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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), we'll continue the study of the Translation Bureau.

[English]

We have the pleasure to have with us today Minister Foote, who will probably complete what has been said in the past.

[Translation]

Welcome, Minister Foote. Our understanding is that you'll be here for the first hour and your representatives will stay with us for the second hour.

You have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the government's response to the committee's report on the Translation Bureau.

With me is Marie Lemay, the deputy minister, and Adam Gibson.

[English]

The Translation Bureau is a unique Canadian institution. Its founding in 1934 was an affirmation of Canada's reality and the rightful place of two languages. From the beginning, the work of the Bureau has been invaluable in fostering respect for our linguistic duality.

Generations of linguistic professionals have dedicated their special skills and talents to helping transform the federal government's capacity to serve Canadians in the language of their choice. This legacy of pride in their place and the quality of their work has been taken up by today's generation of employees, who are making a contribution that is much larger than simply words.

[Translation]

I'm committed to restoring pride and honour to the Translation Bureau.

[English]

This is an organization that actively contributes to supporting linguistic duality within the Government of Canada.

Mr. Chair, the mandate of the Bureau is as important as it has ever been. Even though the employees have made and continue to make an outstanding contribution, I think their work has not always been given the recognition it deserves. A new approach is long overdue.

As a champion of official languages, I am determined to lead by example by reinforcing the value of bilingualism to Canadians. I am committed to renewing the Translation Bureau as a centre of excellence ready to embrace innovation, adopt leading-edge practices, and recruit the best in class.

As home to one of the largest French-speaking populations in the world, Canada is a world leader in maintaining the highest standards in terminology, translation, and interpretation.

I am grateful to the committee for having undertaken this study and for formulating its recommendations. Your work has highlighted some of the key issues around the Official Languages Act and the role of the Translation Bureau in support of Canada's linguistic duality.

With respect to roles and responsibilities, the Official Languages Act, the cornerstone of federal language policy, recognizes English and French as equal languages in all federal institutions and obliges these institutions to do their part in promoting linguistic duality.

Further, the act clearly assigns specific responsibilities to Treasury Board Secretariat and the Department of Canadian Heritage. Minister Brison and Minister Joly have met with your committee to discuss those responsibilities as well as the commitments in their mandate letters regarding official languages.

In November, Ministers Brison and Joly announced a review of the official languages regulations related to communications with, and services to, the public. In her appearance before you, Minister Joly described the consultations with Canadians that she is leading in respect of this review. I work closely with both of my colleagues to support their efforts and ensure my department's actions are complementary.

The Translation Bureau gives meaning to the Official Languages Act by providing high-quality translation, revision, and interpretation services for Parliament, the judiciary, and federal departments and agencies. It is also the terminology authority within the federal government.

Since our response to your report was tabled, I have requested that officials at the Translation Bureau make progress in relation to your recommendations. Today I am announcing further measures that are consistent with the direction and spirit of your report.

One of those actions concerns the issue of optionality. The Translation Bureau manages, in terms of volume, 80% of the federal government's translation needs. The common services policy set by Treasury Board specifies that organizations such as the Translation Bureau must conduct periodic reviews to assess whether their services should be optional or mandatory. These reviews are done in collaboration with the Treasury Board Secretariat.

I have written to Minister Brison to request his support in considering reverting to a mandatory service delivery model for the Translation Bureau as a complement to other initiatives in support of official languages.

I now turn to other measures that I have instructed my department to take.

A hiring process is under way for a new chief executive officer, who should be in place by the end of March. The process was open to the public and promoted to the linguistic profession, and the selection committee will include an external expert from academia. The priorities of the CEO in the first few months on the job will focus on quality, hiring, and training, which align with the committee's concerns.

I will now take a few minutes to address each of these priorities.

With regard to quality, the Translation Bureau has a strong reputation for excellence, not only across the Government of Canada, but internationally. The Bureau has developed a quality framework that includes a quality-control system, a rigorous process to recruit world-class employees and freelancers, and world-class training programs for its linguistic experts. I support this process.

Therefore, to further guarantee the quality of its linguistic services, the Bureau is creating the new position of chief quality officer. This position will be held by a language professional who will report directly to the Bureau's CEO. The chief quality officer will oversee all Translation Bureau activities affecting quality and take part in decision-making on training, technology, staffing, and other issues.

In addition, the Bureau is setting up a service line that departments can call to obtain advice on linguistic services. Callers will be able to get information on things such as their obligations under the Official Languages Act and standard clauses they can use in their contracts.

In renewal and hiring, loss of staff through attrition in recent years has created the need to manage lost corporate knowledge and expertise. I assure all committee members that I take this matter seriously. Our mandate is to provide federal departments with access to high-quality linguistic services. Gaps in capacity put this mandate at risk, and we are taking action and monitoring the situation.

This year, the Bureau hired 19 new employees to provide linguistic services in specific domains such as parliamentary proceedings, national protection, and meteorology. Aligned with the Prime Minister's youth strategy, and as part of the Government of Canada's ongoing engagement with students and universities, the Bureau commits to hiring a minimum of 50 students per year in each of the next five years.

As well, ongoing projects are bringing experienced professionals together with the next generation of translators, interpreters, and terminologists. Initiatives are under way to increase the number of

interpreter graduates from recognized universities to support additional hiring by both the Bureau and industry.

We are restoring a co-op program. Many Canadian universities, including the Université de Moncton, the Université de Montréal, and the University of Ottawa, have already indicated their interest in participating.

The Bureau's regional presence is important, providing key expertise to better understand the specialized needs of Canada's diverse regions. It will continue to operate its network of regional offices, which employ about one quarter of the Bureau's 1,300 employees. As well, there are staff on site at certain military bases, such as CFB Gagetown and CFB Borden.

Mr. Chair, the Translation Bureau's role in helping parliamentarians and the federal government to listen to and communicate with Canadians is critical. To increase awareness of the Bureau's role and in line with a committee recommendation, the Bureau is collaborating with the Canada School of Public Service to include this information in courses offered to all new public servants. The new curriculum will be rolled out this spring.

● (1110)

I now turn to the language comprehension tool.

With your study, the committee advanced an important conversation about how official languages and innovation intersect. The government agrees with your recommendations regarding the language comprehension tool and has acted on all your recommendations. A plan was developed to ensure the content in the tool is regularly reviewed by professional translators. The terms of use have also been modified.

As we embrace innovation, we must do so in a way that supports and advances our government's priorities related to official languages. The online Language Portal of Canada is an example of how technology can be used to provide accessible innovative tools to help Canadians from coast to coast to coast communicate in French and English.

I now turn to the Bureau's interpretation services and, in particular, efforts to put in place a request for standing offer for hiring freelance interpreters. Concerns have been expressed that the new approach does not respect official languages and, in particular, the quality of our services. Following careful consideration, I have cancelled the request for standing offer. I have asked officials to reset and to develop a new approach based on further consultations with representatives from across the interpretation industry.

Mr. Chair, any new endeavour in this area must reflect our commitment to official languages and the quality of our services. In the meantime, I assure you and committee members that all interpreters hired by the Bureau are fully accredited, based on a world-renowned, proven accreditation process.

•(1115)

[*Translation*]

We're the proud party of the two official languages, and we'll continue to promote, support and defend bilingualism in Canada.

[*English*]

As we mark Canada's 150th birthday and the things that make our country great, your report is a reminder of the Translation Bureau's contribution to linguistic duality in the public service and Parliament, and ultimately for all Canadians. The measures we are taking will enhance the Translation Bureau's ability to provide high-quality linguistic services, as it has done for over 80 years.

I am committed to work with this committee, my cabinet colleagues, and everyone who is interested in ensuring the Translation Bureau continues to deliver on its mandate effectively.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

I am now happy to answer your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation, Minister Foote. Thank you also for your comments on the work you did with the committee members.

We'll now move on to the first round table for questions and comments.

We'll start immediately with Bernard Généreux.

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

I want to thank the minister and her officials for being here this morning.

Minister Foote, I believe the plan was to implement, as of March 9, new procedures that take into account the lowest price factor when translation and interpretation contracts are awarded. Am I to understand that you're completely eliminating this measure and that you'll establish another method that takes quality into account?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: Absolutely. If I may, I'll start by thanking our interpreters as well, because they're such an important part of everything we do in the Government of Canada.

Thank you so much to them.

We are intent on making sure that the quality needed to provide both official languages is made available through any process we enter into. That is why we have postponed the request.

It was supposed to be up within a matter of days...?

Ms. Marie Lemay (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Yes, in March.

Hon. Judy Foote: Yes, March 9.

We want to make sure we get this right, so we want to consult with the various stakeholders across the spectrum. Again, because our

focus as a government is to ensure that we provide quality services, we are committed to official bilingualism, so we are going to consult with all of the stakeholders to make sure we get this right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Can you explain the reasoning behind the policy that was about to be implemented, namely, the insistence on obtaining the lowest price?

As recently as Tuesday of this week, witnesses representing various interpreters associations in Canada explained that the planned policy did not really take into account quality, but only the lowest price.

Why was the adoption of such a policy considered?

•(1120)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: Like you, I am concerned that such a policy existed. For the past year under this government we have been working really hard to change the face of the Translation Bureau. That is why we have cancelled the March 9 deadline in order to go back out and consult further with individuals to make sure they have a say in how we go forward, and that we go forward in a way that is acceptable to those who we work with, who we engage, and who are so important in making sure this process is one that is effective but is also based on quality, and not necessarily the lowest price.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay. Thank you.

I want to go back to your presentation. You told us that you're preparing to hire a new CEO. I suppose the process will be held at the Translation Bureau.

Did the former chief executive officer, whose name I've forgotten, plan to retire? Was this process planned? Did a contract finish?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: It was Donna... I forget her last name.

What was Donna's last name?

Ms. Marie Lemay: It was Donna Achimov. She's now in another position.

Hon. Judy Foote: Donna is no longer in that position. She's gone on to an HR position. We're looking to hire someone of the calibre that we think needs to be there to head up the Translation Bureau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You also talked about training, the implementation of measures to build on the potential of all translators in Canada, and particularly the transfer of skills.

You want the Canada School of Public Service to be able to include this information in the courses provided to all new public servants. That was one of our recommendations. However, what about current public servants? Will they also be eligible for these courses?

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: Do you want to elaborate on that, Marie?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie Lemay: I'm not sure. We'll need to respond later. I think current public servants would also have access to these courses. I don't see why they wouldn't.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The reason is that, in the text you said—

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes, we're talking about new public servants. The courses are provided at the School of Public Service, so everyone has access to them.

I'm told that the courses are for everyone. All public servants will have access to them.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay. It's just that, since you're talking about new public servants here, the implication is that the current public servants may not have access to these courses.

You understand that, for us, the committee members, it's essential and fundamental that the entire government be able to benefit from all these courses. It's fundamental.

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: I agree with you. In fact, that should be part of our approach on a go-forward basis, but I think they do avail themselves now of—

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes, they do.

Hon. Judy Foote: —programs that are available to them.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Do I still have time?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I want to congratulate you, Minister Foote, on your decision to postpone this change. The witnesses we met with this week were extremely worried about quality.

Let's be clear. We're talking about the public service and not a private company. The price factor is essential and significant, but the value for money must also be fundamental.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

We'll now move on to Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you.

First, Minister Foote, thank you for listening to the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Official Languages and for following the work done by our team.

In your remarks, you said that eight measures would be taken to improve things, and these measures are in line with our recommendations. Thank you very much. We're very proud to see our team and the minister's office working together.

Previously, the committee was told that quality was no longer important, but that price mattered. From the outset, the entire team

understood that this wasn't working. I was therefore very pleased to hear you talk about these new measures.

We submitted a report following our study. Initially, we weren't satisfied with the first response provided. We wondered what was going on.

What made you change your mind and respond now to our recommendations by proposing these measures?

• (1125)

Hon. Judy Foote: Thank you for the question.

[English]

In responding to the report, we could have elaborated a bit more than we did, certainly in recognizing all the work that had been done by the committee. I think that was a shortcoming on our part. It was really important to let you know what measures were ongoing in the Translation Bureau. I think the report itself, the response to the report, while it stated what things were happening in the Bureau, I don't think it went far enough. It wasn't thorough enough in terms of allowing you to understand the work that had been done.

Having said that, I really appreciated the feedback from the committee, because in reading your feedback and recognizing that, there are other things that can be done. Your efforts in conjunction with the ongoing efforts of the Bureau—but your efforts—and in being engaged as much as you were, enabled us to look at other opportunities and other things we could do. There was the idea, for instance, of writing to Minister Brison to ask that the use of the Translation Bureau be made mandatory. For the things that came out of your concerns, we were able to take positive measures as a result of them.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

I also see in your answers to the report that you will be hiring 50 students each year. I'm wondering what measures the department is looking at putting in place to make this happen. How will this be done across the country?

Hon. Judy Foote: I can certainly get Adam to elaborate on that, but let me say that this is a measure near and dear to my heart. I think it's really important, as someone who is learning the language, to make sure that we provide opportunities for students. For students who already know the language or are learning the language, I think it's really important that we engage them as well.

We are looking regionally. I've mentioned some of the universities that have expressed interest in the co-op program. There are others. We're working very closely with them, and in different areas of the country where we know that we have had representation from those areas. As well, of course, we have a couple of our bases where bilingualism is really important.

It's based on quality, and I'm going to allow Adam to elaborate in terms of how students who you know—who anyone on the committee may know—may be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

Mr. Adam Gibson (Acting Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): I'll add a little more precision. We've already done a call-out to essentially all of the different linguistic schools across the country that we work with regularly, to any that have an actual translation program. This is why we have some early feedback. We know that a number of universities—we expect all—will be interested.

Then, through our planning process, we essentially reprioritize how we're managing our forward planning to make sure that we actually are encompassing students in our forward plan. We talk about the next five years. This is just a good thing in general. I think that beyond five years, we should be doing this. It's just part of our regular process of having fresh blood always coming in and making sure we're contributing to the overall program.

The only other thing I would mention is that it links very solidly with our regional presence as well. We have a number of regional offices directly in the cities where these schools are located, so students don't necessarily have to move to have these jobs and so we will be hiring in local areas as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's excellent news. We must ensure the sustainability of the Translation Bureau, an international leader.

The direction it was heading worried many people. I want to congratulate you for reviewing the policy and reinvesting in the sustainability of the Translation Bureau and interpreters. The Bureau is a leader in the field across the globe. I applaud you for the reinvestment. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Minister Foote, I also want to thank you for this new response. Honestly, your first response was very disappointing. Your latest response was much better. I certainly would have liked it to come earlier, but we're happy nonetheless.

Minister Foote, as demonstrated by the many letters that I've received and by certain studies that were conducted, the atmosphere at the Translation Bureau isn't good. One of them indicates that the Bureau is among the worst workplaces in the public service at this time. Therefore, there's a major problem.

You said 12 people were hired this year. However, 400 positions have been eliminated in the past four years. By 2017 or 2018, 140 more positions will be vacant. So 12 people out of 500 is really a drop in the bucket.

Is there a desire to make the work atmosphere pleasant again and to ease the enormous pressure on the interpreters and translators? This desire could be demonstrated by hiring a significant number of people, because 12 people isn't enough.

• (1130)

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: It is as you say. A quarter of the workforce was lost from the Translation Bureau, which is way too many. Obviously

that is going to have an impact on those who remain. If you don't see an infusion of new talent and new people coming into your fold, that has an impact on morale as well, because you wonder if it will go by the wayside.

The reality is that we've hired 19 people this year. Contrary to what would have happened if we hadn't hired the 19 people this year, the plan was to lose another 30-odd positions, so we have reversed that trend. It is a trend that I'm happy to reverse given my commitment to bilingualism and this government's commitment to quality and to bilingualism.

We are looking at the needs and, as I said initially, one of the things I've done is to write to Minister Brison to ask that use of the Translation Bureau be mandatory. Quality is what's really important to us here, so we are focusing on that. We are working closely with the employees. I know that my deputy has reached out to the employees, and Adam has as well. Again, that's to make sure we understand what their concerns are, what their issues are, and how we can deal with those, because we want to have a happy, productive workforce, particularly in the Translation Bureau.

As you say, the demands are great, and we want to make sure that in responding to those they feel comfortable that they have the time to do what needs to be done to ensure that the work they do is quality work.

[Translation]

Thank you for the question.

Mr. François Choquette: Minister Foote, I understand what you're saying. There was talk of 140 vacant positions by 2017 or 2018. Will you at least fill those 140 positions, which will become vacant through attrition? Can you confirm this?

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: I'm going to ask my deputy to talk about the plan that we put in place with respect to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie Lemay: Thank you.

As Minister Foote said, we've reversed the trend. A new era has started for the Translation Bureau. The work environment and volume are completely different. You heard the minister say she wanted quality to be the Bureau's key priority.

The recruitment of the Bureau's new CEO will be very important. We'll ask the CEO to properly determine, in the current environment, the number of people needed and the related figures. At this time, I can't give you specific figures, but we were clearly told that it was a new era and that changes would be made.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Ms. Lemay.

Minister Foote, you spoke to Scott Brison, president of the Treasury Board, to determine whether the Translation Bureau's services would continue to be optional or whether they should be mandatory again.

When can we expect an answer? How much time does the Treasury Board have to submit its recommendation?

• (1135)

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: I wrote to Minister Brison. I'm giving him some time, obviously. I have not heard back from him. The letter would have gone out only maybe a week ago. We need to give him some time.

Again, I would point out—and I don't need to do this to my colleague because he knows—that as a government we see it as our job to promote, protect, and defend bilingualism. We need to take whatever measures we can to do that.

What I am asking him would be one of many measures that we're implementing. In terms of a timeframe, I don't have that for you. I can tell you that we're all wedded to the same idea as a government and as cabinet ministers, which is that we need to do everything we can to ensure the quality of the services coming out of our government. Certainly, we have a role to promote and defend.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Thank you for your responses, Minister Foote.

We'll now move on to Darrell Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Foote.

[English]

I have to say this in English to start off, because I had a dream... If I'd had a dream last night and I'd been dreaming about translation and the Translation Bureau, this would have been my dream.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Hon. Judy Foote: Thank you.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Minister Foote, I'd like to say that, as a member, today I feel even more engaged in the democratic process. I always take risks in life, and I'll take another risk by saying the following. Our committee met with witnesses who spoke about an extremely important and fundamental subject for democracy, namely, bilingualism and the Official Languages Act. All members around this table, as politicians, have had the chance to reflect, play a key role and make recommendations. As you know, things don't always go as planned. In this case, your leadership is the fruit of our labour. Our work consisted of fuelling the debate. Your work consisted of taking the information that came out of the debate, analyzing it, interpreting it, incorporating it and making a difference for Canadians. To do so, there's no better time than the 150th anniversary.

I see Ms. Boucher is already starting to cry.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: Two aspects are crucial.

I feel strongly about quality. It's critical to conduct an analysis to ensure the quality is high enough to provide the service. I applaud you for this.

I also feel strongly about interpreters. If they can translate the words of an Acadian from Nova Scotia like me, with the person's emotions and energy, they must be very good. It's hard work, and I applaud them for it each time.

I used to be the superintendent of all French-language schools in Nova Scotia. I feel very strongly about education and youth. I'm talking about the youth of today and not the youth of tomorrow. The initiative you implemented regarding the 50 youth, but also the training of interpreters and the engagement of several Canadian universities are all measures that show exceptional leadership. Thank you for this. We're in the process of ensuring success for many years to come, in particular for the 200th anniversary. Most of you will no longer be here, but I plan on being here.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: Oh! The chair of the committee is indulgent with me.

I want to ask you two questions.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

[English]

Mr. Darrell Samson: How many translators were cut by the previous government? Because we were running into a cement wall. I don't want to play politics, but what was the scenario on the ground? I mean, adding 19, but also not eliminating 30 plus, that's 50 plus. That's exceptional on the first move. What in the long-term plan—you've talked about the short term—is different as far as the cuts taking place are concerned and what we need to do? Because of course, if Mr. Brison and Treasury Board approve that it's mandatory, now we're into major work.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Hon. Judy Foote: Thank you.

[English]

The number I have for those who were lost through attrition was 450. It's a significant number when you consider how many employees we now have in the Bureau.

I think our number now is 1,300...?

Ms. Marie Lemay: It's close to 1,200 FTEs.

Hon. Judy Foote: It's close to 1,200 full-time employees.

It was a significant number, and it obviously had to have an impact. I want to go back again to your work and the work of this committee that enabled us to look at things a little differently and enabled us to look at other measures that we could take and should take. Again, in keeping with the philosophy behind where we are as a government and as the party of official bilingualism, it was really important for us to look at and respond to your report, but at the same time to hear your outcry because it really wasn't thorough enough and to say, "Well, if it wasn't, aren't there other things we could be doing?"

That's what leadership is about. That's what being in a department is about. That's what having different entities and departments is about: allowing them to look beyond, allowing them to go the extra mile, and allowing them to come up with.... When I first met with the Translation Bureau, I remember saying to them that the sky is the limit. We may not be able to do it all, I said, but I said to think beyond what they would normally think of as things we'd like to see happen within the Translation Bureau. I commend the Translation Bureau for doing that, but I also commend each and every one of you for the role that you played in helping us get there. Eventually we would have, but working with you makes a difference.

To go to quality, I want to again repeat that the new position of chief quality officer is really important to me. That individual will report to the new CEO.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

I know my dream was up there too.

I'll finish, but maybe someone will continue the question. I did want to ask what measures will be put in place for accountability to ensure that it is happening on the ground, that it continues to happen, and that the improvements are in place. I know that I've run out of time, but maybe some of my colleagues might allow you some time to expand on that. I'd really appreciate hearing about that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

I'll now turn the floor over to René Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Foote.

I'm sure my colleague from Nova Scotia will agree with me when I say that the light often comes from Atlantic Canada.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm kidding. Honestly, thank you.

I want to add some things to the first part of our friend Darrell Samson's brief remarks.

Since being elected, I've participated in several committees, and I can say that this committee is special. The clear, specific and strong recommendations made were the result of an incredible joint effort by our liberal, conservative and new democrat colleagues. The work was astonishing. Since this meeting is public, I want Canadians to know it. Democracy works. We often hear quite cynical comments about democracy, but it works well. Your department was given quality recommendations and was therefore able to take quality action. Thank you.

I would have wanted to ask you the same questions as my colleagues and tell you the same things. However, I won't repeat all their remarks.

My legal expert and lawyer side tells me that the minister before me is responsible for purchases from toilet paper to jet aircraft, in the same way she's responsible for services ranging from simple carpet cleaning to optimal security services. The Translation Bureau is included in all this.

We need to think of the future. I imagine that Minister Foote won't be here for the next 50 years. How can we make sure that, in the future, for all procurement of goods and services, translation will be considered a service of unique quality in Canada, as you said at the outset? How can we make sure that, in five or ten years, we won't need to present the arguments again, and the service will remain as crucial as you describe it today?

•(1145)

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: I can certainly attest to the fact that as long as this government continues to exist there will be a place for the Translation Bureau and it will be focused on quality. There is no doubt about that.

Within the government itself, it really doesn't matter where it's located as long as the commitment is there to do what needs to be done to respond positively and, again, to promote and defend official bilingualism. That is as much as we can commit to as a government.

As you know, we've talked about jobs lost, and I'm glad you took the time to commend your colleagues on the committee, because the committee did work very hard to come up with very concrete recommendations. I appreciate that. The reality is that not every government thinks the same way, but I can assure you as minister and as a member of this government that we will deliver on the measures we have announced today. I'd like to think that the proof will be in the results: that people will see that these were the right measures to take, and that because we have an obligation as a country to respect both official languages whoever follows this government will look at the impact of these measures after they were introduced.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

More concretely, I was pleased to learn that the much talked-about co-op program will be restored so that students in the process of becoming translators can have internship opportunities.

It's supposed to start in spring 2017. Will it happen that quickly?

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote: Absolutely. We've already put out the ask. We've had expressions of interest from eight universities, I think, so the interest is there. This is something that we should have been doing before and that previous governments should have been doing. We all should have been taking advantage of an opportunity where you have a co-op program, where we have people who are adhering to the idea of official bilingualism and who focus on quality. For us, this is an opportunity. While we say that it's five years, this can go on forever as long as we have the students we need in the co-op program to deliver on the program through the Translation Bureau.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Minister Foote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

We'll now move on to Sylvie Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, Madam Minister. Thank you so much.

First of all, all the work we have done together would not have been possible without all the witnesses and interpreters who came to meet with us, and I commend them for that. I must say that, in this committee, we have risen above political games, as my Liberal friends said, and we have put citizens first in our discussions. We often debate our respective visions, which are not necessarily the same, but we have done a tremendous amount of work in this committee with regard to translation. I would especially like to thank all the witnesses who appeared, who took the time to come and share their concerns with us. We have worked together to ensure that their vision, our vision as parliamentarians, lines up with your vision, Ms. Foote. I must thank you as well.

I would like to play politics a bit though, but just for two minutes. Your party is not necessarily the party of bilingualism. If that were the case, the official languages would be included in Ms. Joly's title.

That said, we have had concerns regarding interpreters because the issue of privatization has often been raised. Can you reassure us that the Translation Bureau will not be privatized?

• (1150)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: My goal with the Translation Bureau is to make sure we deliver the quality services that we should be delivering. We want to do that with our employees. We want to build the morale of our employees. At this point, we are hiring additional employees, so it is certainly not my goal to privatize the Translation Bureau. Again, I think we have an obligation as a government to provide quality services because this government is committed to official bilingualism.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Would you like to add something, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes, if I may.

Last Tuesday, we welcomed witnesses who kindly came to share their concerns. They include Mr. Thompson and Ms. Gagnon, who represent all translators and interpreters in Canada. I truly believe that they have made a very conscientious contribution. They have helped us better understand how the federal government works and how outside groups can influence it. They influence us as parliamentarians to make decisions that benefit all Canadians. So I would like to salute their presence here today and thank them once again for their work. They have approached us all with great respect, regardless of our party. Their arguments were very strong. This is how Canadians can contribute to the evolution of our society, and of the successive governments guiding us over the years. We must thank them for that.

I would also like to say that the committee works very closely together to address the real needs of Canadians and to safeguard the

essential place of the official languages in Canada. I think that we all agree on that, regardless of our party affiliation.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I will turn it over to Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, Madam Minister.

First of all, I would like to thank you on behalf of my constituents of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital, in Winnipeg. It is clearly a priority for them and for all Canadians. You have addressed a controversial issue, and you have truly found solutions that are not just for the short term, but for the long term, I hope.

[*English*]

I know that the last 10 years have been difficult for the department. Positions have been left unfilled, and there have been cuts and contracting out, which was an approach that did the bare minimum to comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Act. Based on what you've said today, I'm confident that this has changed, but what insurance or what measures can you point to such that the improvements we're going to get in the short term are going to stay with us in the long term?

Hon. Judy Foote: I think our commitment to hiring additional employees is an important part of this, as is our commitment to co-operate with the universities that have the co-op programs and to make that an ongoing initiative. I think the idea that we're putting in a chief quality officer who will report to the CEO is important as well, as is the idea that I'd like to see the use of the Translation Bureau made mandatory. Those are all measures that we are taking now as a government.

You have referenced the fact that people weren't hired.... Once they left, they left. It was through attrition. We lost a significant number of individuals from the Translation Bureau. That's a decision that was made by the government of the day.

From my perspective here with you today, allow me to repeat that we are the party of official bilingualism. We're a government that's committed to quality. We want to make sure that we provide the services that Canadians need. We want to engage all the stakeholders. If you look at the department I lead, you'll see that it's a lot about consultation. It's about reaching out to the stakeholders and recognizing that no one person or group has all the answers.

From our perspective here and working closely.... I'm so pleased to hear the reference to the interpreters and the translators, those who came forward to be witnesses to the committee. That was really important. We need to hear first-hand what their experiences were and what they have to say about those experiences.

We're going to do everything we can to ensure the measures we are taking last for a very long time.

•(1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dan Vandal: You talked about hiring 50 students this year, I believe, and a co-op program with the universities.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dan Vandal: Can you tell us more about how the co-op program will work?

Since my time is nearly up, I would like to say right away just how much I hope that you are still thinking of including the Université de Saint-Boniface as one of the Canadian universities in this initiative.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: Go ahead, Marie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie Lemay: If I may, I would like to make a few important points about the students before I turn it over to Mr. Gibson.

The 50 students are from language programs. In the past, we hired students, but there was a mix; now we are talking about a firm commitment for 50 students from language programs. This is an important point.

Mr. Adam Gibson: We have an office in Winnipeg and we have already been in touch with the Université de Saint-Boniface. We intend to hire students there. As our regional managers there always say, we have had ties with that university for a long time. I wanted to make that point.

As to the co-op program, I cannot provide too much detail because I do not know exactly how it works. That said, I know we are creating the kind of program that matches students up with experienced translators. The students will not be making photocopies or anything like that. They will truly be working in their field of translation, and the revisors, the Bureau's experienced staff, will create a high-quality training environment for them. That is how the programs work.

We also have other programs in which we work closely with the universities. We contribute to their programs and always try to reach as many students as possible.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Samson, would you like to add something quickly?

Mr. Darrell Samson: As my friend Mr. Généreux often says, hiring an officer responsible for product quality is really the key to a company's success. This approach clearly means that someone will be responsible for that quality, which is very good.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Choquette, you have two minutes.

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

When do you expect to hire the quality officer?

Ms. Marie Lemay: We are going through the bureaucratic steps of creating the position right now. We will wait until the new CEO is hired to ensure that the team is made of people who share the same vision.

•(1200)

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Ms. Lemay.

Unless I am mistaken, 30 positions were eliminated by attrition in 2016-2017, but then 19 people were hired. Are the 30 positions that were eliminated translator or interpreter positions?

As to the people who were hired, I believe they were mostly terminologists. Is that correct?

Ms. Marie Lemay: No interpreter positions were eliminated. The positions eliminated were translator and other positions.

Mr. François Choquette: Which positions are you referring to?

Ms. Marie Lemay: They are translator and other positions, but remember that we hired some people.

Mr. François Choquette: Translators or terminologists?

Ms. Marie Lemay: That's a good question.

Mr. Adam Gibson: I don't have the details, but I don't think they are terminologists.

Ms. Marie Lemay: We can check and get back to you with that information.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes.

There have been drastic cuts in recent years and they are continuing, unfortunately, putting pressure on interpreters and translators. If we continue to cut translator positions and hire terminologists, that does not ease the pressure on interpreters and translators.

Do you understand my question, Madam Minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: Absolutely, I do. This is something we will look at in terms of our numbers to see where we've been hiring, where we haven't been, and where the shortcomings are, and we will respond positively to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Madam Minister, thank you very much for your excellent work and your open mind.

I would also like to thank all my colleagues for the chemistry we have on this committee.

We intend to table a supplementary report of the committee in the House of Commons, recapping your appearance here this morning.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Foote: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will take a short break.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: Let us resume our study of the Translation Bureau.

For the second hour, we are pleased to have with us again Marie Lemay, Deputy Minister of Public Services and Procurement Canada, and Adam Gibson, acting CEO of the Translation Bureau. With them is Lucie Séguin, vice-president of corporate services at the Translation Bureau.

Welcome.

Does anyone have a report? I see not.

Let us go straight to the questions and comments.

We will start with Mr. Joël Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the first hour, we congratulated Minister Foote, who appeared before the committee this morning. We also commended all the work done and the way the department listened to the committee's recommendations regarding the Translation Bureau. There seems to be good chemistry among the members from the different parties. I would simply point out that that exists elsewhere as well. I am filling in for someone here, but I can say that I have noticed a strong connection between the translation mission and the two official languages.

To be a bit of a killjoy, I would like to ask the witnesses a question about the committee's recommendation 4b), which was that "the Government of Canada implement a program to regain its lost expertise in technical, scientific and multilingual translation". In response to this recommendation, the government informed the committee that it is using the private sector to provide services in certain specialized subject areas, in particular, technical, scientific and multilingual translation.

Where is the program? The answer provided does not really follow up on the committee's recommendation. I would like to know what program has been implemented, and what its timelines are please.

• (1215)

Ms. Marie Lemay: I will ask Mr. Gibson to provide the details.

You have probably noted that this is a change in direction for the Translation Bureau. The environment in which we have operated has led us to where we are today. We are starting over. All the recommendations you made will be examined, and not just today. As the minister just explained, we have not finished. This is the direction the minister has given us and that is where we are headed. If we have not addressed all the recommendations, rest assured that we have not forgotten them and are examining them.

I will ask Mr. Gibson to provide some details about what we are doing now as regards technical translation.

Mr. Adam Gibson: The most specialized fields always pose an interesting challenge. We work closely with the industry and with our departmental clients, who tell us what their needs are. I can give you a few examples where there is a lack of expertise, something we are addressing through staffing.

The minister mentioned the meteorological service, for instance. We have launched a competition and hired indeterminate staff. We are now evaluating the demand, since there has been a change in government recently and demand changes according to global influences and the government's priorities.

There are other fields that require us to make an investment. If we do not have sufficient expertise in a field internally, we work with the industry, but we also have to decide whether we need to hire or call upon the private sector. There always has to be a balance. We evaluate whether it is a short-term or long-term requirement and make decisions accordingly.

Let me give you a few examples of fields in which the requirements are likely long term. There is the legal field, for example. We work closely with our clients to determine which areas their needs are in. We intend to hire a number of people, for parliamentary services in particular. That is another area that requires specific expertise.

We are updating our multi-year plan. I have given you a few examples, but on the whole we look at all fields to see where the pressure is the greatest. We then make certain decisions in order to achieve the best balance possible.

Ms. Marie Lemay: May I add something?

Mr. Joël Godin: Please go ahead.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Just to say that you have to remember that the hypotheses of recent years are not the same as those that apply to the future.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, except that the committee has recommended that you put forward a program. It seems instead that you are managing the situation on an ad hoc basis, in response to specific requirements.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Once the new CEO arrives, we will be developing a plan for the coming years. That is exactly the kind of thing we will evaluate in developing a long-term plan, if there is a need. There is also the balance issue, as Mr. Gibson pointed out.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay.

You are saying then that the reason you don't have a program is because you are waiting for that person to be hired.

Can you make the commitment today that the person selected will have the mission to create such a program?

• (1220)

Ms. Marie Lemay: I would say that the person selected will have the mission to examine all the committee's recommendations, to evaluate them in the context, and to establish the best programs. I assume that will be one of them.

It does not depend solely on that person, however. There is a whole shift in direction. A person will be appointed, but we also receive very clear directives.

Mr. Joël Godin: You mentioned the best programs. You hope that this program will be among the best and that the person appointed will implement it.

Here is what I would like to know today. Can you make the commitment to implement a program and to ensure that this order is clear to the person who is appointed CEO?

Ms. Marie Lemay: There will be a very clear order to examine all the committee's recommendations in detail and to try to inform us accordingly. I do not want to make promises that I cannot keep, so I will simply say that is our intention.

Mr. Joël Godin: Very well.

Ms. Marie Lemay: That is definitely our intention. You can invite the new person to come and speak to you about their vision.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Lemay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Arseneault has the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lemay, we are talking about a change in direction and hiring the CEO by the end of the current fiscal year. Is that correct?

Ms. Marie Lemay: That is our hope. It will of course depend on people's availability. The process has begun, however, and it will be completed by the end of the year.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay.

In Ms. Foote's department, is it unusual to have a CEO who is responsible for the quality of a specific service?

Ms. Marie Lemay: Are you talking about the quality officer or the CEO of the Translation Bureau?

Mr. René Arseneault: I am talking about the quality officer.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes. It is a new position. Perhaps a similar position might be created elsewhere. For the Translation Bureau, though, it will be a first.

Mr. René Arseneault: So it is something unique in the department's history.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Have you made any progress? Is there already a selection process in place to hire this person?

Ms. Marie Lemay: We are talking about two different positions.

We posted the CEO position both externally and internally, something we do not do very often. For this competition we decided to look both within and without the public service, to see what results this produced. The key skills required are really leadership skills. I have the list here. It mentions creating a vision and strategy, rallying people, maintaining integrity and respect, and of course obtaining results. There is a whole list of them. We are really looking for someone who has leadership qualities, who believes in official languages and understands them, and is ready to be a part of this sea change at the Translation Bureau. That applies to the chief executive officer.

The position of chief quality officer is one we are creating, and it will be staffed through a similar type of process. As I was saying earlier, we want to wait for the CEO to be there, because it's important to have a common vision, and a synergy.

Mr. René Arseneault: Well, you certainly have a big challenge to meet at the Bureau. This can be compared to shopping for an ultra-modern vehicle. However, this is about dealing properly with official languages in the department.

In summary, the first step before the end of the fiscal year is to hire the CEO.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Afterwards you will analyze our recommendations, and then hire the chief quality officer, a first for the department.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Bravo! I wish you good luck. I hope you will recruit the best people in Canada.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Choquette.

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

Thank you again to the witnesses for being here today.

I have a lot of questions for you, but first I want to tell you about a problem.

A complaint was filed with the Commissioner of Official Languages concerning the fact that official languages had suffered from certain budget cuts, and from the fact, among others, that the departments and other organizations made less use of the services of the Translation Bureau. We have heard from reliable sources that there are "ghost translators" in various departments. As you know, that is completely prohibited.

What measures are you going to take to ensure that the various departments and organizations that use contracts will use the services of the Translation Bureau and promote the two official languages, as well as their quality? You will of course hire this person who will be responsible for quality, but how are you going to ensure that phantom translators won't be used internally, which is illegal?

• (1225)

Ms. Marie Lemay: Mr. Choquette, as far as I am concerned, really, quality is the overarching priority. Whether we have competition or not, quality is going to be our watchword. I think that the measures that have been put in place, which you are aware of, are going to take us there. That is what will allow us to stand out and have productive discussions with our colleagues in the departments concerning the use of our services. That quality must absolutely be maintained at any cost so that we can have these conversations. If all of these measures are applied, we will develop a vision which, I hope, will be attractive to our colleagues and the departments. Obviously, we are going to have a lot of conversations due to this sea change.

Mr. François Choquette: I would like to digress, if I may. It will only take a minute.

I simply want to mention that your department is also responsible for the purchase of publicity in francophone minority community media. Community media, whether we are talking about newspapers, radio stations or others, are currently suffering from the lack of publicity purchases that derive from a new policy. Have you looked into this?

In fact, a recent report mentioned that the new approach at Public Services and Procurement Canada was adversely affecting the vitality of linguistic communities, because it is depriving our newspapers and community radio stations of subsistence income.

Ms. Marie Lemay: I must say I don't have much information on that.

I don't know if Mr. Gibson can answer you.

Mr. Adam Gibson: I did not understand the question well.

Ms. Marie Lemay: It was about procurement and advertisements in minority media.

Mr. François Choquette: In fact, you could send a written response to the committee later if you wish.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes, we could do that.

Mr. François Choquette: You could simply send it to the clerk. I would like the answer to be sent to all committee members, please.

I have another question. I'd like to go back to attrition. Are you still expecting to eliminate 140 posts by 2017-2018? Is that still the plan?

Ms. Marie Lemay: The short answer is no. As indicated in the figures of the 2015-2016 Report on Plans and Priorities, we planned to have 1,165 full-time equivalent employees, or FTEs. In fact, at the end of the year, we had 1,197, almost 1,200. So, we have more full-time employees than we had planned.

I would say that that is where the change is happening. Even if we don't have definitive figures yet, we know that more people were hired this year, and we are going to continue in that direction.

So, no, the 140 positions you referred to will not be eliminated through attrition.

Mr. François Choquette: How many positions were lost through attrition in 2016-2017?

Ms. Marie Lemay: We don't have the final figure, but we could answer later. Overall, there is probably no attrition. I think there's probably an increase.

Mr. François Choquette: Oh, really?

Ms. Marie Lemay: That does not mean that internally, no positions were abolished following a departure, and they may have been transformed into different positions. However, in total, we are seeing, rather, an increase in the number of employees.

Mr. François Choquette: You can confirm to the members that in 2016-2017 there is a positive balance as to the number of employees.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes. I can tell you officially that 2015-2016 was a positive year as compared to what we had expected, even though those figures are lower than for the following year.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, but you had planned for job losses.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Correct. So this was more than...

Mr. François Choquette: You lost fewer than you had expected.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: But jobs were lost nevertheless.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes, but this year...

Mr. François Choquette: Basically, this is what I want to know. For 2015-2016, we understand that the new government needed time to settle in and to understand what was going on. However, what is the status for 2016-2017? At the end of the fiscal year, will we have more FTEs or fewer than we had in the beginning?

Ms. Marie Lemay: We can provide you with figures. We expected to lose about 40 this year, and we have hired at least 19.

Mr. François Choquette: So, there is still a negative balance of 21 positions.

Ms. Marie Lemay: I am not certain. I will send you the figures. I think there are other positions that are not language industry positions, but we will send you an answer.

• (1230)

Mr. François Choquette: Very well.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

It is Mr. Lefebvre's turn.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

You said that there has been a change of course or of direction at the Translation Bureau. You are of course going to staff the CEO position, and also recruit a chief quality officer.

However, what I would like to know is where is the starting point? Did you have an action plan in the past, were you able to measure data? Every department has one.

I also sit on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, where deputy ministers are also asked to account for their action plan. They are always asked about their action plan, what measures they have put in place to assess the data they collected, and what decisions were made.

So, what was your point of departure? What existed before? And now, in what direction are you headed? What is your new plan? How are you going to measure the hiring rate? What is being done on that? How can you measure quality?

Ms. Marie Lemay: We had a very clear plan. We are in the fourth year of that plan, which contains very specific data on the number of people, the cost per word, and expenditures. However, it is difficult to tell you what it will look like in the future. We have to start over and rework this plan in light of the new directives we have been given, while taking into account the additional volume in the previous year. In fact, the demand for translation and interpretation has increased enormously.

All things considered, the arrival of new leaders means that this is a good time to review the plan and the specific measures to be put in place over the next years. The plan we have right now is a five-year plan. We are in the fourth year of that plan. We are going to start over with a new plan.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What is behind this sudden increase in volume?

Ms. Marie Lemay: There are many more public parliamentary committee hearings. This has a big effect on the volume of interpretation. Also, parliamentary translation went from 28 million words in 2015-2016 to 60 million words in 2016-2017. So there has been a considerable increase.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is clear and transparent.

Ms. Marie Lemay: With regard to parliamentary interpretation, we have seen an increase of close to 40%. So that is a big increase, which is a good thing.

At this time, it is very inspiring and exciting to be at the Translation Bureau. We are going to be able to do all kinds of interesting things in the years to come.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: As I said, I also sit on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, where we often hear representatives from the various departments. We always hammer home the same thing, and that is the importance of having an action plan with measurable data. You must measure and verify your data. If the Auditor General goes to see you, that is precisely what he will ask of you. You have to be accountable and you're going to have to appear. In fact, that is how all parliamentary committees work.

Today, you have just told us that you will be putting recommendations in place, but you are going to leave and we will hear nothing further from you. You tell us not to worry and that the work will be done, but how can you ensure that that will be the case?

When we sit on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, we sometimes see afterwards that things aren't working, that there are gaps or deficiencies, or we see that things go well. In many departments and agencies, things are going very well.

I simply wanted to say that if the Auditor General meets with you, it will be important for you to have a good action plan with measurable data.

Ms. Marie Lemay: I apologize if I was not clear, but I simply want to reassure you. There really is a plan, and measurements, whether it is in the Report on Plans and Priorities, or other ones. We have all of that. The only nuance I would like to make is that the plan we had begun will change directions, and we are going to start over with new measures and new projections.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

I must say that this is good news. This is a new beginning, in fact. Your five-year plan is in its fourth year, but since the vision has changed, you have to go back to the drawing board to build a new

plan. The new hires and the new leadership will be a part of this new vision.

Personally, I am very confident. Mr. Choquette is worried about figures. However, he must understand that with an 18-wheeler truck, you can't turn on a dime as you can with a Corvette. You have to be patient. The vision has changed and you must go back to the drawing board to build a new action plan. I am very pleased about that.

That said, have you done or do you intend to conduct comparative studies with other bilingual countries, or countries that have three or four languages and offer translation services? Can you share comparative information or data with us, information that could perhaps provide potential solutions to the new leader?

• (1235)

Ms. Marie Lemay: There are several. I will let Mr. Gibson provide details. There really are some good opportunities.

Mr. Adam Gibson: I'd say there are a few examples. There are no countries to which we can compare ourselves exactly, but Europe remains one the best points of comparison for Canada. We can compare ourselves on some points with the United States, but they do not have many internal services. They use contracts with the private sector almost exclusively.

Another good comparison is the New Brunswick Translation Bureau. That province has its own bureau.

Whatever the comparison, whether we look at other countries or even Canadian provinces, the same question remains: we have to find a good balance between persons and expertise we keep in-house, that is to say our own employees, and the work we give to the private sector.

The challenges are the same with regard to technology and quality. Based on our discussions with stakeholders, the challenges are similar. I remember my last conversation with a United Nations or European representative. The challenges we talked about were almost exactly the same in our respective organizations.

And so there are good examples and good practices the new chief executive officer will be able to look to for inspiration.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Very well. In fact, the moment is propitious. The vision is different and a new action plan is being put in place. Let's hope we do not have to wait for the fifth year to see the results. That said, we need the time it takes in the case of a five-year plan.

Madam, you are the deputy minister, correct?

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: How long have you been in that position?

Ms. Marie Lemay: I arrived on April 11.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So it's quite easy for you. The action plan has to be reworked and this is an auspicious moment.

Between now and then, how do you intend to exercise your leadership to prepare the dossiers for the people who will be joining the team?

Ms. Marie Lemay: The most important role I will have to play over the new few weeks will consist in choosing the right person for the Bureau. The selection committee and I will conduct the interviews. We have to find the person who will be able to translate the vision the minister has set out for the Bureau into concrete terms. That is my first duty. As the Translation Bureau is part of the Public Services and Procurement Canada team, I work to support it. We work with these people on a continuous basis.

Mr. Darrell Samson: My colleagues have talked at some length about accountability. This aspect will certainly be discussed when the action plan is drafted. That is normal. In addition, it would be a good thing to inform our committee of developments once a year. I would like us to agree on that.

I would also like to know if the new five-year plan could be made available to the committee, so that it too may participate in this continuous improvement.

Ms. Marie Lemay: I think the idea of coming to see you on a more regular basis is an excellent idea. As I said earlier, I encourage you to invite the new CEO, once he or she has taken up the position, to share what you have heard with him. Obviously we are going to do so on our side, in the context of the report and recommendations, but please feel free to do the same. I am entirely open to that.

Now I want to set aside my deputy minister's hat to say this. I was listening to you earlier when the minister was here, and it made me proud to be a Canadian in this wonderful bilingual country. I congratulate the committee on its work. When you want to invite us to come back, we will be here.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like to stop there. I would like to tell you that we are a nice committee, but extremely efficient.

Voices: Oh, oh!

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mrs. Boucher and Mr. Génèreux will now share their time.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You gave us some figures, but I didn't make a note of them. Still, it was an increase, and I spontaneously wondered whether this increase was due to the fact that new members were less bilingual.

Ms. Marie Lemay: We found that many more committee meetings were being held publicly, which means that, in many cases, translation was needed. This in large part explains the increase in volume.

I don't know whether Mr. Gibson can think of anything else that might explain this.

• (1240)

Mr. Adam Gibson: First of all, this is due to the growing number of committee meetings. For example, committees are working more often during the summer. In addition, meetings are held in public much more often than in camera. Moreover, there really are a lot of televised committee meetings, so much more subtitling is needed. This increase in Parliament's work is definitely measurable.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In other words, we can't conclude that it is because people are less bilingual.

Mr. Adam Gibson: That isn't being assessed.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The truth is that the Liberals' approach is much more transparent. There are many more explanations and communication on the ground.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Samson, but we are going to give the floor to Mr. Génèreux.

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: Mr. Chair, I would like to be given the time he just used. Thank you.

I would like to thank Ms. Lemay and the other witnesses present.

I come from the private sector, where a person can be called upon to manage growth and negative growth. I've had the opportunity to do both, and I can tell you that growth is much more manageable than negative growth. That's pretty obvious.

It's never good to eliminate positions or apply budget or other cuts. I'm not excusing the behaviour of the government at the time, which I was a member of. We had decided to apply cuts, but very rational elements were at the root of those decisions, which affected every department and were sometimes difficult. That said, one very important factor, I think, that has contributed to the decrease in the number of translators and interpreters is the contribution of new technologies.

As I understand it, the number of words translated in a year went from 28 million to 60 million, but the number of employees remained the same. I think these people should receive a bonus, since their workload has increased so much.

So I'll reiterate my question. Has the technology contributed to the considerable reduction in people required to do the same work?

Ms. Marie Lemay: I would like to come back to the increase in the volume of work and the people at the Translation Bureau.

Based on our business model, we use the private sector during peak periods at the Translation Bureau. At peak times, we work together. In addition, it is important to nurture the language industry outside the government. Maintaining this balance is very important. I just wanted to clarify that.

And technology does, indeed, have an impact. The linguistic world is also transforming. We must continue to use new technologies, but all of this can be done with respect for translation and interpretation professionals, for bilingualism and both official languages, as well as for quality. Succeeding in achieving that will be fascinating in the coming years. That is what we want.

Mr. Bernard Génèreux: I fully agree with you on that.

Much has been said about Portage, the translation tool that will be put in place later. What is Portage's status? Can you elaborate on that?

Some witnesses have commented on the quality of the Portage tool, for example with respect to the corpus and what feeds the machine in order to give the best possible translation. Where are we now with respect to that?

Ms. Marie Lemay: My colleagues can add something, but I would say that 39 departments now have access to Portage.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Out of how many potential departments?

Ms. Marie Lemay: I imagine we could make it available to the 101 departments and agencies.

I listened to the conversations that took place on Portage at the beginning, and some aspects surprised me. Based on your comments, we have been able to clarify all that. Portage gives all public servants the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue. That's the purpose of Portage. For example, I can write a few words in French to an anglophone, and Portage will allow that person to understand them. That really is the goal with this tool.

We did a trial—

• (1245)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Excuse me, Ms. Lemay. There has been a lot of discussion about the fact that it's a comprehension tool, not a translation tool. So you are confirming that it really is a comprehension tool and not for translation.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Absolutely. It's a comprehension tool.

We have hired a company to do a study on the system's performance, relevance, and efficiency. We can share the study's findings with you.

Ms. Séguin, when will we have them?

Ms. Lucie Séguin (Vice-President, Corporate Services, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services): By the end of May.

Ms. Marie Lemay: So in early spring.

As for the statistics—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What's the purpose of the study exactly? What questions is each department being asked?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: The goal is aligned with the evaluation policy. We want to determine the tool's relevance and performance, and see whether the tool achieves the objective set at the outset. We are also going to speak with the users.

The most recent statistics indicate that about 500,000 requests have been made through this tool, in English and in French. So the tool works. It is for internal use within the federal government only. We have implemented all the recommendations of this committee's members.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Parliamentarians don't yet have access to Portage, if I'm not mistaken. Do any parliamentarians currently have access to Portage?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: No. The tool can only be used by public service employees, because the underlying terminology, lexicons and databases correspond to the language used within the public service.

That said, as our deputy minister said, the evaluation will allow us to see how the tool is perceived. We will be able to establish a plan based on that.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Would it be possible to inform our committee of the study's findings when it is released? I suppose it will be made public, because everything is public, at the federal level.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We would like to know the outcome of the study.

You said that there have been 500 requests...

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You can finish your question.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You said that there had been 500 translation requests, in fact—

Ms. Marie Lemay: 500,000.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Right. Excuse me.

I still don't find that this is very many.

In fact, it isn't 500,000 words, but 500,000 requests for translation, so it may be paragraphs or whole documents.

Ms. Lucie Séguin: It's 500,000 expressions or sentences that have been put into the tool. It's the number of times that someone has clicked on the "translate into English" or "translate into French" button, after which the tool gives the meaning of the expression or sentence.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Right.

Ms. Lucie Séguin: As requested, we have also added a notice to encourage people to use the services of the Translation Bureau and its professionals if they need official translations. We have also clarified the terms used and changed the name of the tool.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: When the report comes out, you can certainly expect to come and comment to this committee.

Ms. Marie Lemay: It will be a pleasure.

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

Before we finish, I simply want to mention that, behind every minister, there are teams like yours. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for the excellent work you are doing on this. Ms. Lemay, thank you to you and your team for the effort you've made, and fairly quickly, with regard to the Translation Bureau.

Mr. Adam Gibson: Thank you.

Ms. Marie Lemay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That ends our meeting for today.

Once again, thank you very much.

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