.

Lastly, we recommend that the government support international twinning initiatives and the creation of an Acadian commission for international cooperation.

• (1700)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériège.

Great. You spoke for 4 minutes and 59 seconds.

We will now move on to the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to ask questions.

Mr. Lehoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: It's Mr. Gourde who's up now.

The Chair: Right. Sorry, I had relied on the document in front of me.

I had almost forgotten you, Mr. Gourde. You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here. Their testimony is truly important and will contribute a great deal to the preparation of our report.

Mr. Jolin, You spoke at length about the Treasury Board and the importance of having a central agency. Could you expand on that?

Mr. Carol Jolin: For some 50 years, Canadian Heritage has been responsible for implementing the act. However, Canadian Heritage doesn't have any power over the departments. Canadian Heritage does its work and makes recommendations to the departments, but they are free as to whether they will implement 25%, 50% or 100% of the recommendations, or none at all.

If we want this bill to advance the francophone cause, we clearly need an agency that has authority over these departments. In this instance, the agency in the best position is, we feel, the Treasury Board.

It's not a matter of taking away from Canadian Heritage the work that it does. It would continue to administer its programs as it has been doing very well for many years. However, we would like the Treasury Board to be solely responsible for everything surrounding the implementation of the act.

In the bill as it now stands, it includes a paragraph which would allow the Treasury Board to delegate its responsibilities. It's essential that this should not be left in the act, because the Treasury Board should be solely in charge of coordinating the act's implementation. This would mean that the departments would have to comply with the recommendations and the work being done with respect to the act, contrary to the situation we have been in for some time now.

● (1705)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You spoke to some extent about immigration in Canada. Expectations are high that immigration will increase the number of francophones in Canada. But we all know that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is having a great deal of difficulty in handling its internal problems and that the wait times are much too long.

Are we placing too much hope on our immigration system? Does the department need to be completely restructured?

Mr. Carol Jolin: There is an enormous amount of work to do, beginning with Bill C-13. The bill mentions targets and accountability, but does not contain any objectives. Nobody knows how the Department of Citizenship and Immigration will deal with it.

It's an extremely important issue. While there is a shortage of anglophone workers, it's much worse on the francophone side. In Ontario, the French Language Services Act has just been overhauled, and efforts are being made to improve services in French. However, workers are needed to provide the services. At the moment, it's undeniable that a great deal of francophone immigration is needed.

Lately, we've been hearing that international students are having a lot of trouble obtaining a visa to come and study in Canada. Ms. Cardinal spoke about many situations like this. There is only one visa office in Dakar serving something like 12 countries. If we're serious about francophone immigration, we need to begin by opening visa offices in several locations in Africa to enable people to submit an application. Once students get here, their reception needs to be facilitated and they should be offered an opportunity to remain once they have completed their studies. Currently, when people tick the box on the form indicating that they want to remain in Canada following their studies, their visa application is refused. There is a problem somewhere and it needs to be resolved. Immigration needs to be facilitated by making sure that students can come and study in Canada and that after graduating, they can remain here, preferably in Ontario. The process of obtaining permanent residence afterwards should also be facilitated.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I have a brief question for you, Mr. Jolin.

The next appointment of a judge to the Supreme Court of Canada will be critical in terms of determining the government's will to follow through on Bill C-13. Historically, the government has often appointed unilingual anglophone judges. Could the government possibly make the same mistake again?

Mr. Carol Jolin: I hope that this mistake will not be repeated. In its speech from the throne, the government committed itself to the Francophonie and it will have to take follow-up action. In the bill, this means appointing bilingual judges to the Supreme Court. That represents another opportunity to do so. I hope, for once, that they will walk the talk.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The Commissioner of Official Languages...

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In that case, I'd like to thank the witnesses. It's really been very interesting.

I'll leave my few remaining seconds to others.

The Chair: I'm sorry for being so strict, but I want everyone to have at least six minutes of speaking time.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to point out how fortunate I am in my riding to be representing the best-ever executive director of a francophone association, Mr. Hominuk. I'd like to thank him for testifying before our committee.

Mr. Jolin, as it happens, is right next door to my riding. He too does good work.

Francophones have for a long time now been discussing the Treasury Board's role. It has often been pointed out that Canadian Heritage introduced measures to encourage compliance with the Official Languages Act, but that this wasn't enough.

Ms. Cardinal said earlier that there were differences of opinion among francophones. Some thought that the role of the Treasury Board should be clearly defined to ensure that it did not delegate its powers. I'd like to give just a few examples where the Treasury Board was able to perform its role effectively while delegating some of its authority.

The Treasury Board, of course, will not go out to consult francophone communities; that's not its role. However, it is up to the Treasury Board to tell departments like Canadian Heritage, Finance and Public Safety, that they have clear responsibilities in this area. If Bill C-13 is passed, there will be some delegation of authority, but the departments will have to comply with the rules if they want their funding requests to be approved by the Treasury Board.

Have you had an opportunity to speak with experts who have worked in government about the difference between giving all the powers to the Treasury Board, and on the other hand, allowing it to delegate some of these powers?

• (1710)

Mr. Carol Jolin: We have not spoken with any experts who have worked in this area.

But to restate the position taken by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, it's extremely important for things to be clear so that we don't end up with a lottery in terms of knowing whether things are only going to be done by half, completely, or not at all. Another government, for example, might have a different stance on it, which would send us back to square one.

According to the position taken by the FCFA, with which we agree, the coordination and implementation of the act should rest entirely with the Treasury Board, and the paragraph concerning the delegation of its powers should be removed. This wouldn't mean that the Treasury Board couldn't consult departments like Canadian Heritage on the work to be done, but we firmly believe that the Treasury Board should be the central agency.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I've been meeting the same people as you. I have experience in procurement, and it was my main line of work for almost 10 years. The Treasury Board sets procurement policy, but does not actually handle the procurement process. It also has authority for human resources, but does not itself hire human resources other than its own. It would delegate this responsibility to the departments, but the departments would have to comply with policy. If they did not, it would remind them that they have failed in their duties and would accordingly not approve the requested funding.

We share the same goal, but we may have different ways of getting there. In your testimony, you clearly said that Canadian Heritage should continue to perform its role within the communities, because it is the department with that kind of experience. In principle, the Treasury Board would delegate its power to Canadian Heritage and ask it to continue its work, because Canadian Heritage has experience in consulting francophone and anglophone minority communities.

It's important. Bill C-13 won't be ready tomorrow morning, but rather in the fall. We know it now and I'm saying it publicly. When you and I are no longer here, others will have to understand future amendments to the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Carol Jolin: You mentioned the Treasury Board and it's financial authority. What we are talking about is making amendments to Bill C-13 to ensure that the Treasury Board would be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the act. If the Treasury Board already has this authority, why hasn't it made more use of it over the past 50 years?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Before, it could do so; now it will have to. That's the difference.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Right, okay.

I still feel that coordination is an important aspect. There should be as little delegation of responsibility as possible. We know what the word "delegation" implies. Our fear, because changes in government happen on a regular basis, is that if a new government were to decide that the Treasury Board should delegate more to the various departments, it could mean all responsibility for imple-

menting the act. We could end up with a situation in which the departments could do whatever they wanted.

• (1715)

Mr. Francis Drouin: On the subject of immigration, you said in your community that if the federal government was unable to meet its targets, you would entrust this responsibility to the provinces, which have their own program. Is that still your position? I agree on that too. It doesn't matter who does it, because the important thing is to achieve the objective.

Mr. Carol Jolin: That's it exactly. The objective is to increase levels of francophone immigration. The means of accomplishing that can vary.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jolin.

Mr. Beaulieu now has the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jolin, you consider it essential for the Treasury Board to be the central agency. Earlier, Ms. Cardinal said that she disagreed. Do you understand her objections? Why is it important to maintain this position?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It's the opinion of an expert in the field.

We worked closely with people who have a great deal of experience in official languages, and who are thoroughly familiar with the bill, in order to prepare the document submitted by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. The position that was decided upon, and that highly competent people advised us to adopt, was to ensure that implementation of the act be entrusted entirely to the Treasury Board.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In any event, it's clear that after 50 years of the Official Languages Act, the assimilation rate for francophones has been increasing slightly from every census to the next. In the most recent census, it was less obvious in Ontario, where the situation remained more or less stable. At any rate, a change is needed because the trend is obvious. The status of French is in decline everywhere. A major change is required.

That brings me to Mr. Théberge, from New Brunswick's Société nationale de l'Acadie.

You said that you were in agreement with an asymmetrical approach. I am pleased to hear that. Quebec has been demanding that for a long time.

How would that approach apply in Acadia? For example, one of the Quebec government's demands in connection with federal institutions advocated compatibility with the objectives of the Charter of the French Language. Even in federal institutions, French should predominate. In federally regulated businesses, managers would be required to understand French.

Where do you stand on that?

Mr. Martin Théberge: I have a rectification to make: the Société nationale de l'Acadie represents the four Atlantic provinces, and not just New Brunswick.

As for your question, I am anything but an expert on Quebec. For us, on the other hand, when we talk about asymmetry, it means regional recognition. The Acadian people, as well as their specific needs and characteristics, need to be recognized. That's why it's important for us to have an asymmetrical approach.

Beyond all of that, we have to acknowledge that we need this new act. We also need to adopt it. There have been delays, we've taken note of everything that's going on and we're very disappointed about it. For us, every day of delay is a day that amounts to a step backward, because of what's now happening. We believe that we have to move forward.

When we talk about asymmetry, it means recognition of Acadia and its distinctive characteristics.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: For example, Quebec has been asking for a differentiated approach, because Quebec anglophones have needs that are different from those of francophone minorities outside Quebec. I don't know how you view this. I do know that there have been alliances in the past.

My question is mainly for Mr. Jolin.

A recent article asked whether the federal government should separate Anglo-Quebeckers from the francophone minorities. In my view, the question should have been whether the federal government should stop separating Anglo-Quebeckers from francophones in general.

• (1720)

Mr. Martin Th  berge: I can acknowledge that needs can vary depending on where one lives in Canada. Recognizing the different needs in Quebec is not a problem for me, but as I was saying earlier, Acadia's distinctive features also need to be recognized.

We already have agreements with the F  d  ration Wallonie-Bruxelles and France. We were in France last November and met President Macron. That demonstrates that the distinctiveness of the Acadian community is recognized. There is acknowledgement of the fact that its history and development are somewhat different. There is a Consulate General of France in the Atlantic provinces, and that also sets us apart because it enables us to achieve different results. It's all about complementarity.

We also have an agreement with Quebec that recognizes the Quebec nation and the Acadian nation. We would like to move in that direction.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I am altogether in agreement with that. I consider Acadians to be a people, a nation, and that they should accordingly have international representation.

I'd like to talk a bit more about francophone immigration. Researchers have observed that among francophone immigrants to Ontario or elsewhere outside Quebec, and even among Quebeckers who settle outside Quebec, there is a trend towards assimilation that is not unlike what has been observed for francophones generally.

How do you believe this trend could be counteracted?

Mr. Carol Jolin: To begin with, we have francophone communities just about everywhere in Ontario. These are strong communities. We are making considerable efforts to welcome immigrants.

We have three welcoming communities and are making sure that immigrants feel at home in our communities and that they can find work and prosper.

Of course, the organizations need funding to be able to do this work as well as they can. They are already doing well, but the needs are enormous in all parts of the province.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jolin.

The final six minutes of speaking time go to the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

My first question is for Mr. Th  berge.

When you were a witness at a meeting held earlier this year, you spoke about the importance of Canada having a francophone immigration policy. This policy will now be built into the Official Languages Act. This was also requested of the committee by the former president of the SNA during the last Parliament.

Also, the FCFA put forward amendments to some of the wording in the bill about this policy, to ensure that the policy would aim at restoring the demographic weight of francophones in Canada.

Do you think that we should, after decades of failure following the introduction of Canada's initial immigration policy, correct the situation and return the demographic weight of francophones outside Quebec to the 2001 levels?

Mr. Martin Th  berge: The short answer is yes, definitely, one hundred per cent.

The slightly longer answer is that not only should the demographic weight of francophones be restored, but it should also not be done in isolation. Making progress on immigration can't be done solely by working on immigration. You have to factor in diplomacy, education and the needs and specifics of the regions.

So yes, a strategy to restore the demographic weight is essential, but it cannot be developed independently of everything that's already being done.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

My next question, along the same lines, is for Mr. Jolin.

In your testimony during our study of francophone immigration, you underscored the fact that the immigration policy should move in that direction.

Do you believe that clear targets need to be set to restore the demographic weight?

Mr. Carol Jolin: We do indeed need targets to restore it. At the moment, and it's been like that ever since we set a target, our demographic weight has been declining. One hundred years ago in Ontario, 10% of the population was francophone. Today it is below 5% and is continuing to decline.

Something more drastic is required. We can't continue to have an annual 2% or 2.1% francophone immigration rate in Ontario. At this pace, our demographic weight will continue to drop and put our services at risk, because we'll be told that we no longer have the critical mass needed to justify providing these services. If the francophone community is to survive, these targets must not only be met, but even be exceeded, to make up for the losses of the past 10 years.

• (1725)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Jolin, I'd like to raise another matter with you.

First, I'd like to congratulate you on having mentioned the example of federal-provincial negotiations on child care centres to illustrate the importance of language clauses and the need to make improvements to Bill C-13 in this area. It's something we've heard about on many occasions in committee meetings. I also spoke about this on the basis of what we are experiencing in our own francophone community.

We all know that for francophone communities, the provision of services in French is an ongoing struggle. The lengthy battle for the survival of Montfort Hospital is one example of this.

If the provincial-federal agreements included language clauses, do you think that would help francophone communities in Ontario and elsewhere to obtain services in French?

Mr. Carol Jolin: I believe it would indeed help to get services in French.

First and foremost, when the federal government gives a province funding for official languages, it should be required to provide services and programs in both official languages. That's essential. It would of course enable the community to receive services.

It's a bit of a vicious circle. You want the services, but you need to make sure there are people to provide them. So settling the problem of providing services in French is not limited to a single issue. It's really multidimensional.

If there were language clauses, the government would have no option but to make sure the work is done in both languages, and if the government did not want to go forward on that, it might still be possible to work with the francophone community to implement these programs. That's what we said in our brief.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a short final question for you.

When you came and testified in the spring of last year, you suggested that the modernization of the Official Languages Act should include an accountability component to ensure that the funds invested by the federal government for post-secondary education in French were indeed used for French-language education. These comments referred to everything that happened at Laurentian University.

The FCFA put forward some amendments that included francophone clauses. Do you think that could be part of the solution?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It's an important component. For the situation at Laurentian University, it's very hard to determine where the federal government funding went on French-language services and programs. We hope to receive details once the Auditor General has published her report. We met her, in fact, and asked her to look over the money provided by the federal government for French-language programs and services at Laurentian University. We are eager to see her report. The Sudbury community has serious concerns about how these amounts were used.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jolin.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

To the witnesses we received today from the AFO and the—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Given that the AFO and SNA witnesses only spent a half hour with us, I'd like the committee to look into the possibility of inviting them again, because they are important witnesses. We've already done that for other witnesses.

The Chair: They are indeed important witnesses.

Nevertheless, I'll repeat what I pointed out to members of the first group of witnesses, which is that if you can think of other information that would be essential in making your suggestions clear to us, don't hesitate to send them to our clerk, who will get them to all the committee members.

Thank you again for being here. It's not your first visit to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, but it's always very pleasant to welcome you so that we can hear what you have to tell us.

The meeting is adjourned.

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