



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 143 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 7, 2019

—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, May 7, 2019

• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Good morning,

We are continuing our study of the implementation of Part VII of the Official Languages Act in managing the process for disposing of surplus federal real property and lands, and the study of workplace safety for parliamentary interpreters.

This morning, we have the pleasure of receiving Mr. Steven MacKinnon, parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility.

Mr. MacKinnon, I imagine that you will introduce the people who are with you.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility): In fact, they will introduce themselves.

The Chair: Alright, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Michael Mills (Associate Deputy Minister, Real Property Services Branch, Public Services and Procurement Canada): I'm Michael Mills, associate deputy minister, real property services, PSPC.

Mr. John McBain (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Lands Company Limited): I'm John McBain, chief executive officer, Canada Lands Company.

Ms. Jessica Sultan (Senior Director, Real Property and Materiel Policy Division, Acquired Services and Assets Sector, Office of the Comptroller General, Treasury Board Secretariat): Good morning. I'm Jessica Sultan, senior director, real property policy, Treasury Board Secretariat.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphan Déry (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Good morning. I'm Stéphan Déry, Chief Executive Officer of the Translation Bureau.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now hear from Mr. MacKinnon. Then, as usual, the Committee members may make comments or ask questions to the witnesses.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am honoured to appear before you today to talk about very important issues within the department, and within the government in general. I will then be pleased to answer your questions.

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss the disposal of surplus federal real property and lands, as part of your review of the implementation of Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

I would also like to take this opportunity to report on what we are doing to improve the workplace safety of parliamentary interpreters.

I am accompanied today by the people who have just introduced themselves.

I assure you that Public Services and Procurement Canada is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Official Languages Act and helping promote linguistic duality in Canada.

Our commitment extends to all of the department's service areas and includes the disposal of land, buildings and other surplus federal property.

Under Part VII, we have integrated positive measures into our disposal process to enhance the vitality of official language minority communities in Canada, and to support and contribute to their development.

[English]

Our department plays two key roles in the disposal process. First, as one of the largest property owners in the Government of Canada, PSPC is responsible for disposing of real property assets efficiently and responsibly. Second, as a common service organization, we provide optional support to assist other federal departments and agencies with the disposal of their surplus property.

[Translation]

In general, the policy and orientations in this area are provided by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, in the Directive on the Sale or Transfer of Surplus Real Property.

Recognizing the sensitive nature of surplus real property and the various interests of stakeholders, the Directive sets for the expectations regarding the management of surplus real property.

The Directive is implemented through a comprehensive process, the various stages of which are found on page 5 of the document that we have just given the Committee.

In July 2017, PSPC implemented a new procedure for reminding provinces, territories and municipalities of their responsibility for considering the interests of official language minority communities when assessing the possible use of surplus property and in the priority bid process.

Our department is committed to working with official language minority communities to better identify their potential real property needs.

In cooperation with the Treasury Board Secretariat, PSPC strives to strengthen and clarify the orientation given to custodians regarding the disposal process in relation to official language minority communities. We would particularly like to hear this Committee's suggestions regarding changes that could be made to the Directive on the Sale or Transfer of Surplus Real Property established by the Treasury Board.

PSPC also ensures that documentation regarding the sale of surplus real property is available in both official languages.

•(1110)

[*English*]

I turn now to the involvement of the Canada Lands Company, CLC, in the disposal of properties which have been deemed strategic. These tend to be larger, more complex, properties where development and joint ventures may be required. Although CLC reports to Parliament through our minister, Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Public Services and Procurement, it is a Crown corporation and it operates at arm's length from the government. Under the Treasury Board's directive, CLC buys strategic surplus properties that have the potential to derive further value. It oversees their orderly disposal and their reintegration into communities.

Let me talk briefly about the Heather Street property in Vancouver.

[*Translation*]

The Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, or CSF, has expressed considerable interest in this strategic property, which it felt was a potential site for a new French-language school.

The Canada Lands Company worked closely with its First Nations partners and with the CSF to resolve the issue of the school's location as part of the municipal planning process. Their collective efforts bore fruit.

First, the Vancouver city council unanimously approved a policy statement for the Heather Street project, which included a school under the CSF. Then, the parties involved signed a memorandum of agreement for a long-term lease for the school. I can announce that that lease, which makes the site of the school official, will be established once the city council has approved the necessary zoning change for Heather Street, which is the next step in the approval of the municipal plan.

[*English*]

Let me now turn to the other topic of today's meeting, concerning simultaneous interpretation.

I want to recognize, as we all should, the very hard work, great efforts and expertise of our world-class interpreters here in the Parliament of Canada.

Just over two years ago, our government announced a new vision to position the translation bureau as a leader in providing high-quality linguistic services to the government and Canadians. This is a role that I have taken on with great relish and something that I am very proud of, particularly regarding the turnaround at the translation bureau.

[*Translation*]

Under the direction of its new Chief Executive Officer, Stéphan Déry, and his team, the Translation Bureau has made significant progress in implementing this vision.

Until recently, simultaneous interpretation was always provided in carefully controlled conditions, in a booth, with specially designed equipment to capture and process sound.

The Translation Bureau offers two interpretation services, one for Parliament and the other for the Government of Canada.

Technological progress in recent years has allowed a greater number of people to attend meetings virtually. This has led to a significant increase in the demand for teleconference interpretation and for over-the-phone interpretation.

Government of Canada clients rely a lot on conference telephones, cellular telephones and hands-free devices in their daily work. However, those devices do not meet the ISO standard required for simultaneous interpretation.

Consequently, over the last two years, there has also been a significant increase in the number of health and safety incidents, including many due to the poor quality of sound over telephone lines.

When the quality of sound is deformed, interpreters tend to turn up the volume on their headphones to better make out what is being said. In such cases, when there is noise, such as paper being rustled or a file folder falling next to a microphone, there can be a sudden increase in volume, resulting in what is known as acoustic shock.

[*English*]

We also know that prolonged listening, under acoustic conditions, that does not capture the entire range of voice frequencies can cause a continuous ringing in the ears, commonly known as tinnitus. This issue has been observed in countries and organizations around the world that have also seen a rise in over-the-phone interpretation services.

The translation bureau has worked with clients, stakeholders, international interpretation service providers, universities, professional associations, and, of course, the union, to develop a way forward.

[*Translation*]

The Translation Bureau adopts measures to ensure that all interpreters, regardless of their workplace, carry out their duties in a safe environment.

First, the audio element from the telephone is no longer sent to the interpretation console or the conference room. Consequently, for clients of conference interpreting services, participants who take part in teleconferences must send their questions or comments by text or email.

Secondly, we require that all clients upgrade their simultaneous interpretation systems to comply with the ISO standard.

Thirdly, the Bureau now requires that its clients confirm in writing that a sound technician will be on-site throughout the event and that compressor-limiters will be installed on the interpretation consoles.

• (1115)

[English]

For parliamentary interpretation, the translation bureau is working closely with the parliamentary multimedia service to improve audio quality, thereby ensuring the safety of the working conditions for interpreters. Both of the two new legislative chambers have simultaneous interpretation systems and consoles that meet the ISO standard with built-in compressor limiters to protect interpreters from acoustic shock injuries. This summer, all of Parliament's committee rooms are scheduled to be fully upgraded to ISO-compliant consoles. Until then, we have provided all interpreters with portable sound limiters.

[Translation]

We are convinced that these measures will improve the safety and well-being of our interpreters.

In this regard, management at the Translation Bureau will continue to work closely with the union and the professional association representing conference interpreters.

We are also looking for longer-term solutions to these concerns. In particular, we have launched a request for proposals from Canadian companies interested in finding innovative solutions in this area.

We challenge those companies to develop, for the purposes of remote simultaneous interpretation, a modern digital platform that fully complies with the ISO standard and that meets the changing needs of our clients.

At the same time, we remain abreast of emerging technologies and monitor efforts in that regard by other organizations around the world.

We are committed to protecting the health and safety of our interpreters, who provide an important and high-quality service, like the one we are receiving today in the Committee.

[English]

I want to mention the progress made by the translation bureau to modernize its internal systems and better serve client departments and suppliers. Those efforts reached a major milestone with the recent awarding of a contract for developing and implementing a new web-based platform that enhances the capacity of the translation bureau to provide timely, high-quality linguistic services.

[Translation]

I will conclude by saying that PSPC is committed to promoting and supporting official languages and bilingualism in Canada in everything it does.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, and we can be proud of our efforts to serve Canadians in the official language of their choice.

We know that we must continue to improve our relations, particularly with our official language minority communities, to better support the vitality of those communities and help build a better future for all Canadians.

I am fully prepared to answer your questions, and am pleased to continue working with this Committee to promote linguistic duality in this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. MacKinnon.

We will begin the round table immediately.

Mr. Clarke, you have the floor.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Hello, Mr. MacKinnon, Parliamentary Secretary, and all the senior public servants who are with us today.

I am very pleased to receive you. We have been waiting for your attendance for several months. That is not a criticism at all; I know that you have a busy agenda. I am pleased to have you here.

Mr. MacKinnon, I will ask you questions today about the report from the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages in May 2017, which recommended that your department act as soon as possible regarding Francophone schools in Vancouver.

You say that, in July 2017, you implemented a new procedure. As I understand it, following the zoning change approved by the municipality, the project can move ahead. Can we understand that this is almost complete?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Exactly. We expect the municipal process to be completed, and we expect a lease to then be signed.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: When we Committee members visited Vancouver a year and a half ago, we adopted a unanimous motion to give moral and political support to the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

If I called the members of the CSF today, are you sure that they would say that everything is going well, that the matter is progressing and that they are convinced that the project will go ahead?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Yes, absolutely. It was a long haul of more than 10 years. It took too long, in my opinion. However, we are happy with the results that we are about to achieve.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: On page 6, under "Positive Measures", you refer to the implementation of a new procedure.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: What page 6 are you referring to?

• (1120)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I'm referring to page 6 of your speaking notes.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Alright.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Could you give some more information on the new procedure that you allowed you to advance the project in Vancouver?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I'll ask Mr. McBain to tell you about it.

This process was begun by the Canada Lands Company, as the land in question was in the hands of that company, and then its partner.

I would therefore ask Mr. McBain to tell you more about the efforts they made.

Mr. John McBain: Thank you for the question.

I'd like to describe for you how things work in terms of surplus federal real property and lands.

[English]

You have three players: the province, which must fund the schools; the school boards, which must identify the need; and importantly, the municipalities, which approve the plans and the plans for property. Those three must work together, with Canada Lands in this case, after we receive a property from the federal government. In our world, we are reaching out proactively to minority language communities wherever we work. We're not just relying on general broadcast news or items to engage them.

We do general advertisements to say we're having a public meeting. We hope everyone comes, but we reach out specifically to minority language communities in that regard.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, Mr. McBain.

[Translation]

Mr. MacKinnon, I will nevertheless ask you a question, given that you are the political stakeholder in this matter.

I know that, like Mr. McBain said, there are several stakeholders, particularly the municipalities and school boards, and that we need to work together. What the Committee understands is that according to the provisions governing real estate companies, there is a hierarchy that must be respected when disposing of a property. I checked this and, based on the latest news, your department does not place official-language minority communities at the top of the hierarchy.

Beyond that cooperation, wouldn't it be commendable and even necessary to raise the position of OLMCs on that list so that they are nearly at the top?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I suggest that you consult page 5 of the document that we provided you. In it, you can find the list of steps to follow, which you call the hierarchy, when we decide that any surplus land belonging to the Government of Canada is to be sold. That comes from a Treasury Board Secretariat directive that we must follow.

In late 2015, the Treasury Board Secretariat in fact stated that official-language minority communities had to be explicitly consulted. Afterwards, our department updated its procedures and policies.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: However, official-language minority communities have not been officially placed higher in the hierarchy as provided by the Act.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: If they were not, it is because it is clear that, based on this hierarchy, those communities must be consulted by the provinces.

That said, as I mentioned in my opening statement, we are very open to the idea that the Committee should inform us about any specifications or suggestions regarding how we can improve upon this offer.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Alright. Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon. We will certainly send them to you.

To close your presentation, you said that PSPC is committed "to promoting and supporting bilingualism in Canada in everything we do." For my part, I noted during all of my meetings with representatives of OLMCs that they were a bit tired of hearing about promotion and all the rest. You make these speeches, while at the same time, we noted that two months ago, your department's Internet sites that featured calls for tenders were riddled with errors in the French. I am not saying you are guilty of anything, but I am telling you this respectfully. These were grammar or even translation errors. It is interesting and all the more since we have Mr. Déry from the Translation Bureau with us.

It seems that we currently have a lack of leadership in Cabinet. How do you answer for this?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Nothing shocks us more than mistakes in one or both official languages, whether as part of a call for tenders, on our site Buyandsell.gc.ca or in another context. I think that Mr. Déry will confirm it. This message was sent loud and clear to all affected departments.

Public Services and Procurement Canada provides services to other departments, including procurement services. Other departments often send us the parameters and wording for calls for tenders that have mistakes and, given the volume, they will go directly up on the site. Departments themselves even have the right to upload them to the PSPC Internet site. In such cases, the contents of call for tenders is not certified beforehand by the Translation Bureau.

• (1125)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Going through the Translation Bureau is no longer mandatory.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I am certain that Mr. Déry will confirm that the quality of work is always a priority at the Translation Bureau and that this is still the case today. When the Translation Bureau has the time to do so when reviewing a call for tenders or any other document, priority is given to the quality of the work.

I can let Mr. Déry tell you about it.

The Chair: We need to move to another stakeholder.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Alright. We'll come back to it.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here today, Mr. MacKinnon. I would also like to give a big thank you to your entire team.

We have extremely important topics and I will try to deal with them quickly. We do not have much time to discuss them at length or give long responses. We need to be concise.

You said that you have been consulting us to see what the federal government can do to improve the Official Languages Act. To me, there are three things that can be done.

First, we need to hold consultations, among other things.

Second, we need to provide services.

Third, we need to amend the fourth step of your process for disposing of surplus federal properties. The first step of this process is to report the property as being surplus. The second step is to properly perform all due diligence activities. The third step is to determine the type of disposal; that also works. The fourth step is to consult the aboriginal community; I would add that we should also consult Francophone minorities.

The problem that we have does not only affect your department, but all federal departments. Consultations are held all over the province, but OLMCs do not have what they should. Isn't this the way that we can ensure consultation during the process?

The communities are only part of the issue. However, Francophone schools are still very recognized. The 1990 judgment gave Francophone minorities the right to an education in French. Under the Constitution, it is the federal government that now must hold consultations.

Should the answer to amending the Act be that, at the start of the process, school boards and OLMCs be consulted before a property goes to the provinces?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I would like to make a personal remark before answering your question, Mr. Samson.

I am old enough to remember that without the intervention of the Government of Canada, there would be no Francophone schools in Saint John, New Brunswick or Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island or other places.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Or in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: You can be certain that I am always seeking to strengthen the federal government's role in minority-language education in Canada.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So you believe that it would be fine, in the fourth step of the process, to add consulting the Francophone minority, in addition to the aboriginal community?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I think that I have been clear in my comments. We are looking for suggestions from this committee to find out how we can strengthen the Government of Canada's role in promoting official languages.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You can't say that the member from Nova Scotia hasn't given you suggestions.

I will now address Mr. McBain and speak in a bit greater detail about the process.

In British Columbia, as we know, we have been looking for land in Vancouver for more than 10 years. The situation is really problematic. I met Mr. Robert Howald and Ms. Deana Grinnell, who worked with me at the time and with the school boards. I can definitely thank them for their work.

I have more pointed questions and you may be able to clarify things for me.

The Heather Street land project is almost finished, as was mentioned by the parliamentary secretary. The agreement was signed in February, but the CSF has been waiting for a reply for two months. Should we be worried about it or has it been solved?

• (1130)

Mr. John McBain: The agreement was signed by the four parties, but we are now trying to get a change in zoning from the City of Vancouver. After that has been acquired, it will be possible to implement the lease between the CSF and the partners.

Mr. Darrell Samson: How much time do you think that will take? Will it be a week? Two weeks?

Mr. John McBain: That process is managed by the City of Vancouver. It may take another year or maybe it will be towards the end of this year.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would like for that to be done before the next election, as you can understand.

There is another very important location that I would like speak quickly about, this being the Jericho site.

First, the CSF sent you a letter a few months ago and they still have not received a reply.

Second, will the CSF be consulted?

Third, what action will you take to ensure that the CSF will participate in consultations and possibly even the purchase or rental of the site?

Mr. John McBain: Thank you for your question.

In fact, I recently signed the reply letter to CSF's letter.

We will engage with the CFS in the same way that we have for the Heather Street site. We communicated with the CSF 85 times and had 15 meetings during consultations on the Heather Street site. We will continue to engage in the same way for the Jericho site.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. McBain, I must congratulate you for the quality of your French. Continue, that's fine.

I like your response. However, will the result be the same? We will have the Heather Street site, but will we have the Jericho site?

Mr. John McBain: Unfortunately, I do not have the authority to decide.

It is a process that takes place between the City, our partner, the First Nations and all the community groups. Several parties have expressed their interest in the Jericho site.

[English]

That includes day care, citizens care, schools and so on.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: I will finish with one last question.

There is a third site, the Royal Roads site in Victoria. I don't believe that this site belonging to the government has yet been conveyed, Mr. MacKinnon. Can we move to step 4 and hold consultations sooner rather than later so that the stakeholders are up to speed?

According to what I have seen since becoming involved in this file, the CSF has done good work, but I would like to continue to support them and apply a bit of pressure, since we always need pressure to get results.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mister Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for attending today.

Mr. MacKinnon, my question is related to the well-known decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Association des parents de l'école Rose-des-vents v. British Columbia (Education)* regarding the widespread shortage of schools.

That judgment was made just before your government was elected. Since 2015, decisions have been made.

How far back does this disposal process date?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: The Directive was updated, as I told you...

Mr. François Choquette: When was the Directive updated?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: It was in late 2015, so in December 2015.

Mr. François Choquette: Was this directive updated in response to the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the École Rose-des-vents?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I will let Ms. Sultan answer that question.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: I will answer your question in English. I hope that is alright with you.

Mr. François Choquette: No problem.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Thank you very much. My answer will be clearer in English.

[English]

The update to the directive was made, as mentioned, at the end of 2015. It was specifically in response to a letter that was received from the Commissioner of Official Languages.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Was that linked to the decision regarding the École Rose-des-vents?

What was in this letter from the commissioner? I can ask you the question, but we won't have time to discuss it in detail. Can you send this letter to the clerk so that we can take a look at it?

• (1135)

[English]

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Actually, it is regarding a separate issue in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. François Choquette: Alright.

Mr. MacKinnon, there is a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the insufficient number of Francophone schools in provinces such as British Columbia. This was a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Certainly.

Mr. François Choquette: The Court told you that there is a problem regarding the disposal of property, among other things. It seems that there has not been any amendment to the policy, the Directive, following that decision. That is what concerns me.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I am not a constitutional expert.

Clearly, the Government of Canada is only one of the stakeholders that can sell property to a school board.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, but the Official Languages Act applies to you.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Absolutely.

My interpretation of the situation in British Columbia is that the government immediately set into action. All of the discussions in which I participated, with Mr. McBain or with department representatives, sought to encourage a positive outcome for the Conseil scolaire francophone of British Columbia.

Public Services and Procurement Canada has updated internal procedures in response to a decision or an intervention by Ms. Foote, who was the affected minister at the time. We are clearly continuing in this positive direction.

Mr. François Choquette: I understand your point of view, Mr. MacKinnon.

What concerns me and probably concerns all official-language minority communities is what happened following this decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, which received a lot of media coverage. Normally, the Treasury Board would have to be informed and we would recognize the need to do something.

Since your role is to comply with the Official Languages Act, you would have had to enforce a new policy in reaction to that decision. It's a bit like what Mr. Samson said regarding Part IV. It is certainly very important to consult First Nations first. I also believe it. That is part of the Constitution Act, 1982. That said, the Official Languages Act is nevertheless quasi-constitutional. Therefore, I don't understand why official-language minority communities are not consulted during your disposal process.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: We feel we have improved our positive offer.

Mr. François Choquette: How have you improved it?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: That was done through the update of the Directive, then the update...

Mr. François Choquette: What did this update consist of, exactly?

[*English*]

Ms. Jessica Sultan: If I may, I do have a few pieces of information to offer.

The specific change that was made is that:

Custodians shall develop a balanced disposal strategy for strategic surplus properties that is supported by a comprehensive assessment of federal and other stakeholder interests (including those of official language minority communities)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: I understand very well the change that you have made, but I don't see how that addresses the judgment by the Supreme Court of Canada. You speak of groups in general, and you included official-language minority communities among them. What concerns me about your directive is that it does not give priority to anyone in particular, whether these are environmental groups, municipalities or official-language minority communities. In my view, your policy does not address the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: On the contrary, Mr. Choquette. For the first time, we explicitly mention official-language minority communities in this directive, which governs all of us at the department. In addition, the department has created internal methods regarding this directive. In the case we just discussed, the Canada Lands Company was incredibly engaged with the Francophone community in British Columbia. As a result, we feel that we have significantly improved our consideration for official-language minority communities in those decisions.

That said, as I think I told you right at the start, we are very open to suggestions like the ones that you just mentioned. However, we should remember that setting priorities involves putting something ahead of something else.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. MacKinnon, I absolutely agree with you, but we need to give equal priority to official-language minority communities and aboriginal peoples.

Thank you very much.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

We will now move to Ms. Fortier.

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I have not had the privilege of sitting on the Committee since last September, but I know that the members of the Committee have been working very hard on this file, and so I am grateful for your presence.

The first of my two questions deals with the disposal process.

The Université de l'Ontario français is currently looking for a site to move onto. I know that the federal government has been

participating in discussions about this. Can you explain to us how the Franco-Ontarian community could benefit from your new directive? I am trying to understand the process and see who else could participate in these discussions.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: The Université de l'Ontario français is clearly a file that all of us in the government feel is very important. To my knowledge, the department has not been asked. If it ever is, we would gladly take an inventory of the lands that might interest the Université.

With respect to the Canada Lands Company, I believe that it was asked. I will let Mr. McBain tell you about the discussions that may have taken place at this stage.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Can you give me a quick answer? I would also like to talk to the Translation Bureau.

Mr. John McBain: Actually, I will give the floor to Mr. Mills.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Alright.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Mills: I would just like to add that Canadian Heritage has talked with the department about the university. Real estate services within PSPC did provide a list of properties that we had that were up for disposal. Unfortunately, none of the current properties met their needs for the university, but in the future we would continue to look at disposals and engage to see if new properties that came up could meet their needs. One of the things that we are looking at when we have partners that bring a more general need for land is aggregating our properties that are coming up for disposal and giving people a bit more of a range, as opposed to just doing it on a transaction-by-transaction basis.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much.

I would now like to talk about the Translation Bureau.

I would like to give you the opportunity to answer the question that was asked earlier by Mr. Clarke regarding quality, but just before, while I recognize the exceptional interpretation work and all the work that has been done up to now to improve the provided services, I would like to know whether there are measures or factors to which we can continue to dedicate efforts in order to ensure that the Translation Bureau is a leader in the field, as you mentioned. I would like for you to take a moment and tell us how you see the next steps and what should be done to improve things even more.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I welcome our colleague Mr. Clarke's question about quality.

Quality is our biggest concern. I want Canada to be a French-language model for the entire world, like France or any other country in the Francophonie. I would also like the same recognition from English-speaking countries. I think we should aspire to be a model to the world.

That's why we've established the position of Chief Quality Officer at the translation bureau, thus clearly showing that quality is the translation bureau's greatest concern and that it will accept no compromise in that area. I'm going to ask Mr. Déry to tell you more about that.

We've also made considerable progress in establishing partnerships. We have contacted translation schools and professional associations, signed agreements and established partnerships to ensure a succession in our translation and interpretation services. We have also restored the tradition of welcoming students to the translation bureau in summer. I'm personally committed to meeting those students on the ground and to accompanying Mr. Déry in signing partnership agreements. He must be starting to tire of my presence at his side when, for example, we attend the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. In Canada, the translation bureau is an 87-year-old institution and we should be very proud of it.

Now I'll ask Mr. Déry to talk about his work at greater length. This is a project with which I'm proud to be associated.

• (1145)

The Chair: Please respond briefly, Mr. Déry.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I'll be brief.

I want to assure you that we at the translation bureau have established a quality framework for all the products we deliver to the government. As an optional common services organization, we provide services to all departments that request them and to Parliament. We ensure that documents are of high quality.

The bureau is a leader once again. We continue to work with our employees, professional associations, universities and the translation and interpretation industry. Instead of using the lowest price as the only criterion, our new contracts now encourage both price and quality. We therefore cooperate closely with all stakeholders to improve the quality of our services and to ensure that our clients, the departments, meet the requirements of the Official Languages Act as fully as possible.

The Chair: Mr. Rioux, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have three questions, which I'll ask in quick succession since our time is limited.

With regard to Royal Roads University, the people we met in Vancouver said they were unable to communicate with you. Has the situation changed since then?

Second, the Directive on the Sale or Transfer of Surplus Real Property requires that federal institutions consider the interests of the official language minority communities. Correct me if I'm wrong, but that seems like wishful thinking to me.

Lastly, on page 4 of your speaking notes, you say you've put in place positive measures as part of your disposal process. Could you tell us what those measures are?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you for your questions.

Mr. Rioux, I gather your interest in Royal Roads University is related to the role you played with the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean, a file we followed with great interest and in which your contribution was invaluable.

As I mentioned earlier, we stepped up our positive involvement with the communities after clarifying the directive in 2015. We are increasing our interactions with the communities, we remind the other orders of government that they have obligations toward the

official language communities, and we ensure that those obligations are maintained and discharged. It is in that capacity that we feel there is a formal place for the communities in the hierarchy, if I may put it that way. However, we remain open to suggestions, particularly from this committee, on how to formalize, make official and enhance—whatever the preferred verb is here—this role in the sale of surplus lands.

Would you like to talk about Royal Roads University now?

Mr. Jean Rioux: Yes, briefly.

[*English*]

Mr. John McBain: It's early days for us. We've had one meeting with National Defence on this potential disposal. It's still in their hands.

[*Translation*]

However, as Mr. MacKinnon said, there are several steps in the disposal process. The Canada Lands Company is involved only in steps 6 and 7. So a lot of work has to be done before we intervene.

• (1150)

Mr. Jean Rioux: However, those people haven't received an answer yet. We should be able to communicate with representatives of the francophone community.

Mr. John McBain: Yes.

Mr. Jean Rioux: I'm telling you what they told us during our visit last fall. The situation may have changed since then.

Mr. John McBain: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Jean Rioux: What I remember from our tour to Vancouver is that only one in five francophones has access to early childhood services in French. We're studying the case of the Université de l'Ontario français. I think we should have more than one way of saying it. We should take various interests into account. Since our country is based on bilingualism, I hope you can give the official language minority communities a higher rank in the hierarchy on both the francophone and anglophone sides.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Rioux, we feel we've done that, but we're still listening carefully to every suggestion that might enhance or give official status to the role of the minority language communities in this process.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will turn the floor over to Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you for being here this morning.

Mr. MacKinnon, in numerical order, No. 23 comes before No. 35, at least as far as I know. That's the case in the Constitution of Canada too and in the Official Languages Act.

If you want a suggestion, I can give you one right now. I think I'll even introduce a motion at a future committee meeting so that all parliamentarians can agree.

I'm going to propose a measure that will be consistent with what Mr. Samson, Ms. Fortier and Mr. Clarke said earlier.

Step 4 concerns aboriginal consultation. We have nothing against aboriginal people, of course, but, in step 3 or 4, or between steps 3 and 4, we should talk about consulting the OLMCs and the school boards. It's as essential to consult them as it is, under the Constitution, to consult aboriginal people.

In the Constitution Act, section 23, which concerns the official language minority communities, comes before section 35, regarding the rights of aboriginal peoples. The parliamentarians who drafted the act at the time, or who suggested it, initially talked about official language minority rights.

You talked about positive measures in your opening remarks. I think it would be a positive measure to send a clear and essential signal that minority francophones across the country are on the same level as aboriginal people, and that's also the case of the school boards, which have to fight within the disposal process described here. They have to fight to ensure their place, to have offices and lands available to them.

I'm asking you the question and I'm putting it to Mr. McBain as well. You're a politician like us. We all have big political ambitions, and we want to serve the entire community well. In actual fact, once we've drafted the laws, regulations and processes, we aren't the ones who implement them. It's Mr. McBain and his colleagues.

Do those people think the same way we do, or do they think that, in spite of our big ambitions, there may be more realistic things to do on the ground on a daily basis, which may be different from what we want done?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I take it for granted that everyone shares this wish. The process of disposing of surplus lands is a more highly detailed and rigorous one than you might think at first glance.

As I told you, I'm not a constitutional expert. So I can't tell you what should take precedence from the standpoint of the law. That would be an interesting question to put to constitutional experts, jurists or your legal counsel.

• (1155)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We don't want to do that to the detriment of one group or another. That's not the issue.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Absolutely. I would repeat, once again, that we are ready to hear and consider your suggestions on this matter. I know the government's listening very closely.

In this 50th anniversary year of the Official Languages Act, our government is constantly striving to improve, to take the necessary steps so that this country can envision another 50 years of bilingualism and anglophone and francophone presence, as the case may be, all across Canada.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. McBain, do you have anything to add?

[English]

You can answer in English.

Mr. John McBain: Thank you.

It's a very interesting question because in my mind you have Treasury Board that sets the policy, the departments that carry out the policy and then the transaction. In the case of Heather Street there was schedule G of the transaction of the sale between Public Works and Canada Lands that said the province has expressed an interest in our property for a school site, and that is a requirement placed on us from the custodian selling it to us that we explore that.

Frankly, I'm very proud of that result because we facilitated that there is a property on there, and we had to work with our nations' partners and the city to get that done.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How long was the process from the beginning to—

Mr. John McBain: We acquired the property in 2014. In 2018, we had a memorandum in place for a lease. We don't control that process. That's my other point. The municipalities place a great—they control what happens with the property. At the same time that we were doing the CSF in Vancouver, we were developing Village des Riverains here in Ottawa. There are three school sites on that property, two of which are for minority languages, so that process worked very well without much noise while we were also doing the other process.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What you're telling us is that whatever we think, it's not only the federal...that can be a problem somewhere in the process. It's mostly the municipality.

Mr. John McBain: When I appeared before a Senate committee, I had a senator ask me, "Why don't you sell them land tomorrow so they can expand their school?" I don't have that power because I would have to get it rezoned and the city won't allow me to rezone it without a master plan.

[Translation]

Several players are involved.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: At the meetings we had, people suggested it was mainly the federal government that was obstructing. You're telling us it's the municipality that obstructs most of the time.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I don't think you can say obstruct when there've been 85 meetings.

Mr. McBain just explained it to you. I don't think I need to draw you a picture to describe urban planning in Vancouver.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I was the mayor of a small town of 5,000 inhabitants, and it was complicated.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: So imagine what it's like in one of the biggest and most expensive real estate markets in North America.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I believe I still have some speaking time, Mr. Chair. Mr. Samson had some time earlier.

Incidentally, I understand how people can get tinnitus when he speaks. He speaks so loudly.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, you have a minute left. We're nearing the end of the first hour of the meeting.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: All right.

I know my ears are ringing. So I'm going to stay on topic, Mr. Déry.

According to one study, some 35% to 40% of Canadians have temporary or permanent tinnitus. I understand how interpreters can get it. You need only see what goes on in a room like this. This is a term I didn't know: compressor limiters. I don't know what they are, and I'm trying to understand how they work. The sound generated by a door as it opens or closes, or by a pencil that's dropped, is picked up by the devices, and the compressor limiter reduces it.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I have a portable sound limiter here. Without going too much into the details, the compressor limiters we're looking for are installed on sound consoles. They reduce the sound to a certain number of decibels to prevent tinnitus. If you bang on the table with your fist, the sound produced will be blocked and the interpreters won't receive an acoustic shock.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That's not currently the case.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: We've installed compressor limiters in Parliament's new rooms. As the parliamentary secretary said, parliamentary services will begin switching over all systems in June to equip the consoles with integrated compressor limiters. We're working with our clients to ensure integrated compressor limiters are installed across the federal government. In the meantime, we're providing our interpreters and freelancers with small portable sound limiters like the one I have here. This device isn't of the same high quality as the integrated compressor limiters, but we had it tested at the University of Geneva so that these people would be protected, and it meets ISO standard requirements.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much,

Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

That concludes the first part of the meeting.

Mr. MacKinnon, thank you for appearing before our committee. We will let you go now.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes, and then we will continue with the witnesses in the second hour.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)

• (1215)

The Chair: We will now resume the meeting.

We will have four-minute rounds for the second hour. Those four minutes will include the witnesses' response time so that all committee members can take part in the discussion. I'll try to set aside a little time at the end of the meeting for an in camera discussion of the committee's future business until the end of June.

Lucie Levesque has just joined us. She is Director General of the Real Property Services Branch at Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Welcome, Mrs. Levesque.

We will start immediately with you, Mrs. Boucher. You have four minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here today.

My question will be for you, Mr. Mills.

You've testified before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages. We've spoken to you at length about the École Rose-des-vents in the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. You said at the time that you weren't really aware of the situation. I hope you know more about it now.

Can you tell us where the decision concerning the École Rose-des-vents stands? Have you carefully read the judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada in *Association des parents de l'école Rose-des-vents v. Colombie-Britannique (Éducation)*? Can you tell us about it, please?

[English]

Mr. Michael Mills: I'd like to begin to answer by explaining what happened at the Senate. In terms of the briefing material, when we look at disposals and projects, we get focused on the name of the property. In the preparation, we were focused on the Fairmont site, the Jericho site and the Heather Street site. We weren't as focused on that site. We were also focusing on the school board, as they are intervenient. When we were doing the preparation, I was focusing on the board and on the sites, and not on the name of the elementary school. That was the area of confusion. Certainly, in preparation for today I've gone back and looked at those decisions and looked through our process.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Can you explain that decision to us then?

[English]

Mr. Michael Mills: Do you mean for me to explain the decision?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, I'm asking you please to explain the Supreme Court decision to refresh the memories of committee members.

[English]

Mr. Michael Mills: To my level of knowledge, that decision was focused on whether or not the site conditions for Rose-des-vents were equivalent to the site conditions for English-language schools and whether the elementary school and the board were given equal access to high-quality properties. It was decided that efforts should be made by the province and others to make sure that they are provided schools that are equivalent to English-language counterparts.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

Mr. Arseneault now has the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): What happened to Ms. Lambropoulos?

The Chair: I'm following the order indicated here. Ms. Lambropoulos will have her turn.

Mr. René Arseneault: All right.

Thank you for your answer, Mr. Mills. I also remember that discussion in the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, and it surprised me somewhat, but you had just taken up your duties at the time, if my memory serves me.

Ms. Sultan, you work at Treasury Board Secretariat. You heard the questions from committee members on both sides of the table.

Directives come first from TBS. Under the Official Languages Act, what do you think would be an unambiguously positive measure that is clear and specific and inevitably produces results?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Thank you for that question.

As we said, in 2015, we made a change so that the OLMCs were expressly mentioned in the directives. We also intend to make a few changes to the Policy Suite Reset Series.

• (1220)

[*English*]

That means that right now we are reviewing our current suite of policies and looking at consulting widely with various stakeholders—these committees included—to look at changes that could potentially be made to the directive to make it better.

To be succinct, what we are considering as part of our future directive is to specifically require notification of official language minority communities of potential disposals of surplus property. Right now the way that it works is that we, as you're probably aware, notify other federal departments, Crowns, provinces and municipalities. The expectation is that official language minority communities advance their interests through the provinces. As part of our new proposed directive, we recommended that, rather than have OLMCs working through provinces, they would be directly notified on a priority basis.

Mr. René Arseneault: By the department.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: That can happen in two ways. Yes, by the department, but there's a specific distinction that I'll note. Yes, by the department, by the custodian of the property.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Very good. I like what I just heard.

The initiative would come from the department. So the idea isn't to delegate the task of doing it to the provinces, which the provinces don't always do.

Since we're basking in a spirit of openness and sincerity regarding the department's duty, I'll ask the following question.

Do you have a tool for determining where these communities are and what organizations might benefit from these properties? Do you currently have any way of knowing that? How can we prepare for it?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: That's a very interesting question.

We currently have no tool with which to do that. This is a process. We're sending out emails in an attempt to determine what parties might want to become owners. The idea is to send emails to all potentially interested parties.

[*English*]

It would be wonderful to have some sort of tool where we could centrally post properties that were potentially becoming available so that it would be universally available to anybody who wanted to see it, as opposed to our needing to identify the parties and then send them the information. It would be a different way of ensuring open access to the information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Now we will go to Mr. Choquette for four minutes.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Déry, Thank you for being here and congratulations on your appointment. This is the first time I've had the opportunity to tell you that in public. You mentioned you've been the new CEO of the translation bureau for about two years.

You've seen the mistakes that have been reported in the postings of Public Services and Procurement Canada, for example.

Did the translation bureau make those mistakes?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I can tell you that the translation bureau works with all the departments that ask it to work with them.

Mr. François Choquette: Is Public Services and Procurement Canada your client?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Public Services and Procurement Canada is our client. We work closely with that department.

Public Services isn't the only organization that can post notices to the Buyandsell website. It's open to many departments. So it's not necessarily monitored.

We work very closely with Public Services and Procurement Canada to review all titles and to ensure that translations are good. We've implemented something in the past three months, but it concerns the postings of Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Mr. François Choquette: So I imagine you'll find a strategy with Public Services and Procurement Canada to prevent this from reoccurring.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes, we're working with the department to ensure that translations posted to the website by Public Services and Procurement Canada are of high quality.

Mr. François Choquette: That's perfect.

As you know, we conducted an extensive study on the translation bureau at the start of our mandate. As a result, we now have a high-quality senior executive at the bureau. You mentioned that the mission is no longer just to provide services at the lowest possible price but to offer quality as well. That's very important, and we're very pleased about it. We congratulate you.

In the report, we discussed the idea of considering the possibility of offering the translation bureau's services to all government departments and agencies to ensure optimum quality.

Are you currently in talks or communication with Treasury Board on that?

•(1225)

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes, we're working on the bureau's status. The bureau is currently an optional service provider, and I'd say that the advent of neural translation has altered the landscape in the past two years.

It has led us to re-examine and consider what would be the best way to ensure the highest quality in federal documents and federal government communications with Canadians.

We're working with Canadian Heritage on a pilot project. All the documents prepared by Canadian Heritage are first translated by a neural translation machine, an AI machine, and then reviewed by a professional. We consider that very important.

Mr. François Choquette: Absolutely.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: We want to draw on the work we're doing with Canadian Heritage to make a proposal and say how we might use new technologies to achieve better translation, at lower cost and more quickly, to serve the federal government as a whole.

Whether the bureau's services are mandatory or optional, the decision isn't up to us. It's up to the federal government and the ministers. However, we're preparing to say how we'll integrate those technologies and how we'll be able to provide better service to the federal government, whether it be Parliament or the federal departments.

Mr. François Choquette: It's very important that this translation tool be used by translation professionals and not by ordinary people because that's the problem that arises. Ordinary people use a program like Google Translate, and then they post their translations to the Public services and Procurement Canada website and that results in the absurd situations we see in the media.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Now we will hear from Mr. Samson and then Ms. Lambropoulos.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's Ms. Lambropoulos's turn.

The Chair: Ms. Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you very much for being with us today.

I have a number of questions.

[English]

In the document that you gave us about disposals of surplus federal properties, on the last page, it says "In 2017, PSPC modified its priority circulation notices to remind provinces, territories and municipalities to consider official language minority community needs."

You then said, when answering my colleague's question, that you reach out to minority groups directly. I don't think that's the case, because you probably don't know who these groups are, correct?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Treasury Board Secretariat does not reach out to official language minority communities directly. We are responsible for the administrative policy that governs the way in which custodial departments would reach out directly.

I'll let PSPC answer for PSPC.

[Translation]

Ms. Lucie Levesque (Director General, Real Property Services Branch, Public Services and Procurement Canada): Regarding the changes to the procedures, we've introduced an internal procedure at PSPC to remind the various stakeholders for whom we prepare priority notifications that they must advance the interests of the official language minority communities.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Let's say that there's a building owned by Canada and it's being disposed of. It goes to the municipality, because that's the next group that's interested in it. It would be up to them to consider the needs of the minority community.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: It would be up to the provinces to represent the needs of the official language minority community, specifically with regard to educational requirements. For example, if there were a need for schools, they could raise their hands in terms of a priority interest, and the OLMCs would have their voice raised through the provinces.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

Now not necessarily related to official language minorities, but let's say that the municipality asked for a certain building or wanted to pay for it.

Is there any way that Canada Lands would be able to make sure it went to the public good by ensuring that a certain percentage of the building could be used for other community services or anything like that? Is there any way that the Government of Canada can ensure that the buildings would be used in the greatest capacity, let's say?

•(1230)

Ms. Jessica Sultan: I'll answer that. From a policy perspective, I'll make an important distinction in the process. We have two ways that we look at properties. We look at properties as routine disposals or strategic disposals.

In a routine disposal, it goes in the same order: federal, Crown, provincial, municipal. Groups can raise interest in acquiring the property for public purpose. Specifically it has to be for public purpose. If none of the groups are interested, it then is sold on the open market.

With a strategic property, the process is slightly different. Generally, while strategic properties are sold through the Canada Lands Company—and I won't speak further to that; I'll leave that for them—it's still the same idea of groups being able to identify interest in public purpose use of the property. Sometimes the properties that are sold are too big for one custodian, so they would identify their interest in a part of that property. CLC would then consider that as part of their strategy for that site.

Does that answer your question?

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Yes.

Mr. John McBain: From the Canada Lands point of view, the consultation is the same for the custodian, if I look at PSPC as an example. Under the routine, they can sell direct and the policy does allow them to sell it for a public purpose or a public good. If it is a strategic property, it is so noted.

I can quote from the agreement of purchase and sale between PSC and ourselves for the Heather Street land. It said, "Provincial ministry of education objective: potential interest in acquiring a proportion of property for school sites to be used for francophone education."

That is a binding part of the agreement of purchase and sale that we have with the custodian. Then we pursue that. The result is the one-acre property for the CSF.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

I'll be very brief because I have two questions.

Mr. Déry, I'm very interested in the translation bureau. I've had occasion to express my views on the subject on many occasions.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that between 100 and 400 employees left the bureau between 2005 and 2015. If that's true, how many employees have you hired since then?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: It's true that we lost employees until 2015.

Mr. Darrell Samson: What was the approximate figure between 2005 and 2015?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: From memory, it was 400 or 450 employees.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I see.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Since 2017, with the new vision, we've reconnected with the universities. We've hired more than 300 student trainees and more than 100 full-time employees.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Pardon me for interrupting you, but I don't have a lot of time.

You've rehired employees, but what's changed on the ground? If there are 400 fewer employees to do the work, either you're doing less or it's taking more time to do it, or else you're sending work out to freelancers. Is that what happened before 2015? Did the departments send out more of their documents for translation to other suppliers than the translation bureau.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: In the past two years, two departments have resumed doing business with the translation bureau, which has increased the number of words we translate per year.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's excellent.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: We've hired specialized translators to replace those we've lost over the years. They may be translators specialized in fisheries, meteorology or nuclear medicine.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I hope you've rehired those who left.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Pardon me for interrupting you, but I don't have much time left. You're doing a good job of answering my questions.

Here's my most important question. Do you currently have the capacity to translate all documents from all federal departments using the new tools you mentioned?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: The translation bureau works in partnership with the translation industry and can adapt to an increase in demand. We're entirely capable of adapting in cooperation with our industry partners. From 40% to 44% of translation requests that we receive are forwarded to the private sector. When we receive those translated documents, they are reviewed to ensure their quality. In that way, we can process a larger number of translation requests.

● (1235)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Was it more than 44% in 2015?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: It has always varied between 39% and 44%.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You've hired 400 more employees. Can't you translate more documents in house?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: We've hired 100 more employees since 2017. Yes, we can translate more documents in house, but demand has increased over that same period. We're working with our private-sector partners to be able to provide the service.

Mr. Darrell Samson: However, they must go through you.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes. Many of the people we've rehired revise translations in order to deliver high-quality work to the government.

Mr. Darrell Samson: All right, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Now we will go to Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Déry, I have a question further to that of Mr. Samson.

Do you personally think the departments should be required to use your bureau's services?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: My personal opinion isn't important. I'm a federal employee, and I apply the directives I'm given. The translation bureau is a service organization. As I said, we can definitely do more. We're working hard to do high-quality work, and that's important for us.

As I said in response to a question, artificial intelligence and neural translation have altered the situation, and we must determine the best way to work with those tools. The pilot project we're conducting with Canadian Heritage is helping us clarify our thinking. We recently established the advisory committee of the chief executive officer of the translation bureau, on which are represented the organizations of the official language minority communities, such as the FCFA, and the deputy ministers of many federal departments. The role of the advisory committee is to provide advice to the CEO, to me, on how to work with these new technologies and to help me determine how the bureau should position itself for the future.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Thank you, Mr. Déry.

[*English*]

Madame Sultan, you explained quite clearly the difference between the disposal as routine or strategic, which is the third step in the disposal process.

Is step 4, which emphasizes aboriginal consultation, routine disposal or strategic disposal?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: The answer is both.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, because it seems to me that routine and strategic are part of steps 3, 4, and 5, kind of.

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Just to make a distinction, this deck is actually a PSPC product and not a TBS product.

I specifically make that distinction because of two things. In terms of our roles, I'm responsible for setting the policy, which is then operationalized through the departments. For example, PSPC is then going through and actually following through on the process, so they would be better positioned to explain these steps.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you very much.

Madame Levesque.

[Translation]

Ms. Lucie Levesque: Section 35 of the Constitution Act applies in both cases, routine and strategic disposals.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: That's part of the process. Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 will all apply to what we're going to do, to both routine and strategic disposals.

I'd like to add one point on the subject of the process.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: I'd like to clarify the fact that we survey the interests of the various levels of government simultaneously.

We don't send the offer to the federal government, then wait for a response before presenting it to the other levels.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

This is the first time we've heard that.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: We send the offer to all levels of government at the same time, the federal level and crown corporations, the provinces...

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Perhaps the municipalities and so on.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: However, priority may vary based on who shows an interest.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Who comes first?

Ms. Lucie Levesque: If, for example, CMHC expresses its interest—is it SCHL in French? French acronyms aren't my strong suit.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: It's the Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement, or SCHL.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: As regards the federal lands initiative, we have to see where we can develop affordable housing.

Since that's a federal program, priority will eventually go to an interest at the municipal level.

A priority could be established for a property subject to routine disposal.

•(1240)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you very much for your explanation, Mrs. Levesque.

I have a very important question because this is the first time I've heard this.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: In a strategic disposal, all interests are part of what we assess for the disposal plan, which is then sent to the Canada Land Company.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's really important for the committee.

So does priority go back to the party that responds first?

Ms. Lucie Levesque: No, priority doesn't go back to the party that responds first.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Ms. Lucie Levesque: If it's a routine disposal, priority means the first right of review.

We consult everyone at the same time, but the first right of review goes to the federal government, then to the crown corporations, the provinces and the municipalities.

If it's a strategic disposal, all interests are considered in the disposal plan and added to the agreement of purchase and sale.

Earlier Mr. McBain showed you an example from schedule G of the agreement prepared for the Heather Street project.

The Chair: Are you happy with that, Mr. Clarke?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes and no, because I'm not entirely certain I clearly understand.

If the determination as to whether it's a routine or strategic disposal is made before the aboriginal consultation, what's the point of the aboriginal consultation?

For example, let's say the disposal is routine or strategic and that a lot of people have expressed interest.

You're at the disposal determination step, and everyone is interested, whether it be crown corporations, provinces or municipalities. Two weeks later, you get a call from an aboriginal community.

Will it have priority over all the other parties that have already expressed interest?

Mr. Darrell Samson: The aboriginal consultation was conducted in step 4. The federal, provincial and municipal governments are consulted in step 5.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes, but Mrs. Levesque said there was a kind of immediate synergy between step 3 and step 5.

[English]

Ms. Jessica Sultan: If I may, there's a distinction between rights-based, so indigenous groups could have rights-based land claims, and that's separate. That occurs and we undertake that work.

What we're talking about when we circulate to people is interest-based. It's not about rights-based. It's about interest-based, and so—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Which of the two takes precedence?

[*English*]

Is it interest-based or rights-based?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Rights-based would be first, and then interest-based would be considered second.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Could we just have a written explanation of all this, please?

Ms. Jessica Sultan: Absolutely, it would be my pleasure. It is quite complicated, but I would be happy to provide that.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: For sure, and thank you for your work.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: All that is left is for me to thank you, Mr. Mills, Mrs. Levesque, Mr. McBain, Ms. Sultan and Mr. Déry. Thank you very much for your presentation. This meeting with our committee was very interesting and rewarding. I therefore thank you on behalf of the members of the committee.

We will suspend for a few minutes and then continue in camera to discuss future business of the committee.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1240) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1255)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: We will resume the public meeting at the request of Mr. Clarke, who has something to present to us.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Dear colleagues and citizens, here's the notice I submitted last Thursday:

That the Committee call on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to reverse its decision, effective April 1, 2019, to end unilingual francophone training at its academy, Depot Division in Saskatchewan.

I would like to say that there's no particular intent behind this motion. I was somewhat troubled when I saw it. In fact, it really made me angry. I thought that, if the committee unanimously agreed to this motion, that would send a strong signal. I even hoped that the present Government of Canada would find this decision clearly made no sense. I think it's a non-partisan issue.

I sought an outside professional opinion on Canadian law. Those people told me that the RCMP probably had budget considerations. In its own view, it may feel they are legitimate—I know that budget issues are not always easy for the RCMP—but our duty isn't to consider the RCMP's concerns regarding budgets or other matters. Our duty is to determine whether this decision contradicts the spirit or letter of the Official Languages Act, which, according to the opinion I have received, is the case.

The Chair: Time is passing. I'll allow brief responses.

I turn the floor over to Mr. Rioux.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Clarke, I can't do anything else but support you. University training has resumed at the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean. I believe the RCMP's loss would nullify the advance we have experienced in bilingualism.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. René Arseneault: I call for a vote.

The Chair: A vote has been called.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you very much.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's incredible!

Voices: Bravo!

The Chair: We are adjourned until Thursday.

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: <http://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.

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 : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>