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The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this meeting.

I would first like to acknowledge the presence of the Honourable H el ene Chalifour-Scherrer and her group. H el ene is a former Canadian Heritage minister.

Dear friends, let's begin.

This is a little at the last minute. The people we invited for the first hour, including the representatives of the F ed eration des communaut es francophones et acadienne du Canada, were not able to join us. We have tried alternatives, which did not work either.

At the last meeting, we talked about the topics to be studied in the coming weeks. In the first hour, we will go over that list to determine which topics we should address first.

In the second hour, we will hear from Hubert Lussier, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage, and Jean-Pierre C. Gauthier, Director General, Official Languages Branch.

I think the clerk provided you with a list of the topics that we identified at the last meeting. Perhaps you could add two points, the first being the bilingualism of the members of Parliament. I am not sure whether I discussed this matter with you last time, but it would be absolutely wonderful if all members of Parliament were bilingual within four years.

We will be asking the person responsible for official languages in Parliament to meet with us. In the meantime, I can provide you with a few figures. For information purposes, the 78 MPs from Quebec usually speak both official languages and that is the case for at least 30 or so MPs from outside Quebec, which adds up to about 100. I am told that approximately 126 MPs are taking language courses right now, which makes 226 MPs. We could try to figure out how to encourage our colleagues to become bilingual, so that within four years all the MPs are bilingual. I think it would be amazing to have a bilingual Parliament. We could add that item.

In terms of the other point, I noted during the last meeting that, according to the latest studies, the United States has 10 million francophones and francophiles. That number is higher than the total number of francophones in Canada. I was informed that R egis Labeaume, the mayor of Quebec City, was very interested in following up on that issue. He wanted to turn Quebec City into the francophone capital of America. We could ask Mr. Labeaume to

appear to explain his project and share his ideas with us. We could add those two points to the list.

Would anyone else like to add new points to the list before we delve into the details of the topics proposed at the last meeting and sort them out?

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

Mr. Fran ois Choquette: Mr. Chair, I find the exercise a bit contradictory, so to speak, given the information we received on Monday.

On Monday, we were not even sure whether we wanted to study the Translation Bureau issue right away. We wanted to hear from the speakers before prioritizing the topics. I have no objection to discussing what the priorities are for us, but I think we talked about them at the last meeting. If we agree that the idea is to listen first to the participants before we determine our priorities based on their presentations, I think it is a little counterproductive, if I may say so, to prioritize the proposed topics right away because we will then have to go over them again.

Of course, I have priorities to propose. However, someone—I think it was Mr. Lefebvre—said how important it is to listen to the presenters to prepare a list in order of priority. We can discuss things in broad terms, but it's a different story to make commitments as to the exact order of the given studies without even knowing whether the proponents have other priorities to propose. I think that flies in the face of what was decided by consensus on Monday. Perhaps my view is not shared. I suggest that we think about this before we start prioritizing the issues.

That being said, let me go back to the point I mentioned before. On Monday—you were not here, Mr. B elanger, but Mr. Fergus represented you—we heard two members of the committee move a motion to give precedence to the study on the Translation Bureau. I supported that motion in your absence. Of course, for me, that must be the first priority, given that this translation tool will be installed on all government computers starting on April 1. My understanding is that there is a real controversy about this tool. One of its designers specifically said that it is useful only for reading, not for writing. However, it seems that the instructions encourage its use even for writing short emails.

Given that a motion has already been passed, I think this should be considered a priority. In this case, there is no need to wait for the proponents, because members of the committee from all parties reached a consensus on Monday.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, François.

Steven, go ahead.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to extend greetings to the members of the committee and say that today I am replacing our colleague Ms. Boucher. I am here in passing, but it is a privilege for me to be here with you. I am pleased to be here also because I had the chance to sit on this committee for a few years. There is even a minister among us in the audience.

Mr. Chair, let me remind everyone of the important role of the Commissioner of Official Languages. I see him sort of as the steward of the Canadian francophonie. He is also a friend of the committee. I see that you are planning to invite him. He has sound knowledge of the issues and could certainly advise the members of the committee on how to prioritize the work. My recommendation would therefore be that the committee consult the commissioner so that he can discuss his report, of course, but also share his expertise and advice regarding the issues on which the members of the committee might want to focus their work.

Going back to your suggestion, I must say that, in the past, we sometimes carried out a longer-term study interspersed with ad hoc meetings, depending on the availability of the witnesses or the issues we were dealing with. You mentioned the role that Quebec City intends to play as part of the francophonie. That topic could definitely be of interest to the members of the committee and be addressed at ad hoc meetings. For instance, we had a somewhat more robust study on second language education, and we were able to incorporate more specific issues.

Let me reiterate that the Commissioner of Official Languages is truly a valuable resource. I think the Standing Committee on Official Languages is privileged to have access to the commissioner, his resources and his expertise to orient its work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to clarify something about the Commissioner of Official Languages. We are planning to meet with him on March 23.

Hon. Steven Blaney: That is soon.

The Chair: Yes, March 23 is quite soon.

We have just received the responsibility of auditing, no more no less, the estimates of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. I actually wanted to talk about it with you today to see whether the committee wants to hear the commissioner's testimony on that. We can also have two meetings with him, one to find out where he is at and where he is headed, and the other for his estimates. What do you think?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): I think some members of the committee are fairly familiar with his role, but we would like to know how his office operates, who the employees are and what they do, given that there are offices across Canada. As I have said before, we are reviewing his budget and we want to understand the substance of the commissioner's work across Canada.

● (1545)

The Chair: We could hold two meetings: one on March 23 for him to tell us about his activities, and one for us to ask him about his budget.

Does that work for you?

Darrell, go ahead.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am not sure whether we decided to hold two meetings or a full two-hour meeting, with the first hour for his activities and the second for his budget. If we then realize that we need a little more time, we can always invite him again.

The Chair: Darrell is proposing that we do that in two hours of the same meeting. Do you agree?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Go ahead, François.

Mr. François Choquette: I support Mr. Samson's suggestion. However, I would add that, despite the fact that we would be able to have the commissioner with us for two hours, it would be good to have other witnesses. We might only take one hour to ask the commissioner questions. If there were other witnesses, we could also ask them questions. That is my proposal.

Come to think of it, we have enough discussion topics to have the commissioner appear only for a two-hour meeting.

On Monday, we discussed suggestions for witnesses to appear in the short term. The Quebec anglophone minority association, Quebec Community Groups Network, was mentioned. Do we have any news about the date when those folks are available? We also talked about the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, FCFA, which you mentioned a few minutes ago, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: When do we think we can meet with them?

The Chair: I am told that we have contacted those organizations and that the committee will be ready to hear from them on March 9. First, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., we will hear from the Quebec Community Groups Network, the anglophone group from Quebec. In the second hour, we will hear from the representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne.

Mr. François Choquette: That's great.

The Chair: They are coming on March 9.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry, but I would like to have the floor again.

I have recently talked to your assistant about another witness who would be appropriate to invite. Both the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board prepare reports on the official languages. They both have responsibilities in that respect. Today, we have asked to hear from officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage, which is very good. I know that you invited an official from the Treasury Board, which was not possible today. In that case, would it be possible to invite the President of the Treasury Board, Mr. Brison, to provide us with an update on the focus of his activities?

The Chair: Things are going very well. We have a great clerk.

I can confirm that, on March 7, we will be receiving representatives from the Treasury Board and the Translation Bureau.

Mr. François Choquette: That's very good.

The Chair: Things are going well.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, I have another question.

Does the committee have to approve the expenditures for its activities?

The Chair: I am glad you asked. I just took part in a meeting of the Liaison Committee, which brings together all the chairs of the various committees. We were asked to promptly submit an operating budget for the year. The budget is divided into two: first we have our regular activities, including our meetings, and second, we have the travel budgets.

We talked about the travel budget before. Let me give you a rundown on the situation, since we asked for clarifications at the Liaison Committee meeting. This committee's travel budget for 2010-2011 was about \$100,000. Over the subsequent years, nothing has been spent on travel at all.

Having consulted with a number of you, I was proposing to hold meetings in four different places over this year. We could go out west, to Saint Boniface, perhaps come back through Sudbury, Ontario, go to Quebec, in the Eastern Townships, where there is a minority group, and perhaps end up in Nova Scotia, the home province of our friend Mr. Samson, a member of the committee.

I am trying to cover Canada's various regions as much as possible. We cannot do everything, but if we are looking at travelling to those four centres this year, we can ask the clerk to prepare a budget proposal that I could submit to the Liaison Committee as soon as possible.

Some also said that we might benefit from going to those places while the House is sitting. If so, I ask for your co-operation so that all the party whips can ensure that the travelling delegation is balanced, given the votes in the House.

Does that work?

• (1550)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): The most western place you have suggested is Saint Boniface, but there is a francophone minority in Edmonton. That might be useful. I don't know, it depends, I guess.

The Chair: Can we go to Saint Boniface and Edmonton in the same trip?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Do you think they are close?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): You actually need to fly between the two.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Nothing is impossible.

The Chair: I think the parliamentary secretary would like us to go to Edmonton. If we are able to go to Edmonton and Saint Boniface in the same trip, I have no objection.

Are you in favour of trying to combine those two trips?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We all agree, that's great. We will ask the clerk to prepare a budget proposal for those four trips and we will submit it to the Liaison Committee.

We could do that in more than one stage, so that we are not away for two weeks.

Hon. Steven Blaney: We could have two trips: one in the east and one in the west.

The Chair: We could do that in two trips. We all agree, great.

I would like to go back to your proposal, Mr. Choquette. I think we have found a date for the Translation Bureau issue. It is the same as the date we had agreed on. However, we established that the study would take from three to five committee meetings. That was Mauril's initial motion. We will certainly be able to add meetings.

Mr. Clerk, what is the date for the first meeting on the Translation Bureau?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): It will be on March 7.

The Chair: Could you contact the officials to find some additional dates so that we can deal with the topic fully by holding more than one meeting.

Does that work, Mr. Bélanger? That's a yes. Good.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

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

My understanding is that we can start suggesting names for witnesses who could appear for the study on the Translation Bureau. We are talking about three to five meetings. The March 7 meeting would be one of those meetings, but we will have only—

The Chair: That will help set the stage.

Mr. François Choquette: So we'll have one hour with one official from the Translation Bureau; we will have only one witness.

I'm not sure how Mr. Bélanger or the committee was planning to do this. How many witnesses do we usually receive in an hour? We are talking about two or three witnesses per hour. I'm not sure what you are suggesting, but having one witness per hour will not allow us to have a very broad vision of the problems. It is often desirable to have more than one insight into a problem. That is why I'm suggesting at least two or three witnesses per hour, so that we can have a better overview and so that the study is as effective as possible.

•(1555)

The Chair: Could you provide the clerk with the names of the people you would like the committee to hear from? The steering committee will be able to review the list of witnesses and decide what we are doing with it.

I am turning to all members of the committee: if you have names of witnesses or organizations in relation to these topics that we have just defined, feel free to submit them as soon as possible to the clerk so that the steering committee can set the order of priority for the witnesses and then notify them.

Does that work? It seems so.

Moving right along.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, I would like to go back to the idea of meetings outside the national capital region. We could hold meetings and sometimes visit places that may be related to the study. That has been done in the past. For instance, if the committee decided to study francophone immigration, it could go to welcome centres in francophone communities. It is up to the committee, but when you plan the external meetings, do you think it would be possible to take the opportunity to visit places that would be in line with the study chosen by the committee? In the past, we have visited francophone schools in Regina and Yellowknife. I can tell you that when you visit a francophone school in Yellowknife, it is an eye-opener.

The Chair: I agree with you.

That makes me think of another topic. We will ask that most of our meetings be televised. You know that CPAC takes care of broadcasting our meetings on television. As a result, I met with the CEO and talked about the balance between French and English.

Furthermore, CPAC is looking for a new role and would like to go further. I asked its CEO whether she could come to testify before us since CPAC is rebroadcasting all our debates and is looking for a new role. She was eager to appear here. I forgot to mention the new CEO of CPAC earlier. If we invite her, we can ask her how CPAC could broadcast our travels, for instance if we want to go to Quebec City.

The clerk mentioned that we also talked about inviting the minister. I suggest that we wait for the budget to be introduced on March 22, and that we consult her office to find out when she is available. As we said, hearing from the Minister of Canadian Heritage is also a priority for our committee.

Mr. Lefebvre, the floor is yours.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As we all know, the Prime Minister gave the Minister of Canadian Heritage a mandate letter with a number of things related to the official languages. If we want to make a difference or, to at least, make suggestions, study various issues, then submit a report to the government, it would be a good idea to focus our work on the aspects in the mandate letter, to ensure that our committee is doing real fieldwork.

Let me list the six points in the mandate letter.

The first point is the multi-year official languages plan. The second point is establishing a free, online service for learning and retaining English and French as second languages. The third point is ensuring that all federal services are delivered in full compliance with the Official Languages Act. The fourth point is updating and reinstating the court challenges program. The fifth point is planning the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Finally, the sixth point is reviewing the funding for CBC/Radio-Canada and other cultural organizations that play a strategic role in official language minority communities.

Our committee could certainly review those points and help move things forward. It could check to see what the department is doing. We could hear from witnesses who are likely to help us with that.

•(1600)

The Chair: Very well.

Are there other speakers?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, the points raised are surely matters of interest to our committee.

We remember the Vancouver Olympics. Whenever a major event is held in Canada, the committee has an opportunity to show leadership in ensuring that Canada's linguistic duality is respected.

Canada's 150th anniversary is soon. The committee could surely have a role to play in ensuring that linguistic duality underpins the various cultural and social activities that will take place to mark the 150th anniversary celebrations. I am sure that has been considered, but it is still the committee's role to call on the stakeholders, dare I say, to ensure that this is the case and to validate the monitoring mechanisms. That could be a follow-up suggestion from the committee.

The Chair: That is really important.

Hon. Steven Blaney: We must ensure that the festivities for Canada 150 reflect the linguistic duality and we must obtain the assurance from the various agencies, including Canadian Heritage, that the programs have been designed with this fundamental feature of our society in mind.

The Chair: That is very important.

Bernard, the floor is yours.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): We know that economic development will be a very important issue in the next few years, considering the current struggling economy.

Yesterday, I read an article that really made me think of Mariette Mulaire from the World Trade Centre in Winnipeg; Mr. Vandal surely knows her. In her organization, she deals with the French fact front and centre. She would definitely be a very interesting witness to hear. We could meet with her here or when we go to Winnipeg or Saint Boniface.

I would expand that to include other committee activities. When we travel across the country or when we invite people here, we should have a component in our work on linguistic duality in business development across the country. That would also be very useful to study.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To that end, I think very important work has been accomplished in Nova Scotia by the economic development council. I think there are a number of them across the country, and I think they are associated with RDÉE. That is very interesting. They look at the economy, the population in the region, wages, age, and so on. Today we have very sophisticated information that was not available 20 years ago and we should be able to explore it further to obtain a true picture not only of the regions, but also of the provinces and the entire country.

As my colleague Mr. Lefebvre mentioned earlier, the minister's mandate letter contains some very interesting things, which I think show that our government intends to move the official languages issue forward. Of course, Canadian Heritage is also in the picture.

There are some extremely interesting projects, including Canada's 150th anniversary, of which we can be proud. As you can imagine, I was very young in 1967, when the 100th anniversary was celebrated.

•(1605)

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): That was the year of the Expo.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, I was so young that I don't remember it. However, I remember that my father and mother were all excited about the celebrations.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: There was a special 10¢ coin.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Indeed. My parents flew to Montreal to celebrate that anniversary, which shows how important it was. My poor father was so frightened because he had been on a plane only once before in his life, I think. We have never forgotten that experience.

As I was saying earlier to my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, the City of Lévis recognized my ancestors. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of Confederation in 1967, the city built a monument in recognition of my ancestors, two brothers who came from Normandy. You can imagine the honour. Although we have done many things in our lives, there is no monument for us yet. But they have been recognized by the City of Lévis for their contribution. I think they were two soldiers who did a lot for that community.

The celebration of the 150th anniversary is extremely important. I know that a lot of activities have been planned in the communities. As members of Parliament, our commitment to these communities will certainly help to show the importance of Canada, of Canadians across the country. This is extremely important.

The issue of reconsidering and reinstating the court challenges program is also extremely important. This program was crucial for minority communities across the country. The situation was critical. I was the director general of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial in Nova Scotia, representing all francophone schools. It was a shock and it was very difficult for francophone schools in minority communities across Canada. They have since been asking that we reconsider it. The fact that this government is committed to updating and reinstating the program, as stated in the Prime Minister's letter, will help many minorities. That is good support.

I also sit on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage and we hear witnesses talk about the media—be it Radio-Canada or any other media—in rural and small communities in Canada. This is in line with that work, demonstrating that the department and the government are really working on a vision to meet needs and to address situations that have been challenging for a few years.

We want to ensure that federal services are provided in compliance with the Official Languages Act. The other day, we mentioned the importance of this issue, and no member from any of the three parties questioned the importance of reviewing this issue and ensuring that we are showing leadership. If changes need to be made, now is the time to do so. As Mr. Généreux said, I believe, last week, the next four years will pass so quickly that we will not even have had time to turn around. My fear is that we will not have taken tangible action by the end of these four years. I of course intend to go back to my constituents for their approval, but I would like to be able to tell them about the good things we will have done.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I suggest that we build a monument in your honour right away, Mr. Samson. Otherwise, it will mean that we will have missed our chance for four years.

Our clerk can perhaps answer one of my questions. I will paraphrase someone you know well and say: because it's 2016. So I wonder whether the committee could have its own Facebook page and post all the evidence from the witnesses who come to visit us. We could also provide our contact information on this page and ensure that all francophones are on this platform. I'm not sure whether that's possible. If so, we'll need someone to administer the page. We could add links to CPAC. We were just talking about possible ways of promoting CPAC. That would be one way to do it.

The Chair: I am told that the House already has a website, but you are talking about Facebook, which is not the same thing. At first glance, I am not completely against that, but let's check what we can do about it.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Of course, this page would be administered by analysts or people who work for the committee.

Yesterday, I saw the article about President and CEO Mariette Mulaire. It was on Facebook and it caught my attention. It was interesting to be able to stumble upon it by accident.

If we want to promote the francophonie and the committee—

The Chair: We are in the age of social media.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Social media are now being used for promotion. I am sure that, if the general manager of CPAC came here and we talked to her about our plan to include links in a committee Facebook page—

The Chair: She would like that.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It seems to me that it would be interesting.

The Chair: Right.

Dan, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I feel that it is important to discuss economic development all across the country. But, in terms of my riding, Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, we can talk about Mariette Mulaire, who is the CEO, or the assistant chief of operations, of the World Trade Centre in Saint Boniface. The centre is set up in the former Saint Boniface city hall, on the main street, Provencher Boulevard. It is the only bilingual world trade centre anywhere in the world that I am aware of. It is extremely impressive when you consider that francophones make up 20% of the population in Winnipeg. They are doing extremely important work, impressive economic development. They are organizing a Centrallia conference that will take place in Winnipeg at the end of May. People will be coming from all over the world. It lets companies have speed meetings, so to speak. They conduct business, international trade, and the words “world trade” say it all. It would be good to talk to them.

Also in Saint Boniface, there is the Association of Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities. It is run by eight bilingual municipalities in Manitoba, including Saint Boniface—Saint Vital. The Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities, or CDEM, does nothing but economic development all over Manitoba. It is located in Saint Boniface too. People like that are doing really wonderful things, including a lot of ecological projects. If we go to Saint Boniface, we can certainly meet them all. We could also invite them here.

Immigration is extremely important for my region as well. Of the three universities in Manitoba, the Université de Saint-Boniface is the fully francophone one. It attracts a lot of francophones from around the world, particularly from Africa. In Winnipeg, and in Manitoba in general, we are building on immigration a lot. I see that immigration in francophone minority communities is a major topic for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The francophone significant benefit program, which was designed for francophone communities, was not renewed after September 2014. That penalized our francophone minority communities a lot. I do not know why funding for that program was stopped. These are good questions to ask and to study.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

Paul, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: This is just a suggestion.

Mr. Lussier is going to appear at 4:30 p.m.

The Chair: Yes, in 15 minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I propose that we take a break for 15 minutes.

The Chair: Does that work for you?

Yes, François.

Mr. François Choquette: Before we break, I would like to remind all my colleagues that tomorrow, Thursday, at 5 p.m., we are having a reception to welcome the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. It will be right here in the House of Commons, in room 238. You're all invited, you might say almost summoned, because the invitation is extended to you by

Mr. Boissonnault and myself. There will be about 80 representatives from all the organizations across the country.

Mr. Dan Vandal: This is the FCFA, right?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, right, the FCFA, The reception is tomorrow.

If you did not receive the invitation or if you want me to send it again, send me an email and I will happily send the invitation to you again. It is an opportunity for you to meet everyone involved, to talk to them and also to learn what their priorities are.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

I'll let you have a quick word, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, you talked earlier about the importance of new platforms and new media and the role they are now playing in communications. We are seeing an explosion, whether we are talking about the Internet, Facebook, television channels, private or otherwise. The impact they are having is a topic that might interest the committee.

It might be interesting to ask the commissioner whether the change in the media environment is having repercussions on linguistic duality and whether that is an opportunity or a threat. Let me use my kids as examples. They no longer look at local newspapers. Instead they go onto their platforms, their iPads. It would be interesting to see how the linguistic space is faring in that universe.

The Chair: Great, let us add social media and linguistic duality to our list of priorities.

We're going to suspend the meeting for 10 minutes or so.

• (1615)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: We are now resuming the meeting.

Allow me to welcome Mr. Hubert Lussier, Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizenship and Heritage, and Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Director General, Official Languages Branch.

Gentlemen, welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

For the information of our colleagues, I would first like to remind you of the way in which we proceed. You will make a presentation of 10 minutes or so. It will be followed by comments from our colleagues.

In the first round, the order will be as follows: Conservatives, six minutes; Liberals, six minutes; NDP, six minutes; then the Liberals, six minutes again.

In the second round, the Liberals will have six minutes; Conservatives, six minutes; Liberals, six minutes again; Conservatives, five minutes; and the NDP, three minutes.

That is about 50 minutes in total. If we add the 10 minutes for the initial presentation, that will give us the full hour.

If members have other questions and the hour we have today is not enough, we may well invite you back to another meeting.

Gentlemen, the floor is yours.

Mr. Hubert Lussier (Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizenship and Heritage, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you, Mr. Paradis.

I am going to let my colleague Mr. Gauthier make a presentation on a rather complex issue. We understand that there may well be a lot of questions.

[English]

Therefore, it will be a brief presentation. We understand the question is mainly to address the road map for official languages, and your curiosity will be aimed mainly at results, so Jean-Pierre will speak for less than 10 minutes—that's the challenge he's been told to respect—and then we will be free for questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier (Director General, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): I would also like to extend greetings to you and to thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to come and present the roadmap to you.

I suggest that I review the roadmap quickly. Mr. Lussier and I want to give you as much time as possible for questions. So we will give you the basics, and our answers to your questions will likely be your opportunity to get into the details in which you are most interested.

You have received the PowerPoint presentation. I will go through it very quickly. I am just going to guide you through the pages that seem to be the most important. If I may, I will start directly on page 5. I will jump over the preamble, it is there for your future reference.

I am going to talk to you about the origins of the roadmap and its content. Then I will talk quickly about the accountability measures that the roadmap has in place. I will come back to that later.

[English]

To quickly review the origin of the road map, on page 5 you have statements that we found in government budgets that gave us a bit of direction in terms of what it was intended to do.

The first time we had a statement was in 2012, which was about the same time that we were contemplating the next strategy, so it was very timely for us. We launched into consultations essentially in the summer of 2012. They took the form of a series of round tables that went around the country. We basically invited people from the community, as well as, if I can say so, the majority group, to try to get a sense of what communities thought as a whole with respect to official languages.

There were also a number of consultation elements that we paid close attention to. One was a study from this committee at the same time, which we followed very carefully. We took considerable time to review the committee's report. We also followed the sectorial consultations done by the other departments very carefully. Many of them have consultation forums with the communities, and we wanted to take stock of that insight as well.

● (1635)

[Translation]

We also organized a symposium on official languages research at about the same time, where we held discussions with our provincial colleagues.

That, broadly speaking, is what happened in 2011-2012. We gathered a lot of information. That is pretty much the exercise that we are diving back into now. We are looking for those contacts and that information in order to design a future roadmap.

Let me quickly introduce the roadmap for Canada's official languages 2013-2018.

The roadmap is built on certain major parameters. It is funded in the amount of \$1.1 billion over five years. Let me remind you that the plan ends on March 31, 2018, the end of the fifth year. The strategy has 28 components or initiatives implemented by 14 federal institutions, including Canadian Heritage, which has responsibility for many of those initiatives. The 14 institutions include several other departments and crown corporations.

I would like to point out that, although the roadmap represents the key elements of what is being done in official languages, it's not all that is being done. Other departments are also active in official languages issues to different degrees and in different ways. The roadmap is also a way of presenting the key elements of what is being done in official languages and of opening windows onto the various initiatives that already exist.

The roadmap has three pillars: education, immigration and support to communities. Page 10 of our presentation shows the education pillar and the list of initiatives in education, which clearly tend to focus on youth.

The key is the assistance that the federal government provides to provinces and territories so that they can provide minority language education at primary and secondary levels. But we also assist them in post-secondary education with specific projects. Assistance is also given to provinces and territories so that they can offer second-language learning, meaning French outside Quebec and English in Quebec. That assistance comes to about \$240 million per year, quite a significant amount. It comes under the education pillar.

The next pillar is support to communities. This pillar includes specific initiatives designed to support minority communities. A number of federal institutions participate in these initiatives, in particular the Department of Justice, the Department of Employment and Social Development, and the Department of Health.

I will leave it up to you to tell me the things that you would like more details about through your questions.

The final pillar is immigration. This pillar is essentially the responsibility of the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. It has two major initiatives. One initiative deals with the reception and integration of French-speaking immigrants. We all know that it is a priority for francophone communities that immigrants settle proportionately in French across the country.

There is also training for immigrants in order to be sure that they have a solid knowledge of at least one of our two official languages. This initiative is more a matter of promoting both official languages rather than an initiative targeted to minority communities.

Page 15 shows all the pillars in one diagram. At the top of the diagram, the box describes the strategic objectives to which we are committed. I will leave it up to you to read them. If you have questions on the objectives, we can come back to them.

• (1640)

[English]

The last point that I wanted to cover was how we account for whatever gets done on the road map. I would submit two key sources to you. They are readily available and present the results from all of the various initiatives in the presentation.

The first one is annex 5, on page 13. It's one of the supplementary information tables that accompanies the 2013-2014 departmental performance report. It lists all of the initiatives one after the other. It provides you with the amount of funding that was forecast to be spent. It presents the amount that was actually spent. Where there's a big gap between the two, we ask that the department provide an explanation of the gap.

The last column of that table is about results, meaning exactly what has been done and what has been achieved with those investments over the year. It provides an interesting amount of information in terms of what that investment has done in a given year. If you look at all of the years successively, you're going to get an overall picture of what the road map has done or is contributing to.

The second source that we use to provide information about what the road map is doing or has done is our annual report on official languages, which is also readily available. If you'd like copies, I'd be happy to send copies to committee members. The last edition of the report was tabled, I believe, in July. It covers the year 2013-2014. We are working on the next edition, 2014-2015. The annual report includes road map achievements as well.

In it, we've blended what Canadian Heritage does in terms of its own programs with what the other departments of the road map do, so as to provide an overall view of what has been done with respect to official languages across government. A fair amount of information in that report actually pertains to what the road map has funded and supported.

Between these two sources, you have a certain amount of information about specific examples of achievements, and occasionally overall statistics in annex 5 of the departmental performance report. These are key components for us to try to communicate what's going on with the road map.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I'll just add one thing, with your permission, Mr. Paradis, which is that the departmental performance report that Jean-Pierre is talking about is, of course, the Canadian Heritage departmental performance report, because we are the department that coordinates the road map. It is available on our website. Unfortunately, these are not published in paper format.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will start our first round with Mr. Généreux.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you for being here today.

As you know, I was a member of this committee for a year and a half, from 2009 to 2011, while my colleagues here—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Excuse me, Mr. Chair. I really want to hear Mr. Généreux's questions when it is his turn, but, if I am not mistaken, I was supposed to speak first.

The Chair: I have to tell you what I am told, that first there are six minutes for the Conservatives, then six minutes for the Liberals, then six minutes for the NDP, then we finish with six minutes for the Liberals.

Hon. Steven Blaney: There are some advantages to being in the opposition.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I am sorry, Mr. Samson.

The Chair: So, Mr. Samson, you will have the floor during the Liberals' six minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay, and I hope my colleague, if he is as generous as his name, will use only four minutes.

The Chair: Over to you, Mr. Généreux.

• (1645)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That is not going to happen. I am certainly not going to have my time stolen from me. You can take some time away from Mr. Samson, Mr. Chair.

As you know, I was a member of this committee from 2009 to 2011. Mr. Blaney was the chair of the committee at that time. So the roadmap was put in place by our government. The initiative was very well received all across Canada. I have now been away for the last four years.

In a way, we wanted to meet with you specifically to put everybody back into context. We have a number of new members around the table, in fact, and we wanted to find out the status of the initiatives that have been put into place in the roadmap. I will not dare to ask you to give us a specific number of where we are on a scale of 1 to 10. But are you able to give us an overview that is quick and to the point, yet still quite complete? For the roadmap itself and for all the initiatives, how many have been completed? Are there areas of the roadmap that are less advanced than others? Do you have an answer for me?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: To answer your question objectively, I would say that the funding available was spent effectively. We can say that because we have two full years to refer to, plus a third that will be over in a few weeks.

Jean-Pierre will give you the exact number. In the second year, I believe that 95% of the anticipated expenses were spent on the objectives as set out in the roadmap's original documents.

Some initiatives took time to get going in some departments, because they took more time to launch them than was anticipated at the start. We did what we call a carry-forward, which involves pushing funds from one year into the following year.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I want to make sure I understand. You are saying that funds unspent in one year are carried forward to the following year. They are not returned to Treasury Board but they are kept to be spent in the next year.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Exactly.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Jean-Pierre, can you describe that for us?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Yes.

In the first year of the roadmap, we spent 93% of the funds budgeted. Last year, we spent 95%. At the beginning of the summer, we compile the figures for the current year just ending. Most of the initiatives are progressing as planned. The programs that were supposed to issue funds, did so, as the expense figures show. In that respect, we are quite satisfied with the overall way the roadmap is going.

There were a few unique cases, representing some quite modest amounts in the overall picture of the roadmap. For example, we took a little more time to launch the social development partnerships program, which requires a different administrative approach. My colleagues in Employment and Social Development Canada had to start by establishing the basis of the program. They assure us that the amounts identified in the roadmap will be spent in the three years that remain. This is \$4 million out of \$1.1 billion.

There were adjustments at the outset. Federal institutions knew that, in the first year, Treasury Board authorization had to be obtained, as well as all the authorizations needed to launch and publicize the programs, to gather funding applications, study them and issue contribution agreements. The institutions gave the recipients time to do what they wanted to do with the funds. A number of institutions chose to show a minimal amount in the first year, zero in some cases, and, with the permission of the Department of Finance, to carry it forward to the four following years.

That is what we did with one of our programs, the community cultural action fund. We knew that we would not be able to get the funds out in the first year. So, rather than losing the money in the big financial picture, which is the rule, we got ahead of the game as early as the autumn by asking to get the money back and spend it in years two, three and four. In that way, we were sure that our investment over the five years would be the same.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

You are telling us that 95% of somewhere around \$200 million were spent in the first year, the second year and probably the third year.

What system do you have in place that allows you to analyze the results? Everyone here can spend money quite easily, I figure; that is not really a problem. But it is something else to make sure that the money spent produced the anticipated results.

Do we have documents to prove it? In our work, we will meet a number of people who will have had access to that money and can explain to us what they did with it. That is not a problem.

My question is for the department. Have you taken steps to make sure that the money really was spent and the objectives were achieved?

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Go ahead, Mr. Lussier.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The document that will give you most information about that is the one that Jean-Pierre was talking about just now. It is the report on results, published as an appendix to the report from the Department of Canadian Heritage. You will see that, given the particular nature of their activities, some departments give very concrete explanations, for example the number of health care professionals trained as a result of these investments. Health Canada has an activity in the education component and trains health care professionals, such as physicians, orderlies or nurses.

Since I feel that is what you were trying to find out, I will tell you that other results will be a little less concrete. They are more about the number of partnerships established with organizations charged with implementing the programs, for example. That may perhaps leave you wanting more in terms of definitive results, and we are still waiting for additional information about them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lussier.

Mr. Samson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today, Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Lussier. I met you on a number of occasions in my former career. I have always spoken well of Canadian Heritage. That is why I am not here to criticize you.

I would like to ask you six quick questions. So you will have a minute to answer each one. Let's keep things moving quickly. Basically, I would like to know what has been done.

My first question is about consultation. My previous career was in education. You mentioned consulting school boards during the trip that the committee will be undertaking. Unfortunately, too often, they are not invited to our table. That is difficult to understand, because school boards are actually independent and established under constitutional legislation.

Very briefly, can you answer that question about consultations?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Since I have taken part in the consultations that have been undertaken, I should point out, Mr. Samson, that some provinces allow us to invite school board representatives into the room where we are in discussions with the officials from provincial and territorial departments of education. Others are more reluctant, which does not prevent us from having discussions with school boards through associations like the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. Of course, we are very happy to have a three-way dialogue, when that is possible.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

That means that we have to do something to strongly encourage provinces to invite school boards or perhaps to adopt some strategy that will require them to do so.

What mechanism is in place to make sure that the money allocated to provinces for official languages ends up in official language minority communities? It is not always clear. What is that mechanism? Do you have something in mind for the next four years of the next agreement?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: A mechanism is built into the agreements that we reach with each province and territory. The bilateral agreement asks the province or territory to provide us with an action plan showing how they intend to invest the money we are giving them. Basically, the province or territory gives us a list that matches the priorities that we and the province or territory have agreed on together. As representatives of the federal government, we are also comfortable with that.

Accountability for the action plan is done every two years. Every two years, the provinces and territories provide a report showing us what they have done with each of the initiatives in their action plan. Clearly, that allows us to monitor the investments that we have made in terms of the objectives that we had established.

We do not follow the money; that would be difficult to do. We turn the money over to departments of education; they distribute it to school boards who in turn distribute it to schools. So we do not follow the flow of money downstream, for a very simple reason: this is an area of provincial and territorial jurisdiction and we are not actually authorized to require details beyond what we are doing at the moment.

• (1655)

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is a good answer, but we could still invite school boards, communities and associations every two years to tell us their point of view. The Senate invited me to do that before. That is another mechanism we could use.

Moving quickly to my third question. I would be grateful for a very concise answer. You talk about immigration, but this is a major problem in official language minority communities in Canada. If we want to ensure the survival, the vitality, and the sustainability of our communities, we must have many more francophone immigrants settling in them. What is the department doing or going to do in order to give us a hand there?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: To follow up on the immigration debate, it would be interesting to invite our colleagues from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to explain the

situation in more detail. However, I can quickly give you the broad strokes.

Immigration involves three major objectives: recruitment, which includes overseas promotion to attract people to the country in the best sense of the word; reception, to make sure that they settle in communities and successfully become integrated in an appropriate way; and retention, so that they stay and invest in the communities, rather than assimilating into the majority or moving elsewhere in the country. They have freedom of movement, as we know.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is investing heavily in welcome and integration. There are major challenges in recruitment. The department is establishing initiatives such as Destination Canada. Under that initiative, officials from the department go to Paris each year to try and convince potential immigrants to come and settle in Canada, particularly outside Quebec. I mean francophone immigration.

So we are making efforts in recruitment but we cannot say that we have achieved the objectives we wanted. I discussed this yesterday with our colleagues in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, because I guessed that we would be talking about it. They told me that they are in the process of considering how to increase their efforts to try and meet the targets that have been set for the communities.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

The long-form census is going to be reinstated. For the one in 2021, we really have to get to work quickly in order to draft the questions that will allow us to better understand the demographics in our communities. In fact, the data that we have available do not give us enough information to respond to the needs of the official language minority communities.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: That is a suggestion that would likely please our colleagues in Statistics Canada who are responsible for matters like that. That said, if you have very specific suggestions to make, we would be pleased to hear them because we have discussions with the people over there on this kind of issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

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

My thanks to our guests for joining us today.

There has been discussion about the mandate letter sent to Minister Joly, laying out her priorities.

Have you already received directions in line with that mandate letter?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: That letter tells us very precisely about the type of activities that we are going to have to focus on during the mandate. It is very clear.

Mr. François Choquette: Very well.

The FCFA recently appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance. I am sure that you have had the opportunity to make yourselves aware of that appearance. One of the things they mentioned is the importance of indexing funds that have been stable for almost 10 years. I think that you have already talked about unblocking roadmap funds in the 2016-2017 financial year that have still not been unblocked.

So am I wrong to think that the second objective will be achieved starting in 2016-2017?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: First, in terms of revisiting the level of investment, we are continuing to implement the current roadmap. So the current plan is continuing. The consultations will certainly be the ideal time to bring up those issues and those questions. It will be part of the recommendations to the minister. We will have to see how she wants to intervene, in terms of her future plan, with cabinet support.

Currently, we have funding available that we are going to have to account for in the annual report. We are going to continue to administer the program as best we can in order to make sure we maximize the impact of the funding available to us at the moment.

• (1700)

Mr. François Choquette: Your annual report on official languages deals with 2013-2014.

Will the 2014-2015 report be published next July?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: That varies from year to year. We think we will be able to publish it at the beginning of the summer or a little earlier. We are going to try to publish it perhaps a little sooner each year, but the end of the year is when the data are collected. We have to wait for them to be confirmed in the financial systems.

Mr. François Choquette: As I understand it, you are responsible for implementing the roadmap and a mid-mandate evaluation is in progress. We are wondering how that evaluation is proceeding, what consultations are being held to determine the evaluation criteria and what consultations will be held in connection with this mid-mandate evaluation.

I feel that it will be very important to see you again at that time. We are being asked a lot of questions about who was consulted in order to determine the criteria, what the criteria are and whom you are going to consult thereafter.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Let me give you a two-part answer.

The evaluation period is indeed happening right now. The roadmap has three types of evaluations. There is the evaluation of each of the 28 initiatives. We call them individual evaluations, and each department is responsible for them. Of course, departments can arrange various aspects into groups, so that a number of them can be evaluated together. That basically gives about 15 evaluations. They are all done individually. The second evaluation deals with the coordination function. That essentially is all about us. The third is the horizontal evaluation of the roadmap; it tries to determine the outcomes of this overall strategy. These three types of evaluations are in progress. The departments have prioritized them differently, each according to its own rhythm.

In terms of the evaluation parameters, they are provided by Treasury Board. They tell us specifically what their expectations for the evaluation are. The policy on evaluation established by Treasury Board tells evaluators how to proceed.

Mr. François Choquette: Are you saying that you did not consult the major organizations working in official languages?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: That is not an option. However, when we do the evaluation, it is important to consult the key stakeholders to find out their point of view about the roadmap. In that context, the key stakeholders are very much in demand. At a certain point, they may well feel that they are too much in demand. After all, 17 or 18 evaluations will be going on at the same time.

Mr. François Choquette: What is the timeline for that?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: At Canadian Heritage, we start by working in the field with researchers. We have already hired consultants to do the evaluation in the coming weeks. Some departments are a little less advanced than we are. In the coming months, my impression is that, to varying degrees, a constant barrage of interviews will be starting up. That will allow us to collect the data for our evaluations.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Mr. Choquette, you mentioned the mid-mandate evaluation. The evaluation starts halfway through the mandate because it has to provide information for use after the roadmap. Basically, this will be the evaluation of the roadmap.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you. I understand.

With a new investment logic, Canadian Heritage took steps to refocus the community support program so that it better matched the department's objectives. At that point, you transferred files to other departments and federal institutions.

The department committed to working with groups and federal institutions in order to help them to open doors so that the organizations could continue to do their work in the community by receiving real support from the other federal institutions.

What steps were taken and with which federal institutions to make sure that the community organizations have real access to the programs of those institutions?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We addressed that matter with the communities in order to see the extent to which we could maximize the impact of the money we currently have available. It caused a great deal of concern. When we finished evaluating our program's investment logic, we told them that, before transferring the file to any other department, we would make sure that the other department would be able to take it on.

During the summer, I met with six different federal institutions to see whether each of them was able to take on recipients who previously did business with us. I did not have a lot of success in that regard. It depends on the way in which the programs are structured in the other departments and the amount of money available. We are a little more hopeful about another approach, but it will not help a lot if it affects only two or three recipients out of the 350 we have. That is the maximum.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Your turn, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.) (via text-to-speech software): Here is my first question. What role do Canadian Heritage and the Official Languages Secretariat play in the governance of the roadmap?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: First, we are responsible for coordinating the management of the roadmap, since our minister is responsible for that process. We conducted the consultations and we are in contact with other departments so that we can be assured that they are not treading on anyone's toes in their sectorial consultations.

Our department is also responsible for the accountability exercise. To that end, we hold regular meetings with our roadmap partners. Jean-Pierre and I sit on committees where discussions go on all the time to make sure that things are going well and that there are no major breakdowns that we have to fix. We also publish the accountability results that Jean-Pierre has mentioned.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (via-text-to-speech software): What tools and resources did the official languages secretariat give its federal partners to promote sound management practices under the roadmap?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We developed several shared instruments. It was done mainly through a Treasury Board submission. For instance, we established a risk management framework, which we just updated in the governance committees Hubert mentioned.

We also provide our federal partners with accountability templates. For the past 15 years or so, we've been working on horizontal plans, which also provide them with guidance. In addition, we have a strategy for managing performance indicators, and those were provided to Treasury Board. We use a host of governance mechanisms that were defined in 2013. We also collect data for reporting purposes on a yearly basis.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (via text-to-speech software): How would you describe the interdepartmental cooperation under the roadmap?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The honourable member knows that our opinions, as public servants, are merely our own. We are here to provide the committee with facts. Nevertheless, I'll venture an answer to your question.

The level of cooperation is excellent, but there are always departments that need a bit more prodding than others. Our job is to do our best to motivate and inspire them.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We are well-received. For example, in preparation for today's discussion on the roadmap, I reached out to colleagues in four federal institutions yesterday, between ten in the morning and two in the afternoon, without any trouble. They take our calls, they give us information, they send us material. When we request information, they contribute. The level of cooperation is very good. We have no complaints on that front.

We have our own director general-level committees and working groups that help us maintain good relationships with our colleagues in other federal institutions.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Is there any time left?

The Chair: There are a few minutes left.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I'd like to use the remaining time, if I may.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you for being here.

You'll probably be able to answer a very specific question about my riding, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, which is home to Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand, and Rosemère. There are two English-speaking communities, one in Deux-Montagnes and one in Rosemère.

On page 12 of your presentation, you talk about 19 initiatives, but I count just 13. One of those initiatives, affecting the English-speaking communities in Deux-Montagnes and in Rosemère, came to the fore during and after the election. You said you provide assistance to minority communities—in this case, English-speaking communities—with networks and access to health services. But I have to tell you there's a problem in that regard. At the Saint-Eustache hospital, in the Lower Laurentians area, people aren't receiving services in their first language, and it's very tough on them. Since all the English-language hospitals are on the island of Montreal, it makes things very complicated for those who are isolated.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. Keep in mind that this affects 10,000 people in my riding, and many of them are getting on in age.

• (1710)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: That's a good question.

It actually throws a spotlight on a reality we all know quite well, the fact that we have two levels of government involved: federal and provincial. Health, like education, falls within the provincial domain. These are programs set out in the roadmap, but our involvement is a bit roundabout. We train health professionals who then return to their communities to deliver professional health services in the minority language.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: They didn't make it there.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Studies by the Société Santé en français and the health department suggest that 88% of those trained return to their communities.

That being said, the capacity to speak the second language doesn't change how someone is received in an emergency room, for example, since it's under provincial jurisdiction. We all know that the Government of Quebec has its Charter of the French Language, which lays out when and how services in Quebec are to be offered in French or in English. It's an area where we don't really have the power to get involved directly.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Do you have any solutions or ways to improve the services provided to these people?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: There is another type of activity that we support in Quebec, through the agency known as the Community Health and Social Services Network. The agency works with Quebec's department of health and social services to influence the provision of health services by the Quebec government and hospitals. The idea is to make people aware of the reality you described, the reality of those who are often seniors and who need access to services in their mother tongue. It is actually much easier for people to receive services in their language when it involves issues as sensitive as health care.

Indirect though it may be, it's a method that works. We would be glad to tell our health counterparts about the example you mentioned.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Very well. Thank you.

Is there still time left?

The Chair: You can keep going. You are actually next on the list for the second round.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Excellent, but I do realize that my colleagues wish to speak as well.

The Chair: It's your own speaking time. You have five minutes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay. I just have another question.

Mr. Choquette asked a question earlier about Minister Joly's mandate letter. It pertains to official language minority communities. I'm still talking about my riding, but there are a few of us members from Quebec who represent official language minority communities.

When and how will official language minority communities be consulted? They should be consulted. The Laurentians region is home to quite a few pockets of anglophone minority communities.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Community agencies are consulted on an ongoing basis. That is done regularly and is already in place. Over the years, we've built good relationships with a number of community agencies. My colleague mentioned the CHSSN, but others include the Quebec Community Groups Network. So we've had numerous discussions with intermediaries and stakeholders from the community.

Another form of consultation will be taking place soon in preparation for the next official languages plan. We are definitely going to propose a whole series of consultations to the minister. The process would be modelled on past consultations, similar to those held in 2012 and in 2002-03, with the first official languages strategy.

People will certainly have an opportunity to share their views during that consultation process. So we have ongoing consultations and open lines of communication with community agencies. Consultations will take place on a number of levels, including locally, when average citizens will have a chance to share their views and comments.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you kindly.

I'm going to turn the floor over to my colleague now, given how time flies.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

When I met with community agency representatives in my region, I was told that roadmap funding hadn't gone up in 12 years. Is that true? When was the last funding increase?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The increase they were referring to was the last one for community groups that we, at the heritage department, funded. I think it dates back to 2005.

•(1715)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: So it's been 11 years.

Is the current roadmap budget large enough to satisfy the needs and requests of agencies around the country?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Given the dialogue we have with them, we are aware of the pressures community groups face, as well as the difficulties they have trying to provide certain types of services. They tell us about that.

That's also, to some extent, what gave rise to the exercise Mr. Choquette was referring to earlier. It prompted us to examine how the objectives in question could be better met, given the current level of resources and the lack of a funding increase.

With that in mind, our approach was this. The heritage department was traditionally the organization behind emerging agencies, who, a bit further on in their life cycle, would receive funding from other departments. Their focus could be health, economic development and so forth.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Or justice.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: With the resources at our disposal, we checked whether some of those other departments could take over, thus allowing us to do a bit more with the money we had left.

The Chair: Mr. Lefebvre, we'll come back to you a bit later.

Mr. Nater, you may go ahead.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A Public Service Commission representative may be better-suited to answer my question, but I'd like to hear your thoughts on the bilingualism bonus in the public service.

When I worked at Treasury Board, the bonus was \$800. Do you think it's time to increase the bilingualism bonus?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I am going to give you somewhat of the same answer I gave Mr. Bélanger earlier. You're asking me for my opinion, and I would really be overstepping my role if I were to answer. It might be a good idea to ask that question to the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

Now, for my next question.

In 2017, the country will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of Confederation. What role will your department play to make sure events are held in both official languages?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: That's a good question.

We, at the Department of Canadian Heritage, are certainly giving that question a lot of thought. It's one of our priorities. In fact, I was meeting with colleagues at the 150th anniversary secretariat and the commemoration section, who are involved in the event planning for the celebrations. We took the time to examine what we were doing and what we could do from an official languages standpoint.

Of course, we are very aware of the importance of ensuring that the celebrations take place in both official languages, insofar as is reasonable. We'll have to consider the circumstances on a case-by-case basis. We're also trying to determine just how much we can do under the official languages banner, in terms of organizing activities or integrating some of our activities into the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

I can assure you, then, that we are going to do what we can and explore whatever support we can provide to our existing clients. We are giving our colleagues at the secretariat a helping hand to make sure that, as far as the big picture goes, people are aware of the official languages dimension and that special attention is paid to it, in terms of providing services and choosing initiatives. This is especially important because the impact of those services and initiatives may be greater than it is in the official languages arena, strictly speaking. On different levels and to different degrees, then, we are going to make sure that Canadians are able to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation in the language of their choice.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Has the heritage department established a committee to focus on the 150th anniversary celebrations?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Yes, there is an interdepartmental committee, chaired by my deputy minister, Mr. Flack. A committee was also created at the assistant deputy minister level. The Department of Canadian Heritage coordinates the celebrations, but many other departments are involved, as well.

• (1720)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Your department is in charge of Canada's official languages roadmap, which represents a budget of \$1.1 billion. Your department is also responsible for the application of the Official Languages Act.

Is that correct?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: We are responsible for coordinating part VII of the act, which focuses on federal support for official languages activities in Canadian society. The President of the Treasury Board coordinates the parts of the act related to services, government communications, and language of work.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Is the Treasury Board always responsible for the application of the Official Languages Act, aside from part VII, which falls under your mandate?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The Department of Justice is also responsible for official languages as they relate to justice.

I'd just like to take this opportunity to point out that one of the reasons why it makes sense for us to assume the coordination of the roadmap is that it encompasses the activities of 14 different federal departments and institutions, and almost all of those activities come under part VII.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Gauthier mentioned that the \$1.1-billion investment represented only a portion of the federal government's official languages activities.

Have you estimated the federal government's total financial contribution or, at least, the portion you are responsible for?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We've often looked into that, but it's a hard question to answer. Take, for example, the many contributions made to a number of programs whose first role is not to promote official languages. In the arts and culture arena, if we contribute funding to a francophone theatre group through the Canada arts presentation fund, it can have a very positive impact on minority communities but it doesn't fall under an official languages program. That's just one example of many. It's virtually impossible to account for all the one-time investments in programs of that nature, across 175 federal institutions.

"How do we define that contribution?" is another question that comes into play. Does it include translation, language training, and so forth? It becomes impossible to track.

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

Mr. Lefebvre, you have six minutes.

Did you want to share your time with Dan?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, please.

Earlier you talked about roadmap programs that you would like to see taken over by other departments. You mentioned the Department of Justice.

Was that what happened with the court challenges program?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: No, that program was designed with a human rights focus. The constitutional language rights component came later. It didn't fall under the roadmap. It was administered as a support program for remedies in order to advance the rights in question.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Where did the funding for the court challenges program come from?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: It was allocated to the program, within the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Dan Vandal: On page 7 of your presentation, you say that "these investments reflect in part only governmental action in official languages".

What are the other parts?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Tying into the question about the total cost estimate, I would say that other departments are also sensitive to minority language community issues. Just think of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, which works directly with minority language communities, especially in New Brunswick. Because of that interaction with minority language communities, the department is aware of their situation and adapts its approach accordingly.

Similarly, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada works with rural minority communities on a regular basis, and because it understands their situation, the department tailors its involvement to that reality.

That is also the case with Global Affairs Canada, which is sensitive to the need to provide services in both official languages abroad. It has an obligation to do so. That said, it strives to promote minority communities, particularly as regards immigration. It provides support to French-language universities and post-secondary institutions in minority situations through the recruitment of foreign students coming to study in Canada.

I listed off three quick examples, but it would be possible to provide a report on every federal institution. We ask them to let us know what they are doing to help communities under part VII of the act, and every year, we learn things that surprise us. We discover wonderful things we were completely oblivious to within one federal institution or another.

• (1725)

Mr. Dan Vandal: You have the authority, then, to request reports and evaluations from other departments on all those initiatives.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Yes.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I would just add that 14 departments and institutions contribute to the roadmap, but the Department of Canadian Heritage's annual report mentions several dozen institutions.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I see.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Over a three-year cycle, we ask 170 federal institutions that we have identified to provide us with a report. We do it over a period of three years because looking at 170 institutions all at the same time is a pretty hefty task, so three years gives us enough time to cover all 170 of them.

Some key institutions are required to produce a report every year, but others, whose official languages focus is less prominent, are required to provide us with a report every two or three years.

The three-year cycle helps us gain an overview of all the federal institutions subject to the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Very well.

You started to answer my next question. What's the difference between official languages programs and the roadmap?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: My branch is responsible for the host of official languages programs, which are largely based on section 43 of the Official Languages Act. That section tells the Minister of Canadian Heritage to take action on a series of issues, and those issues are reflected in the host of official languages programs under the department's responsibility.

The programs don't contribute to the roadmap 100% but, rather, 20% or 30%, depending on the program. They contribute to the \$1.1-billion investment. The official languages programs target education, second-language learning, and minority communities. We mentioned the community cultural action fund, as well. Those are all components of the heritage department's official languages programs. They partly overlap with roadmap investments but go further.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay. I see.

Immigration is one of the roadmap's three priority sectors. In September 2014, the government put an end to the francophone significant benefit program, an immigration program created to

support francophone minority communities. The purpose was to make it easier to hire skilled French-speaking workers.

Do you have any information on that cancelled program?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: A bit.

My colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada would definitely be able to give you more details. Right off the bat, though, I would say that the program wasn't intended solely to encourage francophone immigration. Among other things, it helped promote francophone immigration to minority communities. The decision was the result of broader public policy immigration objectives, in terms of how temporary immigration is handled, particularly seasonal workers.

The decision to eliminate the program stemmed from problems that came to light in 2013-14 involving temporary foreign workers, and it had the unfortunate effect of overriding the component designed to promote francophone immigration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

The next members we will hear from have five minutes. Mr. Blaney and Mr. Nater will be sharing that time.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Actually, Bernard will go first.

The Chair: Oh, Bernard is going first?

Hon. Steven Blaney: We've already split our speaking time.

The Chair: No problem.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: As we've been hearing since the beginning, you are, to a certain degree, the watchdogs for the cross-government application of the Official Languages Act and its various components.

You talked about immigration a moment ago. So far, you're giving us the impression that you're doing everything perfectly, or just about. Earlier you brought up a potential hurdle with respect to immigration. Could you elaborate on that? What problems did you observe in those services?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The hurdle in question referred to the challenge our colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada encounter when trying to increase the proportion of francophone immigrants to provinces other than Quebec. That's really the crux of the challenge. Progress has been made, albeit slowly.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: When you talk about francophone immigration, are you referring to targeted immigration or immigration, in general?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I'm referring to francophone immigrants from French-speaking countries such as France or Belgium, as well as from Arab-speaking countries where French is a language that is taught. Immigrants from Maghreb countries, for instance, could be expected to integrate into francophone communities in Manitoba or New Brunswick.

•(1730)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Indeed, they might come from northern Europe, as well.

Everyone knows that, over the last three months, Canada has taken in some 25,000 Syrian refugees. Are you able to tell us where things stand with that group? Did they settle in any official language minority communities? Do you have any figures on that yet?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: We don't have any figures on that for the time being. That's a project being managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We don't have any data on the Syrian immigration or the refugees who will settle or have settled in official language minority communities.

It's also important to understand that community agencies have been given a very large role in the settlement and integration of the immigrants. I know my counterparts at the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship are trying to make sure that francophone community agencies working on integration in minority communities are part of the discussion.

You asked me about the results so far, but I don't have the data to give you an answer.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee invite officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to provide an update on the settlement of these recently arrived immigrants. They could tell us the extent to which immigrants have settled in official language minority communities.

The Chair: Are the committee members in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: They can discuss not just that topic, but also the overall immigration situation.

The Chair: Very well.

Do you want to continue asking questions? You have two minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Actually, I'd like to take Bernard's idea a bit further. It would also be helpful to have information on the resources at the department's disposal to provide language training to these newcomers.

I saw your estimate that around 98% of Canadians speak one official language or the other. Is one of your objectives keeping that percentage high? Do any of your objectives target the 2% of Canadians who speak neither official language? It is, after all, a tremendous asset when it comes to citizenship. Would you mind discussing that?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: That's not one of the Government of Canada's objectives, explicitly speaking. I would venture to say that the small percentage of Canadian citizens who speak neither official language denotes either older people or newly arrived immigrants who have not yet had a chance to learn an official language.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have one last question.

Every year, reports are submitted. I imagine the Commissioner of Official Languages will be submitting his. Do those reports show that the percentage of English speakers learning French is on the rise?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: As I was saying earlier, we provide second-language learning support to the provinces, mainly through immersion programs, which are very popular. We know that quite a lot of young people today are learning the second language. The latest official figures peg that number at 340,000, and it's on the rise, according to our most recent data. That's the case with immersion, in particular, which is a good indicator of the general trend. So the percentage is rising.

We don't do a lot of opinion polls, but those we do have indicate that, over the long term, the general population living in majority language communities, be they anglophone or francophone, increasingly supports both official languages.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

I think all members today have to make sure they are fully bilingual.

The Chair: We'll end with François Choquette.

It's already past 5:30. I'll give you two minutes to wrap up.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you. I'll try to keep it brief.

In your presentation, one of the initiatives in the section on communities is networks and access to justice services. The Commissioner of Official Languages released a report entitled "Access to Justice in Both Official Languages: Improving the Bilingual Capacity of the Superior Court Judiciary". Do you have any involvement in implementing those recommendations?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: The bulk of those efforts will come from our colleagues at the Department of Justice and from the people at the Canadian Judicial Council, who participate in judicial appointments. We are familiar with the report and following the issue. It's one of the things we talk about with our counterparts at the Department of Justice, in order to stay on top of official languages trends and progress, overall.

It's part of our coordination function, which we discussed earlier. Occasionally, the commissioner asks us to play a supporting role, but the central role clearly belongs to our Justice Canada colleagues.

•(1735)

Mr. François Choquette: Stakeholders often highlight the importance of having services offered by and for official language minority communities. In British Columbia, that's no longer the case with immigration. Bilateral, provincial and federal, agreements were reached.

How does the Department of Canadian Heritage ensure that services are offered by and for official language minority communities through policies, for example?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: You're right. Previously, in terms of minority community service delivery, the reflex was to have an organization from the community provide the service. It didn't hold true all the time; it was simply the natural reflex when an organization in the community was available to carry out that function.

Recently, some departments decided to seek tenders for the delivery of certain services from organizations outside the community, and agencies from the majority community were selected in some cases. That situation has indeed caused tension and disappointment in minority communities, who wanted the same organization to continue delivering the service.

The tendering process was transparent and all criteria were followed. The Department of Canadian Heritage was not involved in the decision-making around the delivery of those services. You should probably invite officials from the departments who made those decisions to explain them to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen, for your presentation today.

My fellow members, that concludes our meeting.

We'll meet again after the break week on Monday at 3:30, as scheduled.

Thank you again, Mr. Lussier and Mr. Gauthier.

The meeting is adjourned.

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