



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 044

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, December 8, 2022

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 44 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, May 30, 2022, the committee is resuming consideration 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.

Pursuant to our routine motion, I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses completed the required login tests prior to the meeting.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses, Pablo Rodriguez and Ginette Petitpas Taylor. Thank you for being with us. We've known the people accompanying you for many years and we see them from time to time. Welcome, everyone.

The witnesses will have five minutes each for their opening statements, and a period of questions will follow. I would like to emphasize for newcomers that I am very strict about speaking time so that committee members can ask more than one question.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, who is the Minister of Official Languages, will be first to speak.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like to understand the process. Yesterday at 5:19 p.m., we received a notice of meeting stating that Mr. Rodriguez and Ms. Petitpas Taylor would be appearing here today from 11 o'clock until noon and that the second hour would be given over to the Department of Canadian Heritage people. However, the notice of meeting was amended at 8:45 this morning.

Can someone explain to us what happened between 5:19 p.m. yesterday and 8:45 a.m. today?

That's my first question. I'll have more.

The Chair: The notice of meeting was amended to reflect the fact that Ms. Petitpas Taylor will be available for both hours of the meeting, unlike Mr. Rodriguez, who will be with us for only one hour.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, we have requested on several occasions that the Minister of Canadian Heritage appear before our committee, but there has been a lot of resistance. So I don't know what's going on today.

Reading the entire motion that we unanimously adopted, I see we agreed to two meetings consisting of one hour per minister and department. That means Mr. Rodriguez should appear alone for the first hour together with the members of his team and that Ms. Petitpas Taylor should also appear alone for one hour with her employees.

Did I understand the meaning of the motion, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Literally speaking, you are right. However, Ms. Petitpas Taylor will be prepared to answer our questions for the full two hours, so for one bonus hour, as stated in this morning's notice of meeting.

You are free to question Mr. Rodriguez and the people accompanying him in the first hour.

Mr. Joël Godin: Can we choose the bonus minister that we get for two hours, that is to say, Mr. Rodriguez instead of Ms. Petitpas Taylor?

Some voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor will be with us for two hours, which is more than what was stated in the motion. I really hope there's no more filibustering.

The Chair: Just a minute.

Mr. Joël Godin: The heritage minister is here. I want us to have him exclusively for one hour.

The Chair: I request the attention of everyone around this table. All this noise won't get us any further ahead.

Mr. Godin, I hear and understand what you say, but I don't see how the situation is a problem for you or for the members of each party independently, since Mr. Rodriguez is here for the first hour, which is flying by.

Mr. Joël Godin: As I understand it, Mr. Rodriguez will answer questions in the first hour, and we shouldn't speak to Ms. Petitpas Taylor. Is that it?

The Chair: You are free not to ask Ms. Petitpas Taylor any questions if you so wish, Mr. Godin. It's up to committee members to decide whether they want to ask questions.

Mr. Joël Godin: No, Mr. Chair. The motion is clear: it's one full hour for each minister. Why are these two ministers here together today? The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the President of the Treasury Board were here alone. The motion provides that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Official Languages will appear for one hour each.

The Chair: I hear what you're saying, but I repeat, in a different way, that I don't see how that robs the members of this committee of any right under the motion you refer to.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): We want each minister to appear for one hour. Is Mr. Rodriguez afraid he can't answer questions for a whole hour?

The Chair: Those are questions that you can ask him. I received the same notice of meeting as you this morning.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Beaulieu, I find your opening somewhat arrogant. There's a minister responsible for official languages, and it's Ms. Petitpas Taylor. I think you should know that.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, a point of order was raised before the witness started speaking. The issue regarding the motion should be resolved.

The Chair: Mr. Rodriguez, please wait until you are asked a question.

I'm listening, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, what is the motion? We have to abide by the motion or else someone will introduce another motion and we'll vote on it.

The Chair: The committee is free to do what it wants. If you want to introduce a motion, you may do so, but the clock is ticking. Mr. Rodriguez is here for one full hour, and Ms. Petitpas Taylor is here for two full hours.

Are you suggesting that Ms. Petitpas Taylor should leave the room while the Minister of Canadian Heritage is here?

Mr. Joël Godin: No, what I'm telling you is that the motion provides that each minister will appear for one full hour. I want to have one hour with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and one hour with the Minister of Official Languages. That's it. I'm referring to the motion that we all adopted here.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we're wasting an hour.

I'm pretty sure it's the Minister of Canadian Heritage who's here. I recognize him; it's Pablo Rodriguez. I recognize him; I know it's him. I could single him out if he had committed a crime. I would know it's him, Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Godin, you raised the point of order. Now perhaps we could continue with questions. Then we'll see if that suits you or not.

• (1110)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, with your permission—

The Chair: Just a moment.

Mr. Godin, the motion you read earlier, the one we unanimously adopted, sets out the committee's business, but the committees can't control how witnesses appear. The witnesses were called and are here in accordance with the motion. It's up to you to question both witnesses in the first hour, or only one, as you wish.

According to the notice of meeting I received this morning, as everyone did, Mr. Rodriguez will be here for one hour, and the clock is ticking. You may ask him questions for one hour, which doesn't defeat the purpose of the motion in any way.

I honestly think we should start questioning our witnesses; we've been waiting for them for a long time.

I'm listening, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: My colleague Mr. Drouin said I was wasting time, but the Liberals wasted seven meetings for the sake of the francophonie. So I refuse to accept any blame from my colleague.

You may proceed, Mr. Chair. Pursuant to the motion, I will question Mr. Rodriguez in the first hour and the Minister of Official Languages in the second.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rodriguez, you have five minutes for your presentation.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, members of the committee. Thank you for your invitation.

The bill that you are considering today is both a priority of our government and, in my humble opinion, essential to the future of French across Canada, including in Quebec.

Right off the top, I want to state something that you already know: that my colleague is responsible for official languages. I play no role in developing or coordinating the Official Languages Act.

However, as the lieutenant for Quebec and Quebecers, I consider this bill particularly important both professionally and personally. I am an immigrant, and I spoke neither English nor French when I arrived here, only Spanish. As I learned each of our two languages, I gradually discovered Canada's cultural richness and what we were as a nation.

First of all, French made me love our songs, our films and our culture, and, thanks to French, I developed my sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. However, like many francophones, I am concerned about the future of my language. The government acknowledges this concern and understands that it must take strong action to support the vitality of French. Bill C-13, which was introduced by my colleague, is definitely a tool to that end, and one of its principles is based on the fact that the French language is threatened across the country, including in Quebec.

There are 8 million of us francophones in a sea of 360 million anglophones in North America. French is vulnerable. French is in the minority in our country and across our continent. Let me be clear: inaction is not an option and the status quo is not a plan.

We now recognize, for the first time, that English and French cannot be considered as requiring equal protection. Their situations are not the same. Our government definitely intends to shoulder all its responsibilities in this regard in a manner consistent with federal and provincial jurisdictions.

I believe we must all recognize that Bill C-13 represents a major step forward for francophone communities across the country. Let me be clear: as we do more to protect the French language, we will continue protecting the rights of linguistic minorities, including English-speaking Quebecers. A Quebecer is a Quebecer.

The proposals made in Bill C-13 are not something we pulled out of a hat; we didn't just make them up. The opposite is actually true. Based on the consultations conducted across the country, the government introduced a comprehensive bill that proposes specific solutions on many fronts. It is a major step forward.

For example, with regard to federally regulated private businesses, we would acknowledge and frame the right of consumers to be served in French and the right of workers to work in French both the Quebec and in communities with a strong francophone presence. It is critical that we be able to do so. The government would also have a duty to introduce a policy on francophone immigration. My colleague has high hopes for that and will have all the necessary tools to do so and to achieve those objectives. The bill would also confer new powers and more authority on the Commissioner of Official Languages, who would then be able to make orders in non-compliance cases. Those are only a few examples.

In closing, I would say that the future of French is everyone's responsibility. It's a responsibility that we share with our provincial counterparts and, in particular, with the Quebec government. We do not always agree on the means, but we definitely have the same objective.

We will therefore continue listening to the provinces, but we will also act. We definitely will not shirk our responsibilities. Bill C-13 contains significant measures that would apply to the country as a whole and that are consistent with federal and provincial jurisdictions.

Colleagues, I ask that we all work together to advance this important bill, which is of considerable significance to Quebec and all of Canada. Francophones across the country and Canadians as a whole eagerly await this reform.

Thank you, and I will be glad to answer committee members' questions.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Each party will have six minutes of speaking time in the first round of questions.

We will begin with the first vice-chair of the committee, Joël Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rodriguez, we do indeed have the same objective, which is to acquire the means to protect bilingualism in Canada. By bilingualism, I mean English and French. It is important to note the two languages that are involved in our bilingualism because certain actions that your government has taken are questionable, particularly the appointment of a Governor General who is bilingual but doesn't speak French.

Mr. Rodriguez, you said in your statement that you had conducted consultations and that the purpose of Bill C-13 is to improve French. I don't know whether you consulted the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, but it requests that Bill C-13 centralize powers in the Treasury Board. I'd like to hear your comments on that subject.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're asking me questions about the bill and the consultations that were conducted, but my colleague the Minister of Official Languages and her team are responsible for that.

I can answer any questions you may have about Canadian Heritage. We definitely want to reinforce the two official languages in a manner that respects the minorities, Mr. Godin. That's essential.

Mr. Joël Godin: The Minister of Official Languages isn't mentioned in the bill. The powers are allocated between Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board. You may not know it, but you're responsible for it together with the Treasury Board.

Can you tell me about the division of powers between Canadian Heritage, of which you are the minister, and the Treasury Board? What's your vision? Do you agree that there should be a division of powers between those two departments?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: As the Minister of Canadian Heritage, I transferred responsibility for official languages to the Minister of Official Languages. It was done officially, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, it was done by order, but you're still responsible for the Canadian Heritage portfolio.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: But not official languages; that's clear.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes you are!

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're actually shirking your responsibilities, Mr. Rodriguez. Canadian Heritage is the department mentioned in Bill C-13.

By order, your department transferred authority to be its representative to the Minister of Official Languages, but that isn't the responsibility of the Department of Official Languages. There is no Department of Official Languages. Canadian Heritage is responsible for official languages.

With all due respect, what I mean is that neither you nor the Minister of Official Languages has control. So why not agree to transfer all powers to the Treasury Board?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: She isn't our representative. She's the titular Minister of Official Languages. There's a fundamental distinction between the powers conferred on her and the department's responsibilities.

Once again, Mr. Godin, I'll be pleased to answer any questions you have about Canadian Heritage.

Why are the Conservatives filibustering on the bill—

• (1120)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I'm stopping the clock.

Mr. Rodriguez, we know how the committees work. The questions come from the members of the committee. I respectfully ask you to answer my colleague's questions, whether or not they're relevant. I'm not saying they aren't. I respectfully ask you to answer his questions regardless of what you think of their quality.

I will restart the clock and give the floor back to Mr. Godin.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Just a moment, Mr. Chair. I have a question.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. May I speak?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: But I have a right to answer, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Joël Godin: You should answer my question.

The Chair: You have a right to answer the question that's asked, Mr. Rodriguez. The six minutes are shared. You don't have six more minutes to answer the questions.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Of course, Mr. Chair, but I still want time to answer his question, even though it's not that relevant.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's your opinion, Mr. Rodriguez, and I don't share it.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, bills C-11 and C-18 would provide tools to promote the French fact. The Conservatives are filibustering on those two bills.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like you to ask Mr. Rodriguez to observe the discipline that we have around this table. We have always managed to do so with other ministers. I don't understand why he has adopted this attitude.

Mr. Rodriguez, my question is very clear: if there is some confusion between the powers that are conferred on you and on Ms. Petitpas Taylor, wouldn't it be more in the interest of francophones to give full powers to the Treasury Board?

It's a clear question. It isn't important whether you consider it relevant or not. I'm asking you to answer it. I'm a parliamentarian, and I'm asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage to answer my question.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm very pleased to answer you, Mr. Godin. My colleague Ms. Petitpas Taylor is doing an outstanding job, and I have full confidence in her, as does the government. She's the one doing the work.

Mr. Joël Godin: Has the Minister of Official Languages passed on to you the information that emerged from the consultations?

One of the first requests of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, which represents the vast majority of minority language communities, is that the powers be centralized in the Treasury Board. Under the bill, however, you would be responsible for managing those powers.

Would you agree, in the interest of francophones, to amend the bill to grant the Treasury Board all the powers?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You can ask me the same question three times, Mr. Godin, but I've already told you that responsibility would fall to the minister responsible for official languages.

Mr. Joël Godin: Then you have nothing—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's the minister responsible for official languages, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: My question—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You've been out of power for so long you don't understand how this works.

Mr. Joël Godin: What you just said is beside the point.

I want to know if the Minister of Canadian Heritage is working on the Official Languages Act.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I work with the minister, and I support the excellent work she's doing, but she's the one doing the work.

Mr. Joël Godin: What are you doing, Minister?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Through Canadian Heritage, I support the cultural sector, our artists and creators. That's what you and your party are obstructing by filibustering on Bill C-11. That's what you're obstructing as we want to assist journalists through Bill C-18. That's what you're doing, Mr. Godin. Acknowledge it.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Rodriguez, I do acknowledge our position, but you should acknowledge the fact that all departments and agencies in Canada want those powers to be centralized in the Treasury Board.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: If you had some specific questions—

Mr. Joël Godin: Acknowledge it, Mr. Rodriguez.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

The six minutes are up.

Mr. Francis Drouin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): I have a point of order too, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There are two points of order. First I will hear that of Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I know that we have excellent technical support services and that the microphones work very well, but if members are having trouble hearing, I suggest they use the headsets, which work very well. This is a small room, and I'll have to get my earplugs because there's a lot of shouting going on.

The Chair: That's a good comment, Mr. Drouin, but it's mainly for the interpreters. I don't know how they can interpret what's being said with all this racket.

Consequently, I would respectfully request that those asking questions and those who have to answer them speak alternately, not at the same time.

Go ahead, Mr. Iacono.

• (1125)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Speaking along the same lines, our colleagues are entitled to ask questions, but they also have to allow the minister time to answer questions freely and to avoid insulting him or categorizing his answers because they don't like them. We should show respect on both sides, and it's also important that we be able to understand who's asking questions and who's answering them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, before we go any further—

Mr. Joël Godin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, with regard to what my colleague just said, I didn't insult the minister. I used the same words he used. So he should exercise good judgment when interpreting that.

The Chair: The public will be free to judge that as it wishes.

I must confess that I've made a mistake as chair. It seldom happens, but I forgot to ask Ms. Petitpas Taylor to give her presentation.

According to the notice of meeting, Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you and Mr. Rodriguez were to appear at same time in the first hour. Consequently, I will let you make your five-minute presentation. Mr. Godin clearly wanted to question Mr. Rodriguez only, but the other members may wish to question you too.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): On a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I believe the minister's appearance is scheduled for the second hour. So I suggest that we wait.

The Chair: I understand, but that's how the notice of meeting is drafted; it indicates that both ministers will appear at the same time, with the first hour being reserved for Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Marc Dalton: The problem is that it would shorten the first hour. So I suggest that you not do that.

The Chair: I see that Ms. Petitpas Taylor agrees. I would stick to the notice of meeting that we've received, which is the official agenda, and the minister is signalling to me that she completely agrees. So there's no problem.

Do you wish to speak, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Joël Godin: I have some further information. We should definitely stick to the notice of meeting, but we should especially abide by the motion that the committee unanimously adopted.

The Chair: I repeat that the motion provides a framework for the committee's business but that we can't control how the witnesses appear.

That being said, since the clock is ticking, we will move on to the next series of questions.

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

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

Good morning, ministers.

I beg your pardon, Mr. Rodriguez. I won't be able to question you because I'm going to speak to Ms. Petitpas Taylor, who is responsible for official languages. I'm sorry this meeting has gotten off to a bad start because we're very eager to speak to the minister who's responsible for the francophonie in Canada. The decline of French is a problem that everyone has raised, particularly the official language minority communities.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, it has taken many years to get where we are today with Bill C-13. Would you please tell us about that? Also, what kind of relations do you have with our provincial counterparts, who will ensure the advance of the francophonie, which is in decline, particularly in my community of London West?

We're eager for it to advance, Minister.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages): Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga.

Those of you who know me, or who recognize my accent, know that I'm an Acadian from New Brunswick. I live in an official language minority community.

I have had the good fortune to live, work and study in French partly as a result of the Official Languages Act. Consequently, it is an important act for me, and I think it has genuinely improved the lives of many of us.

In the past year, I have had the privilege of meeting my counterparts from across the country. In June, for the first time, I attended a meeting of the federal government, the provinces and the territories where we had an opportunity to discuss challenges and priorities. I must say we're eager to continue working closely together with the provinces and territories.

I would like to remind everyone that the work involved in implementing Bill C-13 began four years ago. The earlier Bill C-32 and the present Bill C-13 share the same reform objective: to ensure that the new version of the bill enables us to move forward and to give it more teeth. We were able to introduce a good bill thanks to the conversations we had with our counterparts.

As the new Minister of Official Languages, I was fortunate to meet with stakeholders from across the country last year. I was thus able to get to know them, to forge ties and to learn what they wanted to see in the bill. Bill C-32 definitely contained some good elements, but stakeholders also told us they wanted improvements made to it. That's precisely what we've done with Bill C-13.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Minister, since you're an Acadian, you're no doubt aware of what's happening in your province: the premier of New Brunswick is attacking the francophone community and doesn't anticipate continuing to allow children to be educated in French.

Do you have any comments to make on the situation in New Brunswick?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Yes, thank you very much, Ms. Kayabaga.

I'm the Minister of Official Languages, and I come from New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province in Canada. People often see good things happening in New Brunswick, but the official language minority communities, the francophones of New Brunswick, have recently faced some special challenges.

The current provincial government isn't really sensitive to the cause of New Brunswick's francophones. The premier of our province, Mr. Higgs, recently appointed a minister who has never supported official languages in New Brunswick to the special committee reviewing the province's Official Languages Act. That minister previously wanted to merge the regional francophone health authority with the anglophone authority. He has also made inappropriate comments about the province's Commissioner of Official Languages. So as you can see, language rights are threatened in New Brunswick. Recent comments have really been an affront to francophones.

We members from New Brunswick recently wrote a letter to Premier Higgs informing him that we were very concerned and no longer wanted his controversial minister to sit on the special committee. Six members from New Brunswick signed that letter. We had invited all federal MPs from New Brunswick to condemn the appointment, but four of those members chose not to sign the letter. I have to say that they were Conservative, not Liberal, members.

• (1130)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Would you like to comment on the separation of powers?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I must say I was somewhat insulted at being characterized as the representative of the heritage minister.

The Prime Minister appointed me to the position of Minister of Official Languages; it was he who delegated that authority to me. Consequently, I am responsible for the official languages file. That file is obviously overseen by Canadian Heritage, but I manage the official languages file and all that pertains to the Official Languages Act.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you for speaking to this important matter, and I apologize on behalf of the committee for the insult you suffered. Our purpose is to move the bill forward. We live

in communities where French is in decline, and we want to see progress on this file.

Minister, I believe my time is up, but I want to thank you for being here. Thanks as well to Mr. Rodriguez for agreeing to testify before the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga. You stayed within your speaking time.

The committee's second vice-chair will ask the next questions.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's appalling that you aren't adhering to the spirit of the motion that was adopted, but I don't want to waste too much time on that.

Mr. Rodriguez, the Quebec government made a request that was intended somewhat as the premise of negotiations. It would like us to acknowledge that only one of the two official languages, French, is in the minority and threatened. You don't agree with that. You always refer to minorities, in the plural. You think that anglophones form the minority in Quebec. Based on that premise, part VII of the Official Languages Act, for which your department is responsible, has promoted only English as an official language and funded anglophone community groups for 52 years.

How will Bill C-13 change that?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I understand what you mean. If there's a minority in Quebec, it's obviously the anglophone minority. We agree on that.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Even the UN doesn't recognize anglophones as a minority because they form the English Canadian majority. It's as though Canada's anglophone majority told us that the anglophones in Quebec were the English Canadian elite from the outset and had institutions that were more like the majority—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: So you don't acknowledge the existence of an anglophone minority in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's a numerical minority.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You don't recognize it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That minority has the powers of a majority across Canada.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: There's also a francophone minority outside Quebec. The Official Languages Act concerns both minorities. What the Liberal government has recognized for the first time is that French is now threatened and that we must do more to protect it both in and outside Quebec.

Under this bill, we will ensure that francophone workers can work in French and that French-language services are offered in federal institutions.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're avoiding the question.

Funding is provided to Quebec under part VII of the Official Languages Act, but it's exclusively used to promote English as an official language and to support the anglophone community.

What will change under this bill?

• (1135)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: If you have any specific questions on the bill, you can put them to...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're responsible for it—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: ...the minister, who was appointed by the Prime Minister. Take a look at her mandate letter. She's the one who has that mandate, not me, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're deflecting. You're ultimately giving us the same answers as we've previously been given.

You agree to none of Quebec's requests. You've accepted the general principle that French is in decline. That alone is scandalous because French has been declining for 52 years. You've acknowledged it for two years now, and I congratulate you on that. However, you don't want to act accordingly. You say you're going to help the French language, but nothing gets done.

You mentioned language of work. The unanimous view in Quebec, the view of the former provincial premiers, including Liberals, the unions and the major cities, is that the Charter of the French language applies to federally regulated private businesses. However, Bill C-13 prevents that by giving those businesses a choice. Those less inclined to accept French as a common language will cop out if we fail to entrench this principle.

I'm going to put the same questions to Ms. Petitpas Taylor in a moment, but you're supposed to answer now.

You constantly repeat that your government is establishing the right to be served in French in Quebec. Yes, I hope it's a right now, 50 years later.

You've often said that Bill C-13 is a carbon copy of Bill 101 for federally regulated private businesses. However, that's not the case at all, and it's actually misinformation. Bill 101 is designed to make French the common language in Quebec, and that's not at all the purpose of the Official Languages Act. The act doesn't provide for French to be the predominant language in signage. Bill 101 provides for a right to work in French, but the federal act defends the right to work in English in federal institutions. That's not at all the same thing.

So you don't accept Quebec's requests. I'll let you answer.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Beaulieu, it may surprise you, but we work very well with Quebec. Let me digress a little here.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You always say that, but that's not what I want to hear.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, a little respect, please.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I interrupt you when you evade the question. Go ahead.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I never evade, Mr. Beaulieu. You know me well enough to understand that. I'd like to be able to say the same.

As regards our relations with Quebec, we have reached agreements, particularly in housing, child care services, aeronautics, the Internet, manpower training, asylum-seekers and the fight against homelessness. We're investing billions of dollars in the Safe Restart Agreement and \$2.4 million to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. We're also investing in the Espace René-Lévesque, in New Carlisle. The investments are adding up.

We aren't just able to cooperate with Quebec; we're actually doing it. This includes the official language file, Mr. Beaulieu, because there's a common will to do so. Earlier I said we don't always agree on means, but we definitely agree on the objective. We're talking here about the language of work and the language of service, and that's clearly stated in the bill.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You restate the objective, but there are no means to achieve it.

Moving on to another question, many organizations funded by Canadian Heritage, including the Quebec Community Groups Network, the Regional Association of West Quebecers and the Townshippers' Association, frequently label the Quebec government and those who defend the French language racist.

Is that your view? You've previously said so in the House, and you apologized for it.

The Chair: There are less than five seconds left, Mr. Beaulieu.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I've never said that in the House. That's a personal attack, Mr. Beaulieu, and I hope you will withdraw that comment. If any one thing is clear, it's that Quebecers—

The Chair: Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. Beaulieu, time is up.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I haven't answered the question. Quebecers aren't racist, Mr. Beaulieu.

The Chair: Please direct your answers to the chair, where possible.

We will begin the next round.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

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

[Translation]

Good afternoon, Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Rodriguez, you are also the Quebec lieutenant for your government. French is in decline in Quebec, and Quebecers are concerned about the deteriorating situation.

What will you do to stop the decline of French in Quebec? Will you take measures with Ms. Petitpas Taylor to assist the minority community in Quebec and, more importantly, to defend French in Quebec? If so, what measures will you take?

• (1140)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's a very good and important question. Once again, I'll ask the minister responsible for official languages to give you the details. I'll simply tell you that the bill concerns language of work and access to services, but it also contains a whole set of other measures.

Under Bill C-11, streaming businesses such as Disney and Netflix will have to contribute to the creation and production of content in English and French in Canada, and especially in French in Quebec. That bill will have a direct beneficial impact.

Furthermore, Bill C-18 will protect local journalism. Money will be invested in our small newspapers in the regions and elsewhere by Google, Facebook and the web giants, which currently benefit from content without paying for it. The bill will support francophone content creation both in and outside Quebec.

Unlike Mr. Beaulieu, I'm convinced we can reinforce the French fact without attacking the anglophone minority. That's the major difference.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right.

My second question concerns Canadian Heritage's coordination role, which your department wants to preserve under the provisions of Bill C-13. When Canadian Heritage directs other departments to discharge their official languages obligations, why can't you ensure that your colleagues and their departments comply with your decisions?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Ms. Petitpas Taylor is here and can answer questions on specific official language issues. My days are quite long, and I work seven days a week. I don't intervene in or work on official language issues. Those issues are the responsibility of my colleague, who was duly appointed by the Prime Minister. Her mandate letter outlines her duties and obligations in that regard. My mandate letter contains many measures, but they don't concern official languages.

Ms. Niki Ashton: As was previously said, that state of affairs is a problem. Virtually all the witnesses we've heard in this committee want a central agency, the Treasury Board, to assume responsibility. I respectfully submit to you, based on what the communities tell us, that the way things are being done now is a problem.

Once again, Bill C-13 continues to confer significant powers on Canadian Heritage. If you haven't managed to carry out your mission thus far, how would you be able to do so in future?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Ms. Ashton, once again, if you're asking a question specifically about official languages, my colleague will be pleased to answer it. And she's here.

I can tell you that Canadian Heritage has introduced a set of measures. For example, we have bills C-11 and C-18. Other measures concern the Canada Council for the Arts. Telefilm Canada has just funded a number of French-language productions both in and outside Quebec. The National Film Board and other institutions that

report to Canadian Heritage and are thus under my responsibility can help support the vitality of French both in and outside Quebec.

I can answer questions about those measures, but my colleague will be pleased to answer questions specifically about official languages.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for that observation.

We're aware of who is here in the room, but the bill refers to your department. As you said in your speech, the status quo clearly isn't working, and we could say that applies to the responsibilities that are conferred on your department. What we've heard from the community is clear: the status quo regarding responsibilities assigned to the Department of Canadian Heritage doesn't provide adequate protection for French. That's why we need a central agency to direct all that. I'm eager to put similar questions to Ms. Petitpas Taylor when she testifies later this morning.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, you had 30 seconds left. Thank you for staying within your time limit.

In the next round, we will have turns of five minutes or two turns of two and a half minutes.

Mr. Dalton and Mr. G n reux will share the next five minutes.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

• (1145)

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much.

Buenos dias, Mr. Rodriguez.

Do you think French is in decline in Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, French faces enormous challenges. As I said earlier, there are eight million of us outside—

Mr. Marc Dalton: We don't have much time.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Do you want me to answer? I can give you a longer answer.

Mr. Marc Dalton: No, I need a yes or no.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The percentage of francophones outside Quebec has declined sharply—

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, I'm moving on to my next question.

Mr. Rodriguez, I don't have much time.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: In Quebec, the challenges—

The Chair: Mr. Rodriguez, please direct your remarks to me.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes. Pardon me, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marc Dalton: So you don't want to answer that.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I did answer it. Yes, French is in decline, and we have to do more.

Mr. Marc Dalton: The bill contains a lot of fine words. It states that we will support francophones, for example. However, many witnesses told us that the bill didn't go far enough to preserve French.

Do you think that Bill C-13 can be improved, yes or no?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Nothing in life is perfect, but I think we have a very good bill here. It's up to the committee to look at it. The minister has done an excellent job—

Mr. Marc Dalton: So that's a yes.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Wait a minute; I just want to add something.

You have to consider the bill as part of an ecosystem. There are a lot of other measures that reinforce the use, promotion and protection of French—

Mr. Marc Dalton: All right. Thank you very much, Minister.

Are you open to amendments? You're responsible—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Tell me about a bill that I'm responsible for, and I'll tell you yes, but I can't answer for my colleague.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Okay.

Do you have an idea of the financial implications of this bill for your department's budget and the budget in general?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You'd have to ask the minister responsible for the bill, the minister responsible for official languages.

Mr. Marc Dalton: So you have no idea. We're somewhat disappointed—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You need only ask the person responsible.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: What we fear is that the Liberal government will make investments and get no results. We don't just want to expand the bureaucracy; we want to see changes made. That's very important. There are a lot more workers in immigration, for example, but performance has declined. So that's very disturbing. Canadians want to see results on the ground.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: If you're sincerely concerned, stop filibustering on bills C-11 and C-18. That's part of the answer.

The Chair: Mr. G n reux, you have 2 minutes and 10 seconds.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): Minister, yesterday on *Sans r serve*, a program broadcast on 98.5 FM radio, commentator Meeker Guerrier, who attended the Qatar World Cup Soccer event, reported that the Canadian team players were introduced in English only, whereas those of the Belgian and other teams were introduced in both of their official languages, French and Flemish.

In addition, the word "welcome" was inscribed, in each team's language, on plaques that were mounted on the pedestals bearing each team's flag. For Switzerland, for example, the inscription was in French, German and Italian, even though only 1% of the Swiss population speaks that last language. In Canada, French is spoken

by a much larger percentage of the population, and yet the Canadian plaque read only *Welcome*.

These things are unacceptable, and we've been seeing this in Canada for 50 years as a result of the present act. Minister, you are responsible for Canadian Heritage. If the new version of the bill that's on the table is passed, will we still see this kind of thing happening?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Once again, that's a specific question that you can ask my colleague, who is here with me. I definitely won't defend FIFA.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I'm talking about Canada, not FIFA.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're talking to me about national anthems and player introductions.

First of all, the anthems should have been sung in their language.

Second, I think the way FIFA behaved was unacceptable.

However, I congratulate the Canadian team. What it managed to do was outstanding.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Minister, in its present form, the Official Languages Act has prevented neither the decline of French nor this kind of incident from occurring for the past 50 years. And yet it has been said for 50 years that we should ensure that Canada is represented internationally in both official languages. However, it's nearly 2023, and today, in 2022, we're still witnessing these kinds of situations.

Who's going to say, once again, that it isn't his fault and that the problem should be directed to the Treasury Board?

All the organizations whose representatives have testified here have discussed this. Ms. Joly said in her own white paper on official languages that the Treasury Board should be entirely responsible for implementing the Official Languages Act. Like everything else, however, that will slip through the cracks.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. G n reux.

I now give the floor to Mr. Iacono for five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the ministers for being with us this morning.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, I've often heard francophone columnists and commentators say that Bill C-13 wouldn't go as far as Bill C-32.

I don't get the impression that's true, but I want to give you a chance to state your view of the matter.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Iacono.

I read that in the news too. I have to say though that it's quite the contrary.

When we developed Bill C-13, we actually retained the principles of Bill C-32. That's in fact what we did, and then we went even further. As I said earlier, I had a chance to meet with stakeholders across the country when we were getting ready to introduce Bill C-13. I heard those stakeholders' comments on Bill C-32, and they also told me about the improvements they would like to see made.

That's exactly what we did. With your permission, I'll give you some examples. With regard to increasing the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages, I met with Mr. Théberge, who told us he would like to have more tools. The possibility of establishing and imposing administrative monetary penalties is one of those examples. Lastly, we want to ensure that the Commissioner has the tools he needs to do his job.

Stakeholders also told us they would like to see a clearer definition of positive measures. Once again, we went further and ensured that the positive measures would be more clearly defined.

Let's not forget the immigration policy either. This year, stakeholders across the country expressed concerns about francophones' declining demographic weight. We have to ensure that immigration is a key to restoring that demographic weight. Consequently, we've put considerable emphasis on the francophone immigration policy.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Minister, the Liberal Party has committed to appointing bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada. However, the Conservative Party has long opposed that practice, which is deeply disappointing for anyone who believes that all Canadians deserve to be heard before the highest court in the land in the official language of their choice.

Please tell us more about that—

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): On a point of order—

[Translation]

The Chair: Just a minute; I'm stopping the clock.

Go ahead, Mr. Vis.

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Iacono did not correctly state the policy of the Conservative Party. We don't need that partisanship here. We support a bilingual Supreme Court of Canada—

The Chair: Mr. Vis, sorry, that is not a point of order. Mr. Iacono is free to ask his question as he wants to.

Mr. Brad Vis: The Liberals want to continue with their—

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Vis, I will stop you right there. This is the first time in seven years, that is, since I've been sitting here, that I've seen a meeting unfold this way around the table. I would ask everyone to be respectful and to follow the procedure.

I'm going to restart the clock, Mr. Iacono, but I believe Mr. Drouin wants to say something first.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No, that's not the case.

The Chair: If there are no further points of order, I will restart the clock for Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, I was interrupted as I asked my question, which was very impolite. I'll have to repeat my question from the beginning so the minister can understand and answer it. I would therefore like you to adjust the clock accordingly.

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, I stopped the clock at the start of Mr. Vis's intervention. Two minutes and thirty-six seconds have elapsed.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: May I ask my question again from the beginning?

The Chair: Do what you want, Mr. Iacono. You have about two and a half minutes left.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I wouldn't want to lose time as a result of my colleague's interruption. The minister may not understand my question as a result of that interruption and I'll have to ask it again.

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, I told you I had stopped the clock before you spoke.

Go ahead. You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Ms. Petitpas Taylor, would you tell us a little more about how we can entrench this principle in Bill C-13?

● (1155)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Pardon me, Mr. Iacono, but I'll have to ask you to repeat your question.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, do you understand why I said I should start asking my question from the beginning and why the clock should be adjusted so the minister could understand my entire question?

The Chair: Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, when the Liberal Party committed to appointing bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada, the Conservative Party opposed it for a long time. That's deeply disappointing for anyone who believes that all Canadians deserve to be heard in the highest court in the land in the official language of their choice.

Could you tell us a little more about how we can entrench that principle in Bill C-13?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Iacono.

Since we came to power, all judges who have been appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada have been bilingual, by which I mean they don't need interpretation services.

We acknowledge that access to justice in the language of one's choice is a fundamental right, and I repeat that we want to ensure that judges sitting on Canada's highest court are able to understand the court's proceedings in the client's language.

I added that obligation to Bill C-13 in order to entrench it, since we want to ensure that future governments can't change this policy. We think this is a fundamental right, and we want to make sure it stays that way.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Minister, we've heard certain English-language groups from Quebec express concerns about the consequences the act will have for their communities.

How do you respond to those groups?

Will they lose their language rights when Bill C-13 is passed?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for that important question.

As my colleague so clearly said, we acknowledge that the official language minority communities consist of anglophones from Quebec and francophones from outside Quebec.

As Judge Bastarache clearly said when he appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, Quebec anglophones will lose no rights under Bill C-13.

I repeat that we want to ensure that people can work in French and be served in French in regions with a strong francophone presence outside Quebec. That right will also apply to Quebec anglophones.

I repeat: Quebec anglophones will lose no rights under Bill C-13.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The next member will have two and a half minutes of speaking time.

The floor is yours, Mr. Beaulieu.

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

Mr. Rodriguez, do you think that condemning the anglophone pressure groups that you fund and that call us racist constitutes an attack on English speakers?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's really a strange take, Mr. Beaulieu.

In life, generally speaking, and particularly when you're a political leader, you should show some openness, reach out and stop pointing fingers and talking in terms of "us" against "them".

As I told you, Quebecers aren't racist. You should stop judging everyone from the top...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Quebecers are being called racists—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: ...of your pedestal.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Stop funding them.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Whoever accuses Quebecers of being racist...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The federal government funds them.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: ...is wrong, Mr. Beaulieu.

The Chair: Just a moment, please.

The interpreters are finding it impossible to do their job.

Please wait for an answer before asking a question, and I remind you that answers should be directed through the chair.

Mr. Beaulieu, I am restarting the clock. Go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll ask another question.

The Quebec government has made requests regarding language requirements in federal institutions. As we know, 68% of federal public service positions in Quebec require knowledge of English, compared to 9% of positions for which knowledge of French is required.

Will Bill C-13 change that situation?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That will depend on how Bill C-13 is applied and on the discussions.

As I told you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor recently had a very good meeting with the Quebec minister Jean-François Roberge. She can tell you about that as well. We discuss many issues every day, including the language issue, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's always the same thing. You don't answer questions. You respond with generalities. You sidestep the issue.

We wonder whether that's why endless attempts have been made to silence the committee so that Quebecers don't realize that you're fooling them and that nothing in Bill C-13 will really help shore up the French language.

● (1200)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You don't speak for Quebecers, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's not what I said.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm just as much a Quebecer as you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I didn't say you weren't.

You always respond with accusations, like the Quebec Community Groups Network, the QCGN, and the other organizations, which suggest that we're intolerant.

I'm not intolerant at all. Making French the common language is the essential condition for including all Quebecers, including anglophones.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm living proof because I didn't speak a word of French when I arrived in Quebec, and I consider myself a francophone.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's great. You're an example.

However, stop taking measures to promote the anglicization of newcomers. That's what I'm asking you to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton will ask the next questions.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Many witnesses here have described the disastrous state of French-language instruction in official language minority communities across Canada. Rights holders struggle to enrol their children in many regions, and francophile families are being forced to abandon their dreams of having a bilingual family.

In spite of that, no witness has painted us a picture of a government that listens and is involved in funding francophone schools in order to facilitate the international recruiting of French-language teachers.

What would you do to reverse that situation?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Once again, my colleague will be able to answer that question in detail.

You've raised a very good point: the importance of learning another language as soon as possible at a young age. That's true in Quebec and elsewhere. The challenge for the francophone communities outside Quebec is often access to child care or to an education system that enables children to learn the language early on, something they will have for the rest of their lives.

The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship was here this week, but I wasn't here to hear his testimony. However, I know from having spoken to him that he has a very ambitious vision for international recruitment in order to bring in more francophone immigrants.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Briefly, francization programs that are adapted to Quebec anglophone workers who aren't newcomers are rare, even nonexistent. Will you be part of the solution and ensure that all Quebecers, including newcomers from other provinces and outside Canada, can learn French?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We will always be part of the solution, Ms. Ashton. The Canadian government currently transfers approximately \$700 million a year for francization, which is virtually equivalent to the entire budget of Quebec's Ministry of Immigration, Francisation and Integration.

My colleague regularly speaks with officials from that ministry, and I occasionally do as well. I speak with them in my capacity as lieutenant. We will always support Quebec on francization.

The Chair: You still have 20 seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I just want to point out that the concerns I've expressed are those of the communities and that they have emerged from the testimony of a number of witnesses. We hope that the future won't be more of the status quo. We need a much stronger act to make sure we put a stop to the decline of French.

That includes francization programs in Quebec and across Canada.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We all agree on that.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

We will now suspend briefly to allow Mr. Rodriguez and his team to leave the room and Ms. Petitpas Taylor and her team to arrive.

We now suspend momentarily.

- (1200) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1205)

The Chair: We will now begin the second hour.

Minister and Ms. Boyer, Ms. Mondou and Ms. Boily, welcome to the committee. It's always a pleasure to meet with you, to see you and to hear you.

Minister, go ahead with your presentation, following which we will go to questions. You have five minutes.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll do it calmly.

Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear today.

- (1210)
- [*English*]

I would first like to take a moment to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

[*Translation*]

We have made considerable progress since I last appeared before this committee in March. In May, I began national consultations on the next action plan for official languages. They were held across the country and culminated in the official languages summit in Ottawa, which was attended by nearly 300 stakeholders.

During those 22 virtual and in-person consultations, more than 6,500 participants painted comprehensive pictures of their communities, the challenges they face and the opportunities available to us. In the next few days, we will be releasing the Report on the 2022 Cross-Canada Consultations on Official Languages, outlining the key themes that the communities raised during our discussions.

[*English*]

We know that much hard work is still needed in order to move forward with our official languages action plan for 2023 to 2028, which will help put in place many ideas and initiatives that are at the centre of the modernization of our Official Languages Act.

[*Translation*]

I am aware that, although we have made progress, we still have a great deal of work to do to achieve our official language objectives.

Like you, I'm very concerned by the 2021 census data released in August and last week. With only 8 million francophones in Canada living in a sea of more than 360 million anglophones across North America, there is an urgent need to restore our demographic weight. If we do nothing, the decline could worsen. Consequently, our government has committed to stepping up efforts to ensure that does not occur. We must therefore work together with our partners, the provinces and territories to implement strategies that enable us to reverse this trend. I sincerely believe that only by working together can we all have a genuine impact in the coming years. The published 2021 census figures remind us how important it is to pass Bill C-13 now.

[English]

In fact, I have heard this frequently from communities across the country. Groups like FCFA, AFO and SANB have told us that they want to see Bill C-13 adopted quickly because the federal government needs to play its part in supporting official language minority communities across the country.

[Translation]

Expectations of the modernization and strengthening of our language regime are great, and rightly so, considering the enhanced powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages, new rights regarding the language of work and being served in French by federally regulated private businesses, increased compliance by federal institutions regarding official languages and the adoption of a policy on francophone immigration.

[English]

It's clear that Bill C-13 provides us with the tools we need to achieve these goals and to ensure that both our official languages are supported. That is what we need to do, and that is why we need to adopt Bill C-13 without any further delay.

[Translation]

Linda Cardinal, an informed voice of the Canadian francophonie, reminded us of this fact in the following terms when she appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages: "The longer it takes to pass this bill, the higher the price francophones will pay. When you can't move forward, you aren't treading water...you're falling behind."

As a proud francophone and Acadian who grew up in a minority community, I understand what a constant struggle this is, and we cannot, for a single instant, cease our efforts to defend our official language minority communities.

[English]

That includes both English-speaking Quebeckers as well as Francophones across the country and outside of Quebec.

[Translation]

I would remind you that Bill C-13 is the result of extensive consultations with our partners, the provincial and territorial governments, and with stakeholders across the country. Consequently, we believe that the specific measures proposed in the bill will reflect the needs of the communities across Canada.

As the Hon. Michel Bastarache, former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, said, "What we have is a bill that will markedly improve the official languages situation in Canada..."

[English]

This bill is part of a broader process of modernization that includes a number of administrative measures, associated regulations, and the upcoming action plan for official languages.

Even after this bill is adopted, friends, our work continues.

[Translation]

We will have to define what a positive measure and a region with a strong francophone presence are. That will require hard work and extensive consultation.

In short, our objective remains the same: to pass a bill that is relevant, promising and strong for the benefit of all Canadians.

Allow me to take advantage of my appearance here today to confirm once again my sincere cooperation in making Bill C-13 a reality.

I will be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Each party will have six minutes in the first round of questions.

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

• (1215)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here today.

We all have the same objective: to work at strengthening bilingualism in Canada, both English and French.

You said in your statement that you had conducted many consultations. I believe that's true because we've seen your itinerary. You have a very busy schedule. So I'm satisfied that you met with the representatives of organizations.

However, I'd like to know something. We've had the white paper, Bill C-32 and the consultation that you conducted this past year. Did you hear loud and clear what the representatives of the official language minority communities told you?

I'm going to talk to you right now about the first demand of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA. It has requested that the Treasury Board be designated as the central agency responsible for implementing Bill C-13. Do you support that request, which I believe is unanimous among all the communities represented by the FCFA?

We can see that there's some confusion. Earlier the Minister of Canadian Heritage didn't seem to be aware of the issue. He gave you all the responsibilities, but your position isn't mentioned in the bill. He has no powers.

Would you be inclined to amend the bill to implement the FC-FA's first recommendation?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First, I want to clarify the comments that were made this morning, particularly concerning the central agency. I believe that's what you want to discuss.

You have to understand that we're establishing the Treasury Board's role so that it will act as a central agency. We're going to give it more powers, particularly monitoring, audit and evaluation powers. Remember that the Treasury Board is in Ottawa. I'm the Minister of Official Languages, and that authority has been given to me by the Prime Minister. I'm the Minister of Official Languages, not a representative. I wanted to clarify that point. The Department of Canadian Heritage has offices across the country. Consequently, when we work with stakeholders to determine what's happening on the ground, its offices are very well positioned to do that.

Allow me to draw a comparison. If we wanted to organize a hockey team, we'd ask the Treasury Board to be the goalie, but we wouldn't also ask it to be a forward. So, in this instance, the Treasury Board will play its role and the Department of Canadian Heritage will do its own job.

Mr. Joël Godin: With all due respect, Minister, your comparison doesn't apply. To my mind, the Treasury Board is the general manager, and everything that happens on the ice is directly related to it.

What I understand from your remarks is that you're open to amendments, but not to the entire bill. That's the problem. The status quo won't protect the French language, and that's unfortunately what Bill C-13 proposes.

You said you were the Minister of Official Languages. Can you tell us how that works in cabinet? What aspects of Bill C-13 have you had accepted around the cabinet table? Can you show us the stamp you've put on this bill? When I read the bill, I see that the Minister of Official Languages has no power. The only reason your title appears there, Minister, is that you sponsored the bill.

How can the bill be implemented if the Minister of Official Languages, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the President of the Treasury Board share authority for its implementation and there are grey areas? When it comes to implementing the act, we'll fall through the cracks and the French language will pay the price.

What powers do you have at the cabinet table? What did you add to the bill? What stamp has the Minister of Official Languages put on Bill C-13?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First of all, Mr. Godin, as regards my role at the cabinet table, my voice isn't a lesser voice; it carries just as much weight as those of all the other cabinet members.

Bill C-32 was indeed the first take on the modernization of the Official Languages Act. However, I have just introduced the final version of the bill, which contains improvements.

People often ask me if our bill is less rigorous. I was asked that today. However, it's quite the contrary: we've gone to great lengths to ensure that our bill has more teeth.

We've done that, Mr. Godin, because stakeholders across the country have asked us to make amendments to the bill. For example, they wanted us to give the Commissioner of Official Languages more powers and tools to do his job, to clarify the immigration policy and to provide a more precise definition of positive measures.

Since the bill hasn't yet been passed, I hope the committee will work together to pass it as soon as possible.

• (1220)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Minister. We've heard that on numerous occasions. Thank you very much.

I want to know if it's you who withdrew the full power granted to the Treasury Board, which was recommended in Ms. Joly's white paper and as provided in Bill C-32.

Did you withdraw that power under Bill C-13?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Godin, Donald Savoie, who is a social policy and public administration expert, made a clear statement on that issue at our closing summit. He has even worked at the Treasury Board. He previously thought that the Treasury Board could be the central agency—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me, Minister.

As I understand it, the FCFA was completely wrong.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Godin, what I'm saying is that both departments have their strengths; I think we have to ensure that they work closely together.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Drouin is the second speaker.

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Minister.

With all due respect to my colleagues, there appears to be a lack of understanding on their part of the way the government operates.

I'll give you an example. The Treasury Board establishes procurement policies, but it doesn't concern itself directly with procurement. Instead, Public Service and Procurement Canada has that responsibility. I believe the relationship is virtually the same in this case.

We seem to be downplaying the role of the Treasury Board. If my memory serves me, improvements have been made to the provisions of part IV, V and VI and to subsection 41(5) of the act. The Treasury Board will now have a duty to intervene, whereas previously it merely had the power to do so.

Would you please explain the difference between what the Treasury Board would now have to do and what it previously could do?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much.

Once again, the amendments made to part VII of the act under Bill C-13 will require the Treasury Board to assume its responsibilities, and that really represents a significant addition.

As I'm trying to explain to my colleague, we have really clarified the Treasury Board's role to ensure it takes on additional responsibilities by playing a monitoring, audit and evaluation role.

My department and the Department of Canadian Heritage will ensure that Bill C-13 is implemented. As I said, the Treasury Board office is located in Ottawa and doesn't know the stakeholders across the country. The Department of Canadian Heritage has offices everywhere. We regularly work with our stakeholders.

I'll give you an example. When we conducted Canada-wide consultations for the next action plan, we did it together with the Department of Canadian Heritage. We heard from 6,500 Canadians across the country.

Once again, if the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board do their jobs, we'll be able to promote our two beautiful official languages effectively.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We've attached importance to the positive measures that the Canadian government as a whole can take to support our official language minority communities.

We've made another change to the Official Languages Act by replacing "positive measures" with "the positive measures". I would never have thought we'd be discussing the grammatical topic of articles, or the lack thereof. Judges have obviously explained the difference and the reason why it's important. You really have defined the positive measures in the new Bill C-13.

What will happen to the definition of those positive measures once Bill C-13 is passed?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We waited for the Gascon judgment before we introduced Bill C-13 because we wanted to be sure that our bill would be aligned with it. We received it, and that's exactly what we did.

Once the bill is passed, we will make regulations to clarify what those positive measures will be. Like you, I'm eager to continue the work that remains to be done and to clarify that definition.

Another element that we'll have to clarify is the meaning of "a strong francophone presence" outside Quebec. We'll have to conduct another consultation in order to frame and specify what that means.

• (1225)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'd like to say something about the court challenges program, since it's also related to Bill C-13. I personally

benefited from that program because my child was born in a hospital that had applied to it. As a result, we were able to be served in French without applying to it ourselves.

The program hasn't always been around; we're the ones who brought it back. It's important that official language minority communities have access to this kind of program. I want to emphasize that because, without it, I would never have been served in French. Montfort Hospital would not still be in existence without the efforts of Gisèle Lalonde, whom I thank.

We've often discussed the issue of bilingual judges, one of whom our government has appointed.

Why do you think it's important for Bill C-13 to help resolve the bilingualism of judges issue?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: With respect to access to justice, we must ensure that the judges who sit on Canada's highest court are able to hear cases without the aid of interpretation. This is a fundamental right.

We also want to make sure this right is embedded in Bill C-13. All the judges we've appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada since coming to power are bilingual.

Canada is a bilingual country, and we must ensure that Supreme Court judges are bilingual and that they can do their work without the aid of interpretation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

The next questions will come from the second vice-chair of the committee, Mr. Beaulieu.

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

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

Minister, thank you for being here to answer our questions.

Minister, I have asked you a dozen questions in the House. Earlier we heard your opening statement. Nowhere in it did you say that you're adopting the measures that the Quebec government requested. Your intentions are good, and you acknowledge the decline of French, among other things, but you haven't responded to Quebec's requests.

How many of Quebec's requests have you answered?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you for your question, Mr. Beaulieu.

Today I have more than 30 seconds to answer your question.

What we're saying isn't just a lot of fine words. We absolutely intend to do all we can to protect and promote French across the country, including in Quebec.

We acknowledge that the French language is declining. The census data were published in August and clearly showed that we have to do more to protect and promote French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If I may say, Minister, you're still speaking in generalities.

I asked the following question: how many of Quebec's requests have you answered?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Under our new act, we'll be able to ensure that federally regulated private businesses—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's not a response to Quebec's requests at all. It actually denies Quebec's main request, that the Charter of the French language apply to federally regulated businesses. That will enable federally regulated businesses like Air Canada to avoid complying with Bill 101.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Our new bill will secure the right of the employees of federally regulated private businesses to work in French and to be served in French. Our regime is aligned with Quebec's. We wanted to ensure that one regime wasn't more permissive than the other, and that's exactly what we've done.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's not at all the case.

The purpose of the Charter of the French language is to make French the language of work. For example, it requires that the French language predominate in signage and aims to make French the common language. Your act is designed to protect the French language, and it also protects English.

For example, some of the clauses of the bill provide that people who don't know French must be allowed to continue working without learning it. That simply won't support French in Quebec.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Beaulieu, I repeat: we have made sure that our regime clearly aligns with Quebec's because we don't want one regime to be more permissive than the other.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It doesn't align very well with Quebec's. In fact, all stakeholders in Quebec agree that the Charter of the French language applies to all businesses located in Quebec.

You can't name me a single Quebec government request that you agree with. Since you've received the amendments the Quebec government has proposed, I ask you to name one that you have accepted.

• (1230)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We've done a number of things to support the French language in Quebec.

The first is our francophone immigration policy. We recognize that the demographic weight of francophones has declined in our country. We're introducing an ambitious immigration policy because we want to restore that demographic weight.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're just talking about francophone immigration outside Quebec. We need francophone immigration to Quebec. The federal government's actions undermine the Quebec government's attempts to recruit more francophone immigrants.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We recognize that French is the minority language in Canada. The positive measures to combat the

decline of French will be taken not only outside Quebec, but also in Quebec itself.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The measures taken in Quebec will support English.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Absolutely not. We're talking about positive measures.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Absolutely not.

I can name you all the programs. It's the anglophone education system that's being funded. There is English-language instruction in francophone schools.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Today Mr. Rodriguez discussed the investments made in Quebec for francophones. Let's not forget that we want to achieve substantive equality in Canada between the English and French languages.

We acknowledge that we need to take positive measures to ensure we achieve substantive equality for French. That's not just outside Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: These are negative measures that you're taking in Quebec, not positive measures, because they're designed solely to reinforce English as an official language.

On another topic, the court challenges program was introduced after Bill 101. Will it be possible to use it to challenge the Official Languages Act, or will it still be used solely to challenge Quebec's language regime?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The court challenges program is a very useful program for all Canadians. I know it has been very important in New Brunswick.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What I understand from your answers is that there's nothing for Quebec.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, perhaps you should actually listen to the answers.

You have 45 seconds left.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm listening to the answers. When we ask questions about Quebec, we get no answers.

You said you had conducted an extensive consultation. I know of two Quebec organizations for the promotion of French that took part in it. I encouraged them to do so. They were virtually the only participating francophones in Quebec. An organization from the Eastern Townships attended one meeting, but all the discussions were in English. Only anglophone pressure groups were there, and the organization's representatives were the only ones who spoke French.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I don't know which consultation you're referring to. What I can tell you is that we received 6,500 written and oral presentations from across the country.

As for the consultations in Quebec, I can't tell you whether most of the meetings were conducted in English. Some were in both languages.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Ms. Ashton for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'd like to begin by asking the questions that I put to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. He told me that you, Minister, would be in a better position to answer them.

This concerns the coordination that the Department of Canadian Heritage is seeking to preserve in the provisions of Bill C-13.

Why is the Department of Canadian Heritage unable to get your colleagues and the departments concerned to comply with its decisions when it directs other departments to perform their official language obligations?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: You thank you for that question.

As a result of the changes and amendments made to the new version of Bill C-13, there will be changes to part VII of the Official Languages Act, which will reinforce the obligations of the departments. This is a major change.

We want to ensure that the departments are responsible for the necessary measures. The changes made to part VII of the act will result in real improvements.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Unfortunately, according to what we've heard from the stakeholders who have appeared before the committee, that doesn't go far enough. A central agency is necessary.

If the Department of Canadian Heritage hasn't ever been able to carry out the mission assigned to it, why would it be able to do so now? The status quo clearly isn't working. Why would continuing in the same manner change anything?

• (1235)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I agree the status quo isn't working. That's why we've reinforced the Treasury Board's role so it can act as a central agency. The new version of our bill would grant the Treasury Board Secretariat more powers so it could do the monitoring, audit and evaluation work.

We also want to ensure that the necessary resources are provided to discharge the increased responsibilities. In the latest fall economic statement, we set money aside so the Treasury Board can get the necessary funding to recruit the required personnel to do that work.

Remember that the Department of Canadian Heritage has a role to play with stakeholders. I think we should focus on the strengths of each department. The Treasury Board's role and responsibilities are well established, but the Department of Canadian Heritage also has a role to play.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'd like to discuss funding. We know that community organizations are struggling to carry out their missions, apply for scholarships and funding and ensure they are accountable, while offering salaries that are proportionally lower than the contribution their employees make to their community.

Will you, as minister, review the funding you grant to the community sector to take into account the historic level of inflation that everyone is facing? Will you also change the funding method so that you fund the mission, not one activity at a time?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That's a very good question, Ms. Ashton.

As I said earlier, we conducted a Canada-wide consultation of stakeholders from across the country. We frequently heard that specific request from stakeholder groups. They told us about rent and cost-of-living increases. They would like their budgets to be expanded.

In the last action plan for official languages, we increased funding for the agencies and services in question for the first time in many years, and we heard the demands of stakeholders from across the country. I'm eager to finalize our next action plan for official languages.

We'll be releasing what we call a "what we heard report" in the next few days to provide an overview of what stakeholders told us. I'll have more to say about that when we announce the action plan for official languages for 2023 to 2028.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Has your department provided funding for those community organizations? That's what they've been asking us for months. The organizations in our communities are requesting that.

Will you be contributing to an increase in funding, since you have the authority as minister to do so?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: As I said, we're grateful for the work that stakeholders from across the country have done. They're working hard to advance, protect and promote our two beautiful official languages, particularly in the official language minority communities.

We want to ensure that they're properly equipped to do their job, and, as I said, we've heard their demands loud and clear. My team and I, the minister responsible for official languages, have developed a specific action plan for official languages. We're eager to continue working with the stakeholders, who are doing an incredible job.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Rodriguez didn't really answer the question about education. We lack schools and spaces in existing schools.

What are you going to do to change that situation?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you for that question.

As a resident of Atlantic Canada, I often hear parents tell us that there's a shortage of spaces in classrooms and child care facilities, among other things. Our federal government has made significant investments to resolve that situation.

We've invested \$180 million over three years to address the teaching personnel labour shortage. If we want to address the problem of waiting lists in child care facilities and schools, we must first make sure we have teachers.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I know time is flying by. Perhaps you can expand on that question later.

We will now begin a five-minute round of questions. Our friends Mr. Généreux and Mr. Vis will share their speaking time. I will leave it to Mr. Généreux to share those five minutes with Mr. Vis.

Mr. Généreux, we are listening.

• (1240)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us, Minister.

On page 39 of Bill C-13, the short title of the bill reads as follows: "Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act". Definitions then follow. On page 40, after the definitions, the bill provides that the word "Minister" means the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The Department of Canadian Heritage is named in black and white in the bill. Will the present order cover that if the bill is passed?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I don't understand the question. Are you referring to the delegation of authority?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I think Ms. Mondou understood the question.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The answer is "yes".

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you very much. That answers my question.

You heard the question that I asked your colleagues this morning concerning what happened in Qatar, when the Canadian soccer players weren't introduced in both languages as the players from other countries were. And yet Canada is a bilingual country, as far as I know, and you are the Minister of Official Languages, which means that there is more than one.

No one will accept blame, which will probably be shared by Sport Canada and others. However, you're the Minister of Official Languages. Under the bill, you would enhance the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

If someone filed a complaint regarding such an incident, and if the government were at fault, to whom would the Commissioner assign blame? For example, penalties of up to \$25,000 per incident may now be imposed on businesses such as Air Canada. Will penalties be imposed on the government?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: We first have to recognize that the regime of the Official Languages Act is a domestic regime.

What happened in Qatar happened outside Canada.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You're responsible for official languages in Canada. Canada is represented internationally. It's not be-

cause this occurred somewhere else in the world that you aren't responsible for it.

Canadian athletes represent a bilingual country. How is it that the act doesn't apply to those people who organize international events?

Incidentally, this isn't the first time this has happened.

I'll stop here and share the remaining time with my colleague Mr. Vis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Vis, you have the floor for two minutes.

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Minister, my colleague previously mentioned the passage in the bill containing the words "a strong francophone presence".

When the time comes, would you be inclined to allow an amendment to include a threshold in order to define that notion more clearly?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Vis. By the way, hats off to you for your French. I didn't even know you spoke French.

As to defining the measures relating to a "strong francophone presence", I think we have to be very clear: this work has to be done within a regulatory framework. This is an extremely important part of the act.

Since I live in an official language minority community, I have to make sure that federally regulated private businesses and people living in regions with a strong francophone presence, such as where we live, have the right to work and to be served in French.

Mr. Brad Vis: All right. Thank you.

I'm going to ask my second question in English.

[English]

The Minister of Justice has mentioned that he had very big concerns about Bill 96 in Quebec, and spoke at length about his criticisms of the language laws in the Province of Quebec. The Prime Minister recently stated that he is against the use of the notwithstanding clause in an arbitrary manner, yet part 2 of Bill C-13 possibly subjects workers and businesses to making a choice to choose a law that has arbitrarily, in the words of the justice minister, used the notwithstanding clause.

How can you assure Canadians that they will not be subject to a law that is contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms when it's embedded in this bill right now? Do we need to amend part 2 of Bill C-13, to make sure that it's charter compliant?

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I think we first have to acknowledge that Bill 96 concerns many fields, not just federally regulated private businesses.

As for access to justice and health care, we've seen that the comments and remarks of the Minister of Justice were really based on that, since we want to ensure that fundamental rights are respected.

As for the matter of the—

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Vis: Right. On that point—

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

That will be all, Minister. We are out of time.

I've already stretched out the time for a number of members.

Mr. Brad Vis: That's too bad.

Thanks very much.

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Welcome, Minister Petitpas Taylor, among us this morning. Thank you for taking the time.

My questions, the first ones at least, are going to be centred around the English-speaking minority community in Quebec.

This community has expressed clearly that Bill C-13 must safeguard their minority language rights. This has become even more important, as you know, since the enactment of Bill 96 in Quebec last June. Therefore, they're requesting that Bill C-13 not harm them. I'd like to have your comments and thoughts on that.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First of all, thank you, Madam Lattanzio, for your question and your work on this committee.

I've had the opportunity and privilege of doing cross-country consultations for the official language action plan that's coming up, but during that course, as I was meeting with minority communities, they also spoke to me a lot about Bill C-13 because we haven't yet seen the its adoption.

I am very sympathetic and aware of the challenges that many anglophones in Quebec are facing right now with respect to the different regimes that have been made law.

When it comes to the safeguards, I think I want to focus again on the comments made by Justice Bastarache when he appeared at the Senate committee. The former Supreme Court justice indicated that Bill C-13 would in no way take any rights away from anglophones in Quebec.

We are a bilingual country. We want to make sure that we will continue to protect and promote our official languages, and also to make sure that we protect and promote their rights. When it comes to the anglophones in Quebec, we certainly recognize that their rights must be protected, and the federal government will be there.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you.

With regard to the federally regulated businesses, let's delve a bit more into that. We've heard about the different jurisdictions and the concerns about which laws apply. Since 1996, federally regulated companies have had the option of following Quebec's linguistic regime rather than the federal rules.

Does anything change in this regard with Bill C-13? Do federally regulated companies still have a choice of opting for the Official Languages Act or the provincial regime in Quebec, and if so, do you see an issue with this?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First and foremost, as I've indicated, we've made it very clear that we want to make sure our regime and the Quebec regime are very similar and very much aligned. We want to make sure that there isn't one regime that is easier to opt out of than the other. That's why we've worked very hard to make sure that we are able to make that a reality.

At this point in time, with respect to the regime that we have, we've made it very clear that federally regulated institutions in Quebec will have the choice to either opt into our regime or into the provincial Quebec regime. As of now, we are aware that several federally regulated agencies—or institutions, for lack of a better word—have decided to opt into the Quebec regime.

Again, however, it is a choice that they have. They can either choose ours or the Quebec regime. Again, let me be very clear: We want to make sure that both regimes are very much aligned because we don't want there to be differences, such that one is easier than the other.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'm going to take you back to the course of the summer and your consultations in which I participated. I thank you for taking the time to do your cross-Canada consultations with stakeholders across the country.

I was just wondering about the following. Have you had an opportunity since then to consult other stakeholders in the various minority language community groups, to hear more of their thoughts or their potential amendments to the bill? More specifically, I draw your attention to the court challenges program, which I know you're a fan of, as am I.

Again, bringing it back to the context of Quebec with the enactment of Bill 96, do you not see that as a challenge? Because of this use of the notwithstanding clause, the court challenges program will almost be obsolete for the English minority language communities.

• (1250)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: With respect to your question, I have certainly had the opportunity through the consultations we've had in Quebec, but more than that, I took the opportunity to meet with many anglophones in Quebec to understand exactly the state of affairs and how they are feeling with respect to Bill 96, Bill C-13 and the rest of it.

I recognize there's anxiety among anglophones in Quebec right now because they don't know exactly what is going to happen with respect to 96 now that it is law. People are indicating that they're paying close attention, especially with respect to their rights to justice and also their rights to access health services.

I see René here is giving me a sign. I'm sorry, Patricia.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

The second vice-chair of the committee will ask the next questions.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Minister, so far you haven't been able to name me a Quebec amendment that you will accept.

Have you managed to name one?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Beaulieu, we've received correspondence from Quebec minister Sonia Lebel including the amendments that the Province of Quebec has proposed.

I also had a chance to meet with another minister, Jean-François Roberge, last week. I'm very keen to develop a working relationship with Mr. Roberge since we have a common objective: to do everything we can to protect the French language in and outside Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I see you can't name a single Quebec amendment that you would accept.

Here are a few: that Bill 101 apply to federal businesses; that Quebec oversee its language planning; and that federal institutions at least ensure that French predominates as the language of work in federal institutions. There's none of that.

Could you name one or two positive measures in Quebec under Bill 101, not under the Official Languages Act or according to the department? What percentage of those measures would strengthen French?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Beaulieu, we recognize that French is the minority language in Canada, period.

Earlier I mentioned substantive equality. We must take positive measures to ensure that we achieve substantive equality. That's exactly what we're going to do to support the development of the francophonie, which includes support for French in Quebec. That's a positive measure, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I checked this in the Public Accounts of Canada, and less than 1% of the positive measures would strengthen French in Quebec. And yet it's French that's threatened.

What are we trying to do with Bill C-13? Do we want to continue anglicizing Quebec?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I agree with you that French is threatened in Canada.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Isn't it threatened in Quebec as well?

Is English threatened in Quebec?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The English community in Quebec is the official language minority community. French is the minority language at the national level.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The Official Languages Act funds English in Quebec based on that definition.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Your time is up.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Chair, please allow me to complete my answer.

If we pass Bill C-13, we'll have a lot of work to do to promote French both in and outside Quebec. That's a positive measure.

The Chair: The time is up. That's 2 minutes and 36 seconds.

I've stretched out everyone's speaking time. All members have had a little more time today.

Ms. Ashton will ask the next questions.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

The committee has discussed at length the fact that language clauses are essential to the survival of francophone communities. Your government has negotiated an agreement on child care with all the provinces, but only one agreement contains a language clause, the agreement with British Columbia. The committee has learned that negotiations were dragging on in that province. What will you do to ensure the language clause is complied with?

Francophone and francophile families in Canada are waiting for this. The education of young children suffers the consequences of this with every passing year.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much, Ms. Ashton.

Our government will have to take appropriate measures if we want to achieve substantive equality. To do that, we also need to define positive measures more clearly. Language clauses are absolutely a positive measure. In the bill—

Ms. Niki Ashton: With all due respect, Minister, I would point out that my question specifically concerned British Columbia and what's going on there. The federal government negotiated an agreement including a language clause, and nothing is happening to ensure it's complied with. What are you doing to make sure the language clause is complied with and French-language child care services are funded in British Columbia?

• (1255)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The Department of Employment and Social Development is monitoring that situation to ensure the language clause is complied with.

The Chair: You have one minute left, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Unfortunately, from what we've heard from the witnesses, the language clause isn't being complied with and we aren't seeing any results. I have to say that's making the entire federal government look bad right now.

My next question will concern funding. Now that you acknowledge that French is in decline, will you show more leadership and use the federal government's spending power to stop that decline by investing in institutions?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: When you look at the last action plan that we released and that will soon expire, you can see that we've made historic investments to support institutions. We must absolutely make investments in institutions in order to support the vitality of the official language minority communities. That's exactly what we've done.

I'm eager to table the next action plan.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Ms. Ashton.

We may have time for two three-minute turns.

Mr. Généreux is the first speaker.

Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, with respect to the federal institutions' obligations regarding positive measures, a whole slate of measures is provided for in the new act. I imagine most of them are carbon copies of what's in the former act. At least I hope so.

On page 12, clause 21 of the bill would create the new subparagraph 41(6)c(iii), which concerns measures to "induce and assist organizations and institutions to project and promote the bilingual character of Canada in their activities in Canada or elsewhere".

I cited the example of what happened in Qatar. I hope that's already the case, but do you think that your role under the bill would be to ensure the promotion of French outside Canada as well as in my riding of Sainte-Apolline-de-Patton?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Absolutely. That's why it's important to pass Bill C-13, since then we'll have an act that truly enables us to take measures. I hope we'll be able to work closely together to pass Bill C-13 as soon as possible.

When you started speaking, you mentioned the positive measures issue. Bill C-13 isn't a carbon copy of Bill C-32. We've gone even further in the definition of positive measures.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The obligation of federal institutions and all Canadian federal departments to promote French as well as English internationally isn't a new one and doesn't just appear in the new act. It existed previously. The wording may be slightly different, but the federal government necessarily had a duty to promote both languages across the country and around the world. This isn't the first time this kind of incident has occurred, and it probably won't be the last.

What consequences are provided for under the new act regarding each department's obligation to ensure that it promotes both official languages?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Once again, and I want to emphasize this with regard to positive measures, Bill C-13 goes further than Bill C-32. In addition, non-governmental organizations, as you cited as an example, are mentioned in the new version of the act. That's new. We want to ensure that this bill is passed because we want to continue doing the necessary work.

We still have a lot of work ahead of us to develop the regulations and so on. We are all eager to continue that very important work.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You mentioned an evaluation and the fact that the Treasury Board would be conducting audits. Will the Department of Canadian Heritage or the Treasury Board be responsible for that?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: It will be the Treasury Board.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Minister, I'm afraid that some elements are falling through the cracks—that's been the case for the past 50 years—and that no one is being held accountable for it. Furthermore, it has already begun. The Minister of Canadian Heritage assigned responsibility to you earlier. Two days ago, it was the Minister—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

I'm looking at the clock, and I really want everyone to have the same opportunity to speak.

I give the floor to Mr. Serré to complete the final round.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for your hard work across the country.

During the consultations, we clearly heard the concerns of francophones across Canada regarding protection of the French language in most provinces. They told us they wanted language clauses. They view us as saviours of the francophonie across Canada because the provinces don't always play their role.

I'm going to give you a chance to tell us about your discussions with the provinces so we can see how we can fuel the discussion, support the provinces and work together to ensure that Bill C-13 is implemented across the country and that we can work with the provinces.

● (1300)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Serré. Thank you for being an extraordinary parliamentary secretary.

With your permission, I'd like to make a brief comment to complete my answer to Mr. Généreux' question. When we receive complaints about something that happens outside Canada, we often ask the Commissioner of Official Languages to investigate. He then determines whether we or he should handle that complaint. That's part of his role. Once again, with the tools and power we're giving him, he can do even more to protect our two beautiful languages. I wanted to make that clear.

Mr. Serré, it's important that the federal government continue working closely with the provinces and territories. This year, I was satisfied with our first meeting with the provinces and territories. We all have a role to play if we want to protect and promote the French language. That includes the federal government, the provinces and the territories.

As for your question about language clauses and positive measures, once again, if we want to achieve substantive equality, we must ensure that all decisions made by the federal government are viewed through the official language lens to gauge the impact they will have on official language minority communities. That's exactly what we want to do. We must also continue working with the provinces and territories to assess that impact.

As the federal government, we must play a leadership role. That's precisely what we will do in order ultimately to assess needs. We must also take steps to mitigate any negative repercussions. Thank you.

The Chair: You are out of time, Mr. Serré.

Thank you very much, Minister. Thanks as well to the people in your entourage who have accompanied you.

Earlier I forgot to officially thank Mr. Rodriguez and his team.

The clerk gave you the contact information of the new legislative advisor, Isabelle D'Souza, so she can analyze our proposals from a legal standpoint. You received her contact information via email two days ago.

So may I remind you that you have until 11:00 a.m. tomorrow, at the latest, to submit the amendments you want to move to our clerk.

That being said, we will see one another again on December 13.

Mr. Brad Vis: I would like to speak, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: I just need a little more time to draft a few amendments.

Could I submit them on Monday?

The Chair: No, it will be too late, Mr. Vis.

You're probably joking.

● (1305)

Mr. Brad Vis: After listening to the witnesses, I realize I have a lot more work to do to guarantee the rights of young people in British Columbia.

The Chair: Speak to your colleagues, Mr. Vis. There is a unanimous motion on the subject.

With that being said, the meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>