



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 091

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (0815)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 91 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 29, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions.

Since members are now used to hybrid sittings and all of today's witnesses are appearing in person, I will dispense with the instructions for people participating in the meeting via Zoom.

I would like to welcome the witnesses.

We have Geneviève Tellier, a University of Ottawa professor who will speak as an individual.

From the Public Service Alliance of Canada, we have Alexandre Silas, regional executive vice-president for the national capital region, and Pierre-Samuel Proulx, senior research officer.

I'm sure you're familiar with how our committee works. If not, I'll tell you. Mr. Silas, I know you've been here before. We'll give each of you five minutes for your presentation. Afterwards, members from each of the political parties will ask questions.

I'm very strict about speaking time to ensure we can complete two rounds of questions.

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

Ms. Geneviève Tellier (Professor, As an Individual): Thank you very much. I'll be brief.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to testify as part of its study on language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions.

I'm a professor at the University of Ottawa, where I am assigned to the public administration program. I am therefore very familiar with the issues of public service staffing and public policy implementation.

In addition, as you probably know, the University of Ottawa is a bilingual institution. In fact, it is the largest French-English bilingual university in the world. I am therefore very familiar with problems arising from two languages coexisting in the workplace. I'm

also very familiar with the challenges of protecting a precarious language, such as French in Ontario, as well as the obstacles to overcome when teaching a second language.

I regularly comment on current events in columns published in *Le Droit* and *Francopresse*, as well as on Radio-Canada radio, where I regularly address language issues.

One of those columns garnered a lot of attention when it was published in *Le Droit* on July 9, 2021. It was about the appointment of the Governor General. I wrote then—and I'm still of the same opinion—that the Governor General's ignorance of French was extremely detrimental, not to Canada's francophonie in general, but to the francophonie outside Quebec specifically.

Francophone populations outside Quebec have been fighting for years to show that knowledge of French in bilingual organizations is not just an asset, but an essential skill. This appointment sabotaged years of effort and struggle. I see it in my own organization, where bilingualism is no longer considered an essential skill for senior management positions, and where some new university programs are being offered in English only.

This appointment also implied that the francophonie and diversity are two separate things. However, recent appointments to senior public offices prove otherwise. Think of Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin or the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, Manon Jéannotte.

The most senior people in public administration must demonstrate leadership in protecting and promoting bilingualism, and all employees must be on board. They must be sensitive to the issue of languages and bilingualism. That sensitivity must be manifest as early as possible in every employee's career path, especially those aspiring to more senior positions. In an ideal world, bilingualism would be required of everyone at the time of hiring. If that's not possible, second-language instruction should be provided as soon as possible. The longer people wait, the harder it gets.

By way of illustration, let me tell you about the University of Ottawa's master of public administration program. This program is unique in Canada because one of its objectives is to train future bilingual public servants. We've taken an asymmetrical approach to doing that. Anglophone students are required to take a course in French, but not vice versa. Francophone students can register for courses in English, but they don't have to. This requirement is a challenge for most anglophone students, but the outcomes are good. In fact, many of these students choose to enrol in other courses offered in French afterwards. This example shows that we need to figure out how to overcome initial obstacles and stick to our policy guns.

That concludes my presentation. I look forward to your questions.

• (0820)

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

From the Public Service Alliance of Canada, I'm not sure if it's Mr. Silas or Mr. Proulx, or both.

You're indicating that it will be you, Mr. Silas. You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Silas (Regional Executive Vice-President, National Capital Region, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Good morning.

Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I'd like to thank you for inviting us to testify as part of the study on language obligations related to the process of staffing or making appointments to key positions in the federal public service.

My name is Alex Silas, and I'm the regional executive vice-president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, PSAC, for the national capital region. I live in the region, more specifically in Vanier. I'm also a proud Acadian from Grand-Barachois, New Brunswick.

I'm here with my colleague, Pierre-Samuel Proulx, who is a senior research officer at PSAC.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada is one of Canada's largest unions and the largest federal public service union. We represent more than 230,000 workers across the country and around the world. Our members work in federal departments and agencies, of course, but also in Crown corporations, universities, casinos, community service organizations, indigenous communities and airports.

As a union, our role is to defend the interests and rights of workers, including the right to work in the official language of their choice. We advocate for policies and programs that promote linguistic equality, particularly with regard to recruitment, language training and working conditions.

We've seen progress, but there are still challenges. No government ever seems keen on the idea of improving bilingualism in the federal public service so that we can provide better services to the public and ensure that every worker feels comfortable working in the language of their choice.

[*English*]

The Canadian public service should be a place where bilingualism is encouraged and supported by the employer, and we believe it's the federal government's duty to provide the necessary tools to make this happen.

A public service where bilingualism is encouraged means, for example, a team where communication flows smoothly and without misunderstandings, a more inclusive and diversified workplace, and the elimination of language barriers and language insecurity. If managers and people in key positions don't speak both official languages, it's more than likely the employees under them will work in only one of the languages, not both.

I think it's also important to point out that bilingualism in the federal public service is crucial for ensuring Canadians can interact with their government in the official language of their choice. This helps to strengthen citizens' confidence in government institutions and to promote linguistic inclusion at all levels of society.

PSAC is proposing several measures to improve bilingualism in the federal public service, in addition to new provisions for indigenous employees who express themselves orally or in writing in an indigenous language in the course of their duties.

[*Translation*]

Enhancing the bilingualism bonus is one example of what we are asking for. It has never been raised; the amount has remained unchanged since the bonus was created in 1977. That's nearly half a century.

We have repeatedly urged the government to reconsider this policy, but it is refusing to raise the bonus. As a matter of fact, in a 2019 report, the government even suggested eliminating it. That, in our opinion, would be completely unacceptable.

PSAC believes that, if the government truly wants to support official languages, it must raise the bilingualism bonus to recognize the value of work in both official languages. It must also provide more quality language training to encourage anglophone and francophone workers to improve their second language.

We're also proposing an indigenous language allowance for federal workers who speak an indigenous language. That would be an important step towards reconciliation.

Data collected from departments by the Joint Committee on the Use of Indigenous Languages in the Public Service, which included Treasury Board and PSAC representatives, established that several hundred federal workers use indigenous languages in the course of their work. These workers deserve to be recognized for the value they bring to the federal public service.

Parliament has passed legislation to advance the recognition of indigenous languages. As an employer, the federal government should therefore lead by example and formally recognize the contribution of its employees who use indigenous languages with the communities they serve in the course of their duties.

Lastly, if the government really wants to strengthen both official languages, the employer has an obligation to proactively make language training more accessible. It should provide more language training to encourage anglophone and francophone workers to improve their second language, thereby enhancing their ability to provide services to the public.

More language training will also eliminate barriers and enable workers from employment equity groups to access management positions that require a certain degree of bilingualism. Currently, indigenous members are under-represented, and lack of access to language training is a significant factor.

We also want Treasury Board stop outsourcing language training to subcontractors and focus on creating its own training program. This would involve public service workers, who can adapt to the specific demands of the federal public service. The same goes for translation services, which should never be contracted out.

I will conclude by thanking you again for your time.

I would also like to thank the interpreters for their work.

I look forward to your questions.

Thank you very much.

● (0825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Silas.

All the witnesses stayed within their allotted speaking time, so they want to get good questions.

Let me explain how this works. For the first round of questions, each of the political parties will have six minutes to ask the witnesses questions and listen to their answers.

We'll start with the first vice-chair of the committee, who represents the Conservatives.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here this frigid morning on the banks of the Ottawa River.

I'll start with you, Ms. Tellier. I was going to call you "Ms. Letelier", but that's another story.

It was sweet music to my ears when you said in your presentation that the appointment of the Governor General was extremely detrimental. As you said, one must lead by example.

The Governor General holds the highest office in Canada and is influential. We're not blaming the individual. The problem is that the person who holds the highest office in Canada, who represents a bilingual country, is not bilingual. As I often say, bilingualism in

this case means English and French. The person is bilingual, but does not speak French.

How can we fix this mess?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: There are probably two ways to do it: the easy way and the hard way.

The easy way would be to take note of what happened and say that it won't happen again. When I look at recent lieutenant-governor appointments in the provinces, such as in Ontario and Quebec, I get the sense that the federal government has indeed taken note of this case. In Ontario, for example, the government appointed a Franco-Ontarian. We can therefore assume it won't happen again, given the uproar it caused. We have to keep hammering away at this issue.

The hard way would be to change the legislation and make things clearer. I believe the case is before the courts, so we await clarification. It would be a matter of stating explicitly that, as is the case for Supreme Court judges, governors general and lieutenant-governors will have to speak both French and English. We don't want to get to that point, but sometimes, when the government isn't doing anything, that may be the only way to spur it to take action.

Mr. Joël Godin: You said the appointment of the Governor General caused an uproar and that it was regarded as an aberration in the news. Equally, the only officially bilingual province appointed a unilingual lieutenant-governor. There is a saying in politics about not walking the talk. In other words, the government has no willingness or intention and that is very evident in this instance.

Is the current Official Languages Act effective and does it provide the necessary tools? We don't actually know which departments should have those tools because there is confusion regarding responsibilities: Is it Treasury Board, Canadian Heritage, Justice Canada or the Privy Council? There are plenty of loopholes that let politicians wash their hands of it, saying it is not their responsibility, as Pontius Pilate did.

I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: That's an excellent question.

The act has just been updated. From what the Commissioner of Official Languages has said, I understand that it will take a bit longer to see the results.

In general, when there is new legislation, the more quickly action is taken to implement the intent of the act, the better the results. In other words, if you wait, things will go back to normal and not much will change. If strong leadership is shown very quickly and changes are implemented, there will be results.

Your work is very important. Your committee has to provide direction by indicating what is needed and which changes have to be made quickly. I think the Commissioner of Official Languages is also your ally. But you mustn't wait. The government has to be called to action quickly.

A big part of the answer to your question is of course leadership. It has to come from the top, the highest levels. In my remarks, I referred to the highest level of the public service. I said level in the singular and not levels in the plural to emphasize that action is needed from the highest level in government.

In short, the key is quick implementation of the measures through regulations.

● (0830)

Mr. Joël Godin: Let's talk about quick action, Ms. Tellier.

The act is in force. The commissioner has tools, which can be described as fines. Even if it is not spelled out that way in the act, that is effectively what it says.

You said quick action is needed. An order in council is expected, but it has not yet been issued.

You also talked about a quick response. Yet the Treasury Board president told the committee that it would take up to three years to bring in the regulations.

Does that not show a lack of willingness on the part of the government?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I have to agree with you. There really does not seem to be any urgency to act, even though it was recognized several years ago that the situation was not improving. So if the government does not take action itself, I think all communities, including linguistic minority communities, will have to put pressure on the government. I am thinking of minority communities in particular.

This is worrisome right now, I would say. It is also worrisome that it took so long to get the bill passed, considering when we started talking about it.

Mr. Joël Godin: Ms. Tellier, what could be done to turn things around? The government's intention, willingness and quick action are important, of course, but can you suggest any other tools? We know where things stand, but what would you recommend to the legislator to get things moving and act more quickly to protect French and prevent its decline?

The Chair: That is an excellent question but you will have to wait for your next turn for the answer, Mr. Godin, because you have just five seconds left.

As I said, I am strict with our time. Please remember your answers.

The Liberals are up next. Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here this morning. It is a very chilly morning indeed. I think it is the coldest day we have had in a long time.

Ms. Tellier, should language skills, a functional knowledge of Canada's two official languages, be a hiring requirement for senior officials in the public service of Canada?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: Yes, and not just for them. We should make bilingualism a default requirement for everyone, and then proceed by elimination according to the circumstances in which bilingualism is not necessary. So we have to reverse the burden of proof, so to speak. The concept of bilingualism should always be at the forefront. The federal government is in fact a bilingual institution. So if it is a bilingual institution, bilingualism is an important factor in the way it operates.

So I would say that individuals appointed to senior positions must actually be bilingual, even before they are appointed. We have often talked about individuals who get the job first and learn French after, but that means that while they are learning French other people are not served in French. We have to keep that in mind as well.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: If the individuals currently in those jobs are not bilingual, should they become bilingual? What steps should be taken to ensure they become bilingual?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: That is complicated. You have to be sensitive to the circumstances that led to their appointment. I don't think you could tell those individuals, after the fact, that the rules have been changed and that they will lose their job or be assigned elsewhere. You have to consider how those appointments were made and the contributing circumstances, and say instead that it will not happen again. You can see if training could be offered to those individuals, but I don't think that should be a priority.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: So if we focus on language skills and bilingualism, what about the organization's operational needs? If someone has the necessary skills and no one else meets the requirements during the hiring period, what should we do then?

● (0835)

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: Does that person really have the necessary skills if they are not bilingual? That's the problem. We always say that bilingualism is essential, but then it goes to the bottom of the list. It should be at the top of the list.

We have to stop saying that someone who doesn't speak French or English still has the necessary skills. No, that person does not have the necessary skills. We have to change the way we look at and analyze the situation. We have to clearly indicate what the essential skills are and, as the case may be, determine that a given person does not have the necessary skills. Then, we have to proceed as any good employer would: If we really want to hire that person, we have to find a way for them to acquire the missing skills. That said, the person should acquire those skills before they begin in the position, not after. Acquiring an essential skill after the person is appointed should be an exception, in my opinion.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I completely agree with you. But what if no one meets the requirements at the time of hiring and language skills are the only missing criterion, what do we do then?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: The person is not—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Do we wait around for someone who has those skills?

In some cases, a person is hired even if they don't meet certain requirements, and they then acquire them on the job. That happens with a number of other requirements. The same should apply for language skills.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I would challenge you to prove that there is no one else who could do the job. That is an easy excuse that we hear too often. Tell me why French is the skill that should be at the bottom of the list while other skills are at the top of the list.

Other skills have to be taken into consideration. Why not consider a bilingual candidate who does not have some of the required skills, and ask them to acquire the missing skills and offer to train them to acquire those skills? Yet that is not what happens. In actuality, French always ends up at the bottom of the list, by default. We have to stop saying that a given candidate checks all the boxes except for French. We need to look at all their skills and stop putting French at the bottom of the list.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Great.

I will give Mr. Samson the rest of my speaking time.

The Chair: You have just under two minutes.

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

I would like to pick up on something you said. If I understood correctly, you referred to there being some opposition between francophones and diversity. Could you elaborate on that please?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: Right now, francophones sense there is a dichotomy between themselves and diversity, that is, that they cannot go hand in hand. That is often mentioned with regard to appointments. It is a question of skills once again. Diversity takes priority over francophone candidates.

Why could there not be diversity among francophones? Look at what is happening in Quebec and elsewhere. There is an extremely diverse francophone community in Toronto. I also see that in the classes I teach. I teach in both languages at the University of Ottawa, but there is more diversity in the classes I teach in French than those I teach in English.

So I challenge you to prove that there is no diversity among francophones.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are you relating this to the Governor General?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: That is the most obvious example, but not the only one. I have given you others, which are actually counter-examples.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, I liked that.

I have another question, for Mr. Silas, from New Brunswick.

Welcome to you and everyone else in attendance.

Mr. Silas, you said something that I found interesting.

The Chair: You have less than 15 seconds, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: If I understood correctly, you said that if the supervisor is a unilingual anglophone, it is very likely that people will speak English only. Is that what you said? I paraphrased your remarks.

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Absolutely. If there are 20 people at a meeting, and just one person is speaking English, everyone will switch to English.

The Chair: That is an excellent question and I thought I would have to interrupt you, but you finished your answer just as the time ran out.

I will now give the floor to the committee's second vice-chair, Mr. Beaulieu, from the Bloc Québécois.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Since I have been in Parliament, I keep hearing that the official languages are an urgent matter, but nothing seems to change.

Do you think we are making progress or slipping backwards?

My question is for everyone.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I see both. Progress is being made in the public space. Canadians are aware of language-related issues. So there is progress on that front. Further, knowledge of both official languages has increased, I would say. In Ontario for instance, French immersion schools are very popular. So there is that awareness.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yet the figures from Statistics Canada show that bilingualism is increasing a lot in Quebec, primarily among francophones, but is not increasing among anglophones in the rest of Canada. Things are at a standstill.

● (0840)

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: What I meant is that people are paying attention to the issue now. That represents progress, in my opinion.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I agree with you regarding the public space.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: On the other hand, is there any progress in the federal government? I don't think so. That said, one of the main problems is the lack of data. If I could make a recommendation to the committee, it would be to insist on obtaining the data. Sound data is essential.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yet there have been a lot of studies. For a long time, Statistics Canada denied that French was in decline. Now there is some openness to this, which may be why we hear more about it in the public space. Will that last? That remains to be seen.

My next question is for the witnesses from the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Linguistic requirements in staffing or appointment processes are something we have talked about more than once, so we have to ask why knowledge of French would not be required from the outset. As you said, Ms. Tellier, people who do not speak French are appointed to positions on the condition that they learn it, but in many cases that is not effective. So why not require knowledge of French from the outset?

Mr. Iacono asked earlier how to proceed if no candidates are found. It is a chicken and egg situation. If knowledge of French is required, people will make sure they acquire that skill. When it is not required and people can take training after the fact, that is not effective.

What do you think?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: I agree with Ms. Tellier that it should be an essential requirement, not a secondary one.

I would add however that people can learn French or English. That is why we are calling for more training opportunities. Public servants, whether anglophones or francophones, want more opportunities to become bilingual so they can get ahead in the federal public service.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I agree with you that there should be more language training. I do think that knowledge of French should be required from the outset though, because without that I am not sure any progress will be made. That is what we have seen in a number of cases, that of the Governor General in particular.

It is not just a question of learning opportunities. Some people are not good at languages and it seems to be very hard for them to learn a new language. We saw that with the CEO of Air Canada, who said he was taking French classes every day but that it was very difficult.

There is something I would like to know. When he appeared before the committee, PSAC's regional executive vice-president for Quebec said that "systemic discrimination is deeply rooted in the federal government" and that it is taken for granted that English comes first, even in Quebec.

Would you say there has been any change or do you think we are sliding backwards more than moving forward?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: It isn't just in Quebec. I think that this situation occurs everywhere in Canada where there are francophones. There are francophones all over the country.

Clearly, the advancement opportunities aren't equitable. Most of the advertised senior management positions are unilingual English or bilingual. Unilingual French positions don't come up very often. The same goes for training opportunities. Training opportunities are

more common for anglophones who want to improve their French than for francophones who want to improve their English.

Moreover, draft documents are often sent out in English only. When francophones say that they can't comment on the drafts because the documents are only in English, they're told that the final version will be translated into French. If the drafts are only in English, it means that feedback from francophones isn't wanted.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We see it here in the government too. In commissions, we sometimes receive reports in English only.

If that's the way that things work in the government, we can imagine the situation in the private sector. The government is supposed to set an example.

I would like to ask another question.

The committee heard from witnesses who specialize in language training. They told us that, as you said, a centralized model was needed. They explained that, initially, the training was centralized. One school trained all public servants. Later, in order to cut costs, language training was decentralized. Since then, the various departments have been able to outsource language training. We've really seen a drop in quality in this area.

Do you agree that the old model should be reinstated, with one language school for the public service covering all departments, similar to what the Translation Bureau used to do?

• (0845)

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Yes, absolutely.

Outsourcing saves money in the short term, but studies show that costs are higher in the long term.

The Canada School of Public Service employees do important work. I think that the language training services that the school used to provide to federal public service employees should be reinstated. This training must also apply specifically to the federal public service.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Silas.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

It's now the NDP's turn.

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

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

I would like to thank the witnesses.

My questions are for the Public Service Alliance of Canada officials.

You spoke about the bilingualism bonus. During the negotiations with Treasury Board, you asked for a review of the bilingualism bonus directive. You specifically asked for an increase in the bonus, from \$800 to \$3,000.

In your opinion, why didn't Treasury Board agree to increase the bonus?

How would a review of the directive strengthen bilingualism in the public service?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: We all agree that \$800 in 2024 isn't the same as \$800 in 1977.

I think that there's a lack of will. There's a lack of desire to tangibly recognize the contribution of both official languages in the federal public service, or to acknowledge that bilingualism in the public service is vital in order to better represent and serve Canadians.

Ms. Niki Ashton: How can well-paid jobs help, particularly before the hiring process, make it easier to attract and retain the bilingual employees needed in the public service?

We know that a great deal of outsourcing is taking place in the public service in general, and not just when it comes to language training. Do you think that this undermines efforts to retain bilingual employees in the public service and to encourage people to enter it?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Absolutely. There are major retention issues in the federal public service. We're talking about investing in the vitality of both official languages, and also in the recognition of indigenous languages in the federal public service. Yes, it's an investment, but a significant one. It will lead to a better quality of service for Canadians in the official languages.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: The PSAC has been very clear on the importance of recognizing and valuing indigenous languages in the public service. Advocacy groups say there are barriers to learning French in marginalized communities, in parts of, say, western Canada where I am, and particularly in indigenous communities.

How do we fix this? How do we address the systemic gaps in language training so that we can strengthen bilingualism in the civil service, so that we can also value what indigenous language-speaking public servants or potential public servants could bring to the table? Do you have any recommendations?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Absolutely.

There was a joint study between the employer and the union that showed that there are hundreds of workers in the federal public service who use an indigenous language in writing or orally every day to serve the communities that they're in. This is something they have to do. This is something they need to do to communicate with these communities, and it's not being recognized at all. It's not included in the bilingualism bonus, which needs to be increased. Yes, including that in the bilingualism bonus....

Let's go back to increasing opportunities for training. These are trainable skills. These are skills that people want to learn. However, there need to be more opportunities for training, and that training needs to be done in-house in the federal public service because if

it's privatized, it's going to cause more problems. We need to bring that in-house.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

We know that workers in Canada are facing very difficult times, and we know the PSAC has always been a strong supporter of anti-scab legislation, which, of course, the NDP spearheaded in Parliament earlier this year.

I'd like to hear from you. Does the Conservative Party's position opposing anti-scab legislation historically, despite the blip we saw on the voting record just recently, worry your union membership? Also, can you speak to how important anti-scab legislation is to supporting working people, whether in the public service, the federally regulated workplace or beyond?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Absolutely.

We have members on strike right now in non-public funds, CFMWS. They've been on strike for 67 days as of today. They're being replaced by scab labour from DND. Active military personnel are doing their work. Active military are being forced or being ordered to do scab labour. Of course, it's of huge concern to our members.

The largest gap in the anti-scab legislation being proposed by the federal government is that it doesn't include workers in the federal government. That definitely needs to be expanded. I think that we need to go further and pass anti-scab laws provincially, as well. The right to unionize, the right to organize and the right to strike should be protected in Canada, so legislation like this not only needs to be implemented but needs to be expanded.

● (0850)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for this clear message.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: One minute.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

I'll focus again on French and English language training. You also talked about the need to bring these training services into the public service. Can you repeat that recommendation for us?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Absolutely. No one knows the needs of the federal public service better than the federal public service employees. As I said earlier, in the short term, outsourcing appears to save money. However, in the long term, it actually costs Canadian taxpayers more. Providing these services in-house, in the Canada School of Public Service, would not only help improve training and better develop bilingualism in the federal public service, but would also be a good long-term investment for Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Silas and Ms. Ashton.

Bernard Généreux, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses.

Ms. Tellier, I would first like to thank you and congratulate you on your distinguished career. I read and keep up with you. I have always considered your points of view extremely fair, even though I find that you're hard on the Conservatives in general. That's fine, however. This morning you're being hard on the Liberals. I agree that the Liberals' approach to appointments in recent years has sent the wrong message. Obviously, we'll need to address this in the future. The way that Mr. Iacono—who is speaking while I'm speaking—asked his questions earlier shows, I imagine, a type of Liberal philosophy in this area. With 40 million people living in Canada, can't we find people who are both bilingual and competent, and even trilingual in many cases?

I just hired a perfectly quadrilingual young lady in my office. Young people today are increasingly open to learning languages. In Canada, we know that parents are lining up outside for 24 hours to register their children in French immersion schools. People, especially young people, are extremely keen right now to learn English or French, especially French.

What do you think of the current Liberal philosophy of appointing people who are unfortunately not bilingual? We're a de facto bilingual country, with two founding peoples. I don't understand why this isn't automatic. How do you explain this?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I don't understand it either. When I came to Ottawa—I won't say how long ago—to this bilingual institution called the University of Ottawa, I was struck by the lack of bilingualism. I'll make a comparison with the University of Ottawa to explain how this applies to the public service. The issue still arises when it comes to conducting research and having excellent researchers who speak French. There's still this dichotomy between conducting excellent research and speaking French, on the grounds that you can't do both. However, it's a false debate.

I agree with you. Among Canada's 40 million inhabitants, there should be some bilingual people. This should be seen as an asset. I think that an educational effort should be made earlier in life. People should learn early on that we're in a bilingual country and that they need to know both languages. This should also be taught at university.

Something came to mind earlier while I was listening to a question. I would love to see the public service reach out to universities to tell them that it needs bilingual candidates, especially in public

administration programs. I floated this idea on my end, but it hasn't caught on. If a person comes from a bilingual university and proves that they have taken courses in English and French, this should equate to public service language tests. It isn't complicated to implement. We just need people to think about these aspects and provide guidance on how to cut costs, make the system more effective and send a message too. I think that this message concept doesn't exist and that people work in silos. That's what happens in the federal public service. We each work on our own side, and we use French in Quebec and English in other places. That's the perception. In other bilingual institutions, the logic is much the same.

• (0855)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: No doubt you have been keeping up with the discussions concerning the passage of Bill C-13, aimed at updating the Official Languages Act, which hadn't been amended in 50 years. How will these changes strengthen bilingualism in Canada? Will the new legislation provide mechanisms to improve the situation of French in Canada?

The Chair: Please take 20 seconds to answer.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: Yes. Certain appointments must be bilingual, and the commissioner has greater powers. However, as I said earlier, unless these measures are actively implemented and strong leadership is in place across the board, the situation could revert to how it was before.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tellier.

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

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

If Mr. Iacono was speaking, it's because he worked as a public servant while you were in the government, Mr. Généreux. He's still suffering the after-effects.

Ms. Tellier, let's get back to the subject at hand. You teach public administration. I'm interested in executive performance. Do you know whether senior executives are paid for promoting both official languages in their own departments? If not, should this be factored into their performance bonus?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: The short answer is that I don't know.

Bilingualism bonuses seem to pose an issue. Again, you're saying that bilingualism is an asset, not an essential skill. If the position requires bilingualism, it must be better paid. In other words, the overall salary must be improved. The federal public service needs to attract the best people, the people with the best skills.

A few years ago, I did a study for the Quebec treasury board on retaining young people in the public service. The salary isn't the main factor for them. People are in the public service for the common good, and bilingualism—meaning serving the public in both languages and promoting the use of both languages—is part of the common good. It's wrong to think that salaries or bonuses will solve everything. Bonuses were a thing of the past.

I would lean more towards better pay. Federal public service jobs must be competitive. The public service competes with the private sector, but it has its advantages. Its jobs are highly sought after and they provide major benefits in terms of both working conditions and the work that people do. People aren't there to make a profit tomorrow morning so that the company's share price can rise. People do other things, and they like that. You can count on that. If bilingualism is required to obtain these positions, yes, it costs money. If the people who want to enter the public service—and young people do—know that a good job requires bilingualism, they'll learn the other language.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay.

Young people want to enter the public service, but the issue is that it takes too long. The federal government is competing with KPMG and Deloitte, where young people are hired within 24 hours. In the government, it takes a long time. I feel sorry for my generation given the lack of talent right now. Talent isn't being nurtured in our young people, in the federal public administration. That's an issue. However, it's another matter.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: We saw the same thing with the Quebec treasury board. We came to the same conclusions. The Quebec government has some absolutely fascinating positions, but they take 18 months to fill. In this type of situation, the government is bound to lose people.

• (0900)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Aside from regulations and legislation, how can the federal public service develop a corporate culture to ensure that both languages are spoken?

I'll give you a mundane example. Anglophone members of Parliament come here. They take courses in French. On top of that, they'll spend an evening in French and have fun speaking French. Yes, they may make a mistake or two, but no one judges them. Do you know whether any managers organize French-speaking days in the office, even though a team is made up entirely of English speakers?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: Yes, that can work. I think that it's a matter of setting an example. If you believe in it and manage a team, the message will get through. Again, the example must be set at the highest levels.

I'll share a personal anecdote. When I was a student, I did internships. I was offered an internship at the Department of Finance, here in Ottawa. I had the choice between this internship in Ottawa and an internship at Hydro-Québec. I chose Hydro-Québec because I was told that, in Ottawa, on Wednesday mornings, people spoke French in the department. I figured this meant that, for the rest of the week, they spoke only in English. The Hydro-Québec internship was in Rouyn-Noranda, not in Quebec City or Montreal. The

bottom line is that, for relatively similar positions, the language aspect came into play. I didn't realize this at the time.

You can have activities to promote French. However, if you don't believe in them and you're simply doing them out of obligation, it won't work. The key is not to be a francophone, but rather a francophile.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Absolutely. That's why I'm saying that, beyond the regulations, beyond the act, how do we develop this organizational culture?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I think that if your recruitment process makes it possible to recognize these Francophiles, that is to say not those who can speak French, but rather those who show a sensitivity towards French, you will enrich your workplace and the lives of your employees.

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

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

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

Ms. Tellier, I'm going to talk about the elephant in the room. Bilingualism is being discussed left and right. During our study of Bill C-13, an act to amend the Official Languages Act, we discussed the two major language planning models.

The first model is based on collective and territorial rights, used by countries like Belgium and Switzerland. It is recognized around the world as the only model that protects minority languages.

In 1969, however, Mr. Trudeau chose the other model, institutional bilingualism. Since then, we have seen a decline in French across the board, and it seems to be accelerating. And yet no-one wants to call into question this language planning model. If we tried to make French the common language within federal institutions in the main areas where there is still a critical mass of francophones, that would make it possible for people to really function in French. At the moment, however, we still find ourselves in situations where francophones are a very small minority and, in the end, English is the dominant language. What do you think?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: Minority status is a fragile one. There is no way around it; we remain in the minority. So special accommodations must be made to protect that status.

We also have to ask ourselves how to define bilingualism. What do we mean by bilingualism? Does that mean that everyone must know both languages, or does it mean that everyone can work in their own language? Those are two very different things. If you say that every Canadian can work or live in French or English without having to know the other language, then you are in a bilingual country where both languages coexist and everyone can choose the language of their choice.

Now, at some point, it takes—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm sorry to interrupt. If you look at what's happening in the Flanders region of Belgium, Dutch is not threatened, even though it's a very minority language. The central government is bilingual.

Here, however, it's as if we wanted bilingualism to be everywhere, which doesn't work. What we're seeing is the assimilation of francophones outside Quebec, and even in Quebec now. Shouldn't the model be questioned? Even André Laurendeau called for a special status, which was based more on the territorial model. Should we not at least consider that approach?

The Chair: That is an excellent question, Mr. Beaulieu, but you will have to wait for the next round of questions to discuss it further, if there is another round.

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

● (0905)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have another question for the representatives of the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

We have heard rumours that the Canadian Coast Guard hires unilingual anglophones who are responsible for directing the work done in Quebec. What does this mean for Canadian Coast Guard workers in Quebec and the essential service they provide?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Thank you for the question.

Indeed, our members who work for the Canadian Coast Guard in Quebec tell us that the people at the highest level of management are unilingual English speakers. Our workers in Quebec are sometimes unilingual francophones, or their mother tongue is French. Now they're going to have to force themselves to work in English as well, without having the opportunity, once again, to take training to increase their level of bilingualism at work. They therefore feel less and less comfortable working in the official language of their choice.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay. Thank you.

This is particularly concerning when we recognize that the Canadian Coast Guard does emergency-related work and that, of course, it is an essential service.

Recently, we have heard that there are problems at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with translation and interpretation, as a result of which the information that must be provided in both official languages is not done so in a timely manner. Do you believe that this bilingualism gap, this lack of knowledge of French, particularly in Quebec and elsewhere where French is spoken, can hinder access to essential information that francophone Canadians need?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Absolutely. We often hear our members say that there are two official languages in the federal public service: English and interpretation. However, particularly with regard to emergency services, information must be provided in both official languages as quickly as possible. Information should not be transmitted first in English and then, a few hours later, in French once it has been translated. We have heard examples of internal cases where important communications are sent first in English and then later in French. There are also external cases where important communications to the public are made in English first, with francophones having to wait longer for information in French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Silas and Ms. Ashton.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Tellier, I'm going to go back to the question I asked earlier. We made an observation, which is being confirmed by our analysis of the situation. However, based on that, what should we do, as legislators, to reverse the trend and stop the decline of French? The problem is not bilingualism, but rather French. English may be in decline compared to other languages in the world, but our country is a bilingual one with French and English, and the only language in danger in Canada is French. You've already talked about timeliness. Do you have any other important suggestions for us?

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: That's a very good question.

The challenge is that you are legislators. You are not the ones shaping public policy and managing programs. Your role is one of accountability. So accountability is what you can work on, by asking the government and the public service to provide status reports for a certain program, for example.

Legislators can make requests, such as status reports. You can be proactive in this regard and force the government to explain its approach. You can't do the government's work, but you can certainly ask questions. That is why your committee is ideally suited to work on the issue of appointments, because it is not something we deal with every day. I also believe that you heard what the Commissioner of Official Languages, another one of your witnesses, had to say. So your role is to ask the government questions that can be uncomfortable, and to do so repeatedly if need be, and to conduct regular and relevant follow-ups with on the progress of the issues you are interested in.

Mr. Joël Godin: So it's a question of demanding accountability.

You spoke earlier of statistics and data. During our study of Bill C-13, we proposed an amendment to incorporate in the Official Languages Act the mandatory enumeration of rights holders as of the next census. The Liberals rejected that amendment, even though we fought in 2021 to have such an enumeration conducted as part of the census.

So that's a problem. We don't have the data, but we know that the calculations are based on the number of rights holders, which has financial repercussions in our official language minority communities. That is an observation. I would like to hear your comments on that.

● (0910)

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I'm going to talk to you about the public service, since I have a few more ideas on that subject. You'd have to document what's going on in the public service. The commissioner said that there was a lack of data. It's not just a matter of enumerating in the usual manner. You really have to get to a granular level on the ground. As the union mentioned earlier, we have to ask people whether they can work in French, store that information and look at trends over time. So it's that kind of data, collected within the public service, that you should have.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tellier.

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

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for their suggestions to the committee.

I want to remind everyone that this study, which was recommended by the Commissioner of Official Languages, concerns the appointment of senior public servants. The witnesses have made a number of good suggestions.

Ms. Tellier, you also talked about how we define terms such as bilingualism. We know that the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University call themselves bilingual, but truth be told, these are not really bilingual institutions. They offer certain courses in French.

You drew a parallel between institutions such as the University of Ottawa and the senior ranks of the public service. What are your recommendations? I already mentioned the hiring issue. Last Monday, we heard the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada say that it was not important to hire candidates who speak French, since they could be trained later. I completely disagree, and I would like to hear your recommendations on this.

Ms. Geneviève Tellier: I think I said it earlier, but I will say it again. French is an essential skill, not an asset. So it should not be at the bottom of the list, as we see all too often.

I'm going to draw a parallel with the University of Ottawa: between two otherwise equal candidates, the university will choose a unilingual anglophone professor rather than a bilingual professor. We see this frequently in the academic world.

Again, it takes strong leadership. People should know that, if they want positions that interest them, they have to know both languages. We're talking about appointments at senior levels. This is something that you prepare for in life, not something that happens as soon as you enter the public service. So, if a person intends to someday become a director general or assistant deputy minister, and knows that he or she must know French at the time of his or her appointment, he or she will learn French. The message has to be clear.

We haven't talked about it yet, but there also has to be a clear policy on how official languages provisions are applied. This policy will have to be centralized at the Treasury Board Secretariat, most certainly, with general parameters that can then be put in place by each federal institution.

Mr. Alexandre Silas: If I may clarify, our position at the Public Service Alliance of Canada is that hiring francophones is important.

Mr. Marc Serré: Are you talking about the senior ranks of the public service?

Mr. Alexandre Silas: Yes, absolutely.

One of our requests is that there be more opportunities for advancement for unilingual francophones or for those whose mother tongue is French. In senior management, it is okay to be a unilingual anglophone or bilingual. However, a unilingual francophone has fewer options.

The Chair: Thank you for everything.

That was an excellent second round.

I would like to thank the witnesses for taking part in this exercise this morning. I know I have been a strict timekeeper, but this has allowed us to complete two full rounds of questions in one hour, which is quite rare. I know I have cut you off a couple of times, so if you want to add any information that you were unable to share with us today, please send it in writing to the clerk of the committee and it will be distributed to all members. When we prepare to write our report, written submissions are just as important as what was said at the meeting.

Thank you so much. What a fantastic morning.

I will suspend the meeting for a few moments so that we can welcome our witnesses for the second hour.

Thanks again.

- (0910) _____ (Pause) _____
- (0915)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome to the new panel.

From the Privy Council Office, we have Marcia Jones, director general, strategies and planning, and Rima Hamoui, assistant secretary to the cabinet, senior personnel. From the Treasury Board Secretariat, we have someone we have already seen here, Carsten Quell, executive director, and Karim Adam, director, oversight and compliance, both from the official languages centre of excellence in the office of the chief human resources officer. From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Holly Flowers Code, vice-president, human resources.

I will give each of the witnesses up to five minutes for their presentations. After that, there will be a question and answer period.

We'll start with Mrs. Hamoui.

- (0920)

Mrs. Rima Hamoui (Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Senior Personnel, Privy Council Office): Thank you. Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of the committee, good afternoon.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the lands on which we are gathered are part of the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

My colleague and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss official language obligations related to Governor in Council appointments. I will provide you with a brief overview of the role of the management priorities and senior personnel secretariat within the Privy Council Office in managing and coordinating the process for Governor in Council appointments.

[English]

Governor in Council appointees include heads and members of commissions, boards, agencies, administrative tribunals and Crown corporations, as well as deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers leading federal public service departments.

Bilingualism is a fundamental responsibility of federal institutions, and Governor in Council appointees play important roles in carrying out the mandates of these organizations.

[Translation]

Governor in Council appointments are made by the Governor General on the advice of cabinet and on the recommendation of the responsible minister.

Since 2016, the government has used open, transparent, and merit-based selection processes to support ministers in making recommendations for these appointments. This approach is intended to support the identification of highly qualified candidates who meet the skill, knowledge and experience criteria of a position, and who reflect Canada's diversity in terms of linguistic, regional and employment equity groups.

[English]

These selection processes are application-based. Positions are advertised through notices of opportunity on the Privy Council Office website. Federal departments conduct outreach to attract qualified candidates. Applications are assessed against advertised criteria for the positions. Following interviews, a list of qualified candidates is provided to the responsible minister, who recommends a candidate to cabinet. The Privy Council Office provides the necessary support for this process.

[Translation]

Under the Language Skills Act, agents and officers of Parliament who are appointed by the Governor in Council are required to be bilingual prior to their appointment. The language proficiency of candidates for those positions is assessed during the interview stage of a selection process and, if necessary, can also be assessed through language testing provided by the House of Commons.

[English]

For the remainder of Governor in Council appointees who are not subject to the Language Skills Act, the notices of opportunity posted for those positions note the preference for bilingual proficiency, and individuals are asked to include in their applications their ability to speak and to understand their second official language. Applicants are interviewed in the official language of their choice and may be asked to answer one or more questions in their second official language to assess their bilingual proficiency.

The Privy Council Office tracks bilingual proficiency in the Governor in Council community and monitors trends to help support decision-makers.

[Translation]

The committee will be aware of the recent amendment to the Official Languages Act, which impacts deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers. Deputy ministers are appointed on the recommen-

ation of the Prime Minister based on advice from the Clerk of the Privy Council. Subsection 34(2), part V of the act requires that individuals appointed to the position of deputy minister named in schedule 1 of the Financial Administration Act take the language training that is necessary to be able to speak and understand both official languages. This legislative provision reinforces the terms and conditions of appointment for deputy ministers, i.e., that they personally promote the use of both official languages in their institutions.

[English]

The senior personnel secretariat supports the Clerk of the Privy Council in overseeing the deputy minister community, including ensuring that they are aware of their individual responsibilities under the Official Languages Act. Deputy ministers are often promoted from the assistant deputy minister level within the federal public service and would be subject to valid proficiency levels in their second official language.

[Translation]

Individuals who are recruited from outside the federal public service are made aware of their legislative responsibilities, including those respecting official languages, as part of their terms and conditions of employment.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that the Privy Council Office is committed to supporting the Governor in Council as it strives to create a community of leaders reflective of today's Canada.

[English]

Thank you for your attention. We would be pleased to take your questions.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Hamoui.

We'll now go to the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Mr. Quell, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Carsten Quell (Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee here today.

• (0925)

[Translation]

As you already know, with me today is Karim Adam, and he is director of oversight and compliance at the Official Languages Centre of Excellence.

Today, in my brief remarks, I would like to provide some key information on the bilingualism of federal government executives.

Our two official languages are at the heart of the Canadian identity; they contribute to the values of diversity and inclusion. Bilingualism is a priority for the Government of Canada, and one of the reasons this is a priority is the right of Canadians to receive services from their government in either official language. This is a fundamental right, and our department is committed to ensuring that it is respected. A public service and institutional leadership committed to bilingualism can best meet the needs of Canadians to receive services in both languages.

[English]

In addition, federal public servants in bilingual regions for language-of-work purposes have the right to work in the language of their choice.

We are committed to fostering a workplace that is conducive to the use of both English and French.

[Translation]

Moreover, the modernized act strengthens and broadens the Treasury Board Secretariat's monitoring responsibilities in order to improve and maintain federal institutions' compliance with their official languages obligations, including obligations relating to service delivery and communications with the public and those relating to respect for employees' language of work rights.

[English]

As leaders, executives play a key role in setting the tone for the regular use of both official languages in the workplace.

Also, as you know, amendments to part V of the Official Languages Act address the bilingual capacity—as we just heard—of deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers, as well as the language-of-work rights of employees in bilingual regions. My colleague from the Privy Council Office has just spoken to that.

[Translation]

The Treasury Board Secretariat's responsibility extends up to the assistant deputy minister level, meaning the level below deputy ministers. Most appointments to deputy minister positions are made from within the public service, in particular by candidates from the pool of assistant deputy ministers.

The Directive on Official Languages for People Management requires that the assistant deputy minister positions be designated with a language profile of superior proficiency and that the incumbents of these positions be bilingual at the time of their appointment.

Of the approximately 6,000 public service executives, including assistant deputy ministers, 95% met the language requirements of their position as of March 31, 2023.

When we look at the situation from the employees' point of view, in the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey, three-quarters indicated that senior managers in their department use both official languages in their interactions with employees. Perceptions are similar between francophones, at 75%, and anglophones, at 76%.

That's a quick snapshot of the current situation.

[English]

However, despite this solid foundation for bilingualism, I would like to stress that official languages do need ongoing support and that we must be constantly vigilant so that the rights of Canadians and of public servants are respected.

[Translation]

I'll stop there and turn it over to my colleague from the Canada Border Services Agency.

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

Ms. Flowers Code, from the Canada Border Services Agency, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Holly Flowers Code (Vice President, Human Resources, Canada Border Services Agency): Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee. Thank you for having me here today.

My name is Holly Flowers Code. I am the vice-president of human resources at the Canada Border Services Agency, CBSA, and the champion of official languages at the agency.

The CBSA is the frontline of our nation's borders, serving as the face of Canada for many newcomers and international travellers who arrive in the country, not to mention Canadians returning home.

However, we are not just the gatekeepers of our borders; we are also the custodians of our country's rich heritage and culture. Our two official languages, English and French, are a central piece of this heritage. They are at the heart of when it means to be Canadian. Along with indigenous languages, French and English are a powerful symbol of our country's diverse and inclusive society.

[English]

At the CBSA, we understand and recognize the significance of linguistic duality in defining our national identity, fostering social inclusion and ensuring effective communication with the public and the clients we serve.

As the federal agency with the mandate of protecting our borders and providing integrated border services, we strive to ensure that our services are of equal quality in both official languages at all our bilingual points of entry.

Travellers and clients are provided active offers of service to use one of our two official languages when interacting with our border services officers, and are able to receive documents in the official language of their choice.

Every year, the CBSA serves over 95 million people, and in a 2022 Ipsos poll, 98% of respondents indicated that they received services in the official language of their choice.

• (0930)

[Translation]

More recently, in the 2023-24 fiscal year, the CBSA received 35 official language complaints to date, representing almost half of what was received in the prior year. Two-thirds of our complaints come from members of the public, and generally concern the lack of an active offer of service, or continuity of service in the traveller's preferred official language.

As a large organization that has 135 bilingual points of service, we face challenges when it comes to recruiting and maintaining sufficient bilingual resources for all areas, particularly as some of our ports of entry are in remote areas. To address this, the CBSA has put in place a shift scheduling system with the ability to identify the linguistic profile of employees in order to prioritize the scheduling of bilingual border services officers at ports of entry when required.

[English]

We also offer fully bilingual services by telephone for those reaching out to the border information services line, at our primary inspection kiosks and on our social media channels, as well as on our external website.

Within the agency, we also work to ensure sufficient bilingual capacity across the organization so that employees can work in the official language of their choice in bilingual regions. In the 2020 public service employee survey, 92% of respondents from the CBSA indicated that they could communicate with their immediate supervisor in the official language of their choice.

[Translation]

Internally, we have a dedicated language training school and program, and each year we train 500 to 800 employees to increase our agency's bilingual capacity.

Our commitment does not stop at training. We are continually striving to create a work environment that promotes the use of both English and French. We encourage our employees to use their preferred official language in their workplace and regularly share reminders and implement training requirements so that employees are aware of their official languages obligations.

[English]

In closing, I would like to assure the chair and the members of the committee that the CBSA remains dedicated to serving Canadians in the official language of their choice. We are fully committed to upholding the principles of linguistic duality, not only as a legal obligation but also as a vital part of our national identity.

I look forward to the discussion and insight today on ways that we can further enhance our commitment to promoting and preserving our nation's linguistic heritage.

[Translation]

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Flowers Code.

All the witnesses stayed within their allotted speaking time. They can therefore take as many questions as possible. We'll now start

the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes for questions and answers. The Conservative Party will go first.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen witnesses, first of all, I'd like to thank you for being with us this morning and for participating in this exercise. I think it's very important to mention that to you because, for us to be better, it's good to hear from the people who have to live day to day with the laws and regulations we pass.

Mr. Quell, what's changed about everyday life since the new Official Languages Act was passed regarding bilingualism and, above all, the commitment of employees who speak French?

Mr. Carsten Quell: Thank you.

I'd say that our commitment to official languages is ongoing, whether it be with respect to services to the public or—

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me for interrupting you, Mr. Quell, but I don't want to know your commitment. I want to know what has changed meaningfully in your everyday life at the Treasury Board since Bill C-13 received royal assent and is now law.

Mr. Carsten Quell: In our group, it's made significant changes, because we have new responsibilities. I'll speak to the main initiatives under way right now.

The first is the development of new regulations under Part VII of the act, which was mentioned in the previous appearance. To that end, we now have regular meetings with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and with stakeholders from official language minority communities. A second initiative we're working on right now is an accountability framework that we plan to release over the summer. I'd also like to mention a third initiative, the development of a new language training framework. That was a commitment made by the government in 2019, which sought such a framework to improve the language training offering for staff. Those three initiatives are my group's responsibility.

• (0935)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Quell.

Earlier, in your opening remarks, you said that 95% of people meet the bilingualism requirements. How do you do that analysis and data collection?

Mr. Carsten Quell: It's through the central human resources systems. Every incumbent of a bilingual position must pass a test for the core public administration. It's a test administered by the Public Service Commission. Based on those results—

Mr. Joël Godin: At what point is that assessment required?

Mr. Carsten Quell: It's at the time of application, so during the candidate assessment process for positions that are staffed on an imperative basis, which represents the largest number of cases.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Quell, the act states that deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers must take training to become more bilingual, so to speak. How are they evaluated once they are hired?

Mr. Carsten Quell: Are you talking about deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes.

Mr. Carsten Quell: That is the purview of the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay, thank you.

Mrs. Hamoui, I'll ask you the question then.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: Thank you for the question.

The vast majority of deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers were already public service executives and must therefore already meet the bilingualism requirements of the position they occupied before. Once in their position, their appointment conditions require that they personally respect and promote the use of both official languages in their organization.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, Mrs. Hamoui, but I want to know how people who are hired as deputy ministers or assistant deputy ministers are subsequently evaluated. After they are hired, do you leave them in the system and that's it, there's no further reassessment?

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: There's no central assessment, that's correct.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you believe that the assessment of bilingualism at the front end of hiring isn't strict enough or that it's too strict and too demanding? Do you think we should tighten the criteria for knowledge of French, since it's usually the most vulnerable language? Don't you think we should require more knowledge when people take up these positions?

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: I can't give an opinion as to whether they should have more knowledge or not. However, I can say that when they take up their position and are already in the federal public service, they have the necessary level of bilingualism, which is quite advanced in terms of written expression, oral expression and comprehension.

That's the way it is when we appoint people to deputy minister and associate deputy minister positions. Once they are deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers, as a result of the changes to the act, they must take the necessary training to ensure that they understand and speak both official languages.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand, Mrs. Hamoui, except that—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, it's already been six minutes. I know it goes quickly.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today to help us better understand where we are and where we're going, which is very important.

Mrs. Hamoui, I've heard that there have been fewer francophone appointments in recent years. Is that correct?

• (0940)

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: That's exactly why the Privy Council Office collects the data, to see if there are trends.

As far as Governor in Council appointments are concerned, overall, I think the current data show that 23% of those appointed reported that French was their first official language.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I understand that's a decrease compared to two or three years ago.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: The data varies from year to year and from month to month.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Under Bill C-13, deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers must be bilingual. Since Bill C-13 was passed, have there been any hires or not?

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: With the changes to the act, deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers must take the necessary training to ensure that they understand both official languages after their appointment.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So right now, they can still be appointed even if they aren't bilingual.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is the case, even with Bill C-13.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's interesting.

Second, I'm very pleased that the Treasury Board Secretariat representatives are with us today.

Mr. Quell, I really liked the comments made by the woman who was here earlier. She said something that struck me. You were here and I'm very happy that you were able to hear it as well. According to what she said, the longer we wait to implement Bill C-13, the less likely we are to succeed in improving the act. Do you agree?

Mr. Carsten Quell: I agree that every new piece of legislation needs to be implemented as quickly as possible.

That said, there are certain processes that are provided for, particularly with regard to regulations, including the one for Part VII of the act. I appeared before this committee with the President of the Treasury Board, who referred to the necessary timelines. I think it's important to understand that regulations can only be put in place after consultations with stakeholders and the public. In addition—

Mr. Darrell Samson: I understand your answer and I thank you for it.

Is it possible to get a timeline, an organizational chart or some sort of document that would show what can be done in the first month, in six months, and in a year? I understand that it could take a year before the regulations are put in place because of the consultations that have to be held. However, I'd be concerned if it were to take more than a year, and I've heard rumours that it would.

Is it possible to know what steps can be taken quite easily in a month, in six months or in a year to get a clear picture of the situation, even if it might take a year or two before the regulations are in place?

Mr. Carsten Quell: Yes, it's entirely possible.

We've started the process of drafting regulations. We're familiar with the steps. Right now, we're at the pre-consultation stage with stakeholders, particularly with official language minority communities and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The next step will be tabling draft regulations in Parliament, which will be studied by your committee.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Is it possible to get a schematic that will explain that?

Mr. Carsten Quell: We can certainly send you more information.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay, great.

I know your office is working closely with Canadian Heritage on the transition of responsibilities. How far have you gotten since Bill C-13 was passed last June?

Mr. Carsten Quell: I can give you an example.

Bill C-13 provides that Treasury Board is responsible for governance. Starting in the coming fiscal year, the Treasury Board Secretariat will be responsible for, among other things, the high-level Committee of Assistant Deputy Ministers on Official Languages. We'll take that over from Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Quell, I appreciate your answers. I'm not trying to attack you; I just want Canadians to see what progress has been made on Bill C-13.

Again, could we get some kind of chart that explains where we are in the transition and how long it'll take to get there?

Mr. Carsten Quell: We can certainly send you information about governance and the transition of responsibilities from Canadian Heritage to Treasury Board.

• (0945)

Mr. Darrell Samson: I gather that progress has been made on the accountability framework and official languages reports. Can you update us on that as well?

Mr. Carsten Quell: We can also provide you with information on the accountability framework, although it's still in development.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm concerned because Canadians are wondering when the new powers with respect to official languages will come into effect. When will the commissioner receive his powers?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson. That's an excellent question, but your time is already up.

I'll give the floor to the Bloc Québécois.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Ms. Flowers Code, just recently, a Bloc Québécois member from Montreal was unable to obtain service in French from a security officer. He was told to get lost. He said that,

had he not been a member of Parliament, he would likely have had a lot of problems. I also got a call from a math prof, who told me that, when he demanded to be served in French at customs, he was told to back down. When he pressed the issue, he was put in jail and missed his trip.

There are obviously problems here. These incidents happened in Montreal. You said earlier that you had trouble finding people who spoke French in remote areas, but Montreal is in Quebec, and it's not a remote region. Could you comment on that situation?

[English]

Ms. Holly Flowers Code: I'm very sorry to hear that we didn't meet the standard for Canadians and, in particular, for this traveller.

I'm happy to take the details back. We are committed, and we do have a scheduling system to ensure that we have bilingual capacity at all our bilingual ports of entry, but from time to time, border service officers have family emergencies or are sick. We do have backups. We do have phone services when the bilingual capacity cannot be provided at that time. However, we are committed, and I'm happy to take that away and to look at that situation.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Well, I'm glad you're going to look into it, because it doesn't seem to be an unusual occurrence. Security officers verge on contemptuous when people ask for service in French; they don't want to provide it. I've even taken part in protests against the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada because a lawyer was prohibited from pleading a case in French at his client's request. People spoke out against that so many times that he was finally given the right to plead in French, although he was denied documents in French. Eventually those documents were provided. I believe the Canada Border Services Agency submitted an evidence document in English, then withdrew that document upon realizing it had to be bilingual.

This all indicates there are problems in Montreal too. We've been told the Canada Border Services Agency has been heavily criticized. I don't know if you've already heard this, but there are serious problems in Montreal.

[English]

Ms. Holly Flowers Code: I'm certainly happy to take certain specific situations back and take a look at them. That should not be the case. We have bilingual capacity at all of our bilingual ports of service. We have supervisors and we have backup.

It doesn't seem that this individual got the service they should have, and that should be corrected.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Just look into it. We had an immigration lawyer here who's been working in the field for 30 years. He said things are steadily getting worse, not better. We'll see what happens next, but it doesn't look like things are improving. I hope that you'll pass the message along and that steps will be taken to address this.

Moving to another topic, Ms. Hamoui, lately, we've been seeing fewer francophone appointments to key government positions than in past years. Why do you think that is?

• (0950)

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: As I said before, the data we collect vary from month to month and from year to year, every time we make appointments. For context, the Governor in Council is responsible for filling some 2,200 positions. We make about 500 to 800 appointments a year. Every time we make an appointment, that changes the data. Currently, 23% of GIC appointees report French as their first official language, and it's 31% for public service executives. So again, we look at the data, we provide advice to decision-makers, and we make sure there are no downward trends. However, I think it would be impossible to say exactly why.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I understand. You're public servants and you can't criticize or take a political position. The fact remains that all stakeholders who aren't in your position seem to be saying that we aren't headed in the right direction.

For example, you said that people have to be bilingual before they're appointed, although I don't remember which positions that was for. However, earlier, in response to my colleague's question, you said that, no, people don't have to be bilingual before they're appointed. We see it all the time. People who aren't bilingual, who don't know French before being appointed—

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: —and who get training that just doesn't cut it.

Anyway, I'm out of time.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: Could I just clarify something?

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: There are different positions with different criteria. Some appointees must be bilingual at the time of their appointment. For others, it's not essential, but it's certainly preferable.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

The next round of questions goes to the NDP for six minutes.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Quell and Mr. Adam, I have a question about various departments' responsibilities. What's the difference between the Treasury Board Secretariat's Centre of Excellence and the Department of Canadian Heritage's Centre for Strengthening Part VII, which was announced in the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-28? Will this have an impact on future appointments?

Mr. Carsten Quell: I'll start with the last part of the question. No, it will not affect future appointments.

As to the difference between the two centres, I should clarify that Treasury Board is responsible for federal institutions. We're primarily responsible for making sure that the public service runs smoothly. For its part, Canadian Heritage's Centre for Strengthening Part VII focuses mainly on supporting, mobilizing and informing minority communities. Canadian Heritage is also responsible for dealing with the provinces and territories. Basically, that centre has a more external orientation, whereas the centre I head at Treasury Board has a more internal function vis-à-vis the public service.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Having clarified the distinction, do you think it will have an impact on future appointments?

Mr. Carsten Quell: I don't think so. The Official Languages Centre of Excellence, which reports to the Treasury Board Secretariat, is responsible for the application of part V of the Official Languages Act, which covers language of work. We ensure that public servants' right to be supervised in the language of their choice is respected. Our functions include overseeing appointments, which are within the purview of the Public Service Commission of Canada, but we certainly monitor compliance.

Mr. Karim Adam (Director, Oversight and Compliance, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Treasury Board Secretariat): I'd like to clarify something.

Canadian Heritage's centre for strengthening deals with part VII of the act, which has to do with external stakeholders.

At our end, it also has to do with regulations related to part VII of the act, which my colleague, Mr. Quell, talked about.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Very good.

In its negotiations with Treasury Board, the Public Service Alliance of Canada is asking for a review of the bilingualism bonus directive. Specifically, it's asking the employer to raise the bonus from \$800 to \$3,000. Nowadays, with the cost of living climbing, \$800 is a drop in the bucket for people going through increasingly tough times.

In your opinion, Mr. Quell, would a review encourage more bilingual workers to join the public service and incentivize public servants to master both official languages? Given that the amount of the bonus has remained unchanged since 1977, do you believe that raising it will help create a more bilingual, dynamic and diversified public service?

• (0955)

Mr. Carsten Quell: If I may, I'd like to provide a bit of context about the bilingualism bonus.

The bonus was introduced in 1977 as a temporary incentive to encourage employees to become bilingual. That was a very different time.

The bilingualism bonus directive is currently hosted by the National Joint Council, where both employers and unions are represented. The employer and the unions have agreed to examine the bilingual bonus during the cyclical review, which will take place in April.

That said, the appropriateness of the bonus has been questioned in the past. You heard what Professor Geneviève Tellier had to say about it.

In 2002, Dyane Adam, who was the Commissioner of Official Languages at the time, indicated that the government should “[c]onsider knowledge of English and French a basic skill, like other required skills for positions.” She actually recommended eliminating the bilingualism bonus.

In May 2005, this very committee recommended that Treasury Board “eliminate the bilingualism bonus and that the knowledge of the two official languages be considered a professional skill that is reflected in the salaries of federal employees.”

That's some background on the bilingualism bonus.

That said, we'll be discussing the future of the bonus with the bargaining agents in April.

Ms. Niki Ashton: We hope to see a change along the lines of what PSAC is recommending. It's been almost 20 years since 2005. We all know there's been an obvious decline in French in Canada in recent years. Across the country, we're facing major challenges when it comes to retaining French.

I hope that, when the time comes to review this issue, people will consider this context and all the work that was done on the bill to modernize and strengthen the Official Languages Act. I hope those factors will serve as arguments in favour of increasing the bilingualism bonus.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton. Your six minutes are up.

Mrs. Kusie, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I myself am a product of language training in the public service. I came to Ottawa in 2003 as a young woman from Alberta and took 15 months of language training at the Bisson Building. It was a nightmare. I believe the government had a contract with the École de langues La Cité to provide that training at the time.

Mr. Quell, I'd like to ask you a few questions about language training.

Federal departments and agencies contract out language training instead of creating a training program within the government. Do you think that has led to greater costs for lesser service?

Mr. Carsten Quell: I would say that departments approach language training differently. Some departments, such as Employment and Social Development Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Health Canada and even the Canada Border Services Agency, employ public servants as language teachers because they found it more cost-effective to have what amounts to a language school within their own department.

Obviously, not all departments are big enough for that. Public Services and Procurement Canada has therefore established standing offers so departments can choose pre-qualified language schools.

Departments use one of those two models to provide good language training to their employees.

• (1000)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What's being done to ensure that language training meets the same quality standards across the federal public service?

Mr. Carsten Quell: Public Services and Procurement Canada's standing offers, which I just mentioned, include criteria governing not only the cost, but also the quality of the training provided. Suppliers are evaluated to ensure that the training is of good quality.

For schools within a department, it's the department's responsibility to ensure its employees provide quality training.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I received a question from my colleague. I'll read it to you.

Can people whose positions are subject to subsection 34(2) of the Official Languages Act avail themselves of the Public Service Official Languages Exclusion Approval Order, in addition to the deferment provided for in subsection 34(2) of the Official Languages Act?

For example, I received a bilingualism bonus for reaching the CCC level. It took me 15 months to do it, but I did it.

How long does it normally take someone to obtain the required language level for a position? How is that determined? For example, is it acceptable to take 10 years to obtain the required language level for a position?

Mr. Carsten Quell: I'd like to mention that this is the responsibility of the Public Service Commission of Canada. It's under its authority that an exemption is granted regarding language requirements.

Positions for which language requirements do not need to be met are positions that are staffed on a non-imperative basis. I'd have to check to see what the number is, but I can tell you that they represent 1% to 2% of appointments. In that case, an employee is given two years to learn the second language. During that time, the department must ensure that employees' rights are respected. So we make sure that a colleague takes on the supervisory duties of the employee who has to learn the second language.

I'd add that it's sometimes a matter of moving an employee from the BBB level to a higher level, such as the CBC level. That doesn't mean that people aren't at all bilingual. It's more that they don't necessarily meet the language requirements at the higher level.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Quell.

Thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

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

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses once again for being here to help us improve the situation.

First of all, given the comments we've received, I hope there will be better standardization in terms of training. From what we're hearing, training is the responsibility of each of the departments and it isn't working. I hope we can find a way to improve the situation.

Furthermore, my young colleague Mr. Drouin mentioned earlier that young people of his generation were waiting 10 months or more before being hired to fill vacant positions. That's unacceptable. There are young people who go elsewhere and find a job in the private sector fairly quickly. We lose a lot of young bilingual people who go elsewhere because the public service takes too long. I hope you'll improve that aspect.

I would like to come back to what Mrs. Kusie said earlier about section 34 of the Official Languages Act.

I'd also like to thank Mr. Quell and Mr. Adam for spending months and months with us as we study Bill C-13. I know it was very enlightening for them. They've been a great source of inspiration for us.

For the benefit of Canadians who are listening to us now, I'd like you to give us some clarification. I want to go back to our study on senior officials and Governor in Council appointments.

Mr. Quell, you mentioned a statistic of 95%. I think you mentioned it as well, Mrs. Hamoui.

In addition to deputy ministers, there are assistant deputy ministers, associate deputy ministers, directors and managers. So there are four levels of positions.

Does Bill C-13 apply to those four levels? What improvements could be made to those four groups of managers who provide immediate supervision of employees?

• (1005)

Mr. Carsten Quell: I'll start, and then I'll turn it over to my colleague.

I understand that it's complex, but I'll try to sort it all out.

When we talk about deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers, these are people who are appointed by the Governor in Council. They fall under Mrs. Hamoui's purview, so I won't go into that.

As for assistant deputy minister positions, they aren't Governor in Council appointments. These positions are governed by Treasury Board policies. Those are the positions I was referring to, for example, when I indicated that there was a rule that a higher language profile was required, and that it was imperative. In other words, this level must be attained at the time of appointment to these positions.

Then there are executive positions, that is, management positions, which are EX-level positions.

Below that are managers.

However, for all these positions I just named, according to section 91 of the Official Languages Act, the requirements of the position must be objectively assessed to determine whether the position is designated bilingual and what the level of bilingualism should be. Once appointed, people must comply with the requirements of the position.

If you wish, I'll invite my colleague to answer the question about deputy minister positions.

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: The system is different for deputy ministers and associate deputy ministers. The positions don't have a linguistic profile. They are Governor in Council appointees, and their condition of employment is to personally ensure the use of both official languages in their organization.

Now, under the changes made to the act, people who are appointed to these positions must take the necessary training so that they themselves are able to speak and understand both official languages. They can undergo training to achieve this.

I can say that the vast majority of deputy ministers are bilingual. I would say that 88% to 90% of them are. It's commensurate with the number of people promoted from within the public service. People who come from outside the public service also have an obligation to ensure that they use both official languages and take the necessary training.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

My colleague Mr. Samson absolutely wants to ask one last question.

The Chair: You have less than 30 seconds.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Adam, I don't want you to have come here without having had an opportunity to speak. I love your title: you're the director of oversight and compliance at the Official Languages Centre of Excellence.

Can you tell me in 10 or 15 seconds how your role will change, now that Bill C-13 has been passed, compared to last year? You can give me the broad strokes.

The Chair: That's an excellent question, Mr. Samson, but your time is up.

However, I will let you answer, Mr. Adam.

Mr. Karim Adam: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll answer quickly.

This is a new role for Treasury Board. Its powers have been strengthened and expanded. It plays an enhanced oversight role for all 200 federal institutions. They've already started to take on that responsibility.

I'd also like to point out that, in addition to the new responsibilities I'm referring to, you'll see changes in oversight in the annual report that we will table in Parliament.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. That's a very good answer.

Is it possible to send the committee a report explaining that?

The Chair: Yes, I'll take care of that, Mr. Samson. Your time is up. Thank you.

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

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

First of all, we know that the entire official languages policy is based on the concept of institutional bilingualism, meaning the possibility for people to use the language of their choice.

What happens if there's a francophone worker and an anglophone worker, and one wants to work in English and the other in French?

• (1010)

Mr. Carsten Quell: The short answer is that managers have to be bilingual.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're not answering my question.

What happens if a manager wants to work in French, and the employee wants to work in English?

Mr. Carsten Quell: This situation arises in communications between different regions. At some point, the bilingualism of the people in question must be called upon.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The Public Service Alliance of Canada tells us that there's systemic discrimination in the federal public service and that it's always assumed that everything happens in English, even in Quebec. I think the problem lies in the model that favours one language over another. For example, Hockey Canada prohibits players from speaking French because the organization believes that, in emergency situations, only one language should be used. It's the same at all levels. In fact, everything is done in English, unless there are places where French is really the language of use. So that model doesn't work.

Mr. Carsten Quell: I can provide information based on the policies that are in place.

For example, in federal institutions located in the province of Quebec, with the exception of designated bilingual regions, in other words, the Eastern Townships and Montreal, the language of work is French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: How is it that officials are saying the opposite, that is, that federal institutions in Quebec function very much in English, for example at meetings?

There's something really wrong here. I think it's the very principle of the Official Languages Act that isn't working. We can see that French is in constant decline. That's what the study of language planning models tells us. When a model is based on institutional bilingualism, it's always the majority language that dominates and ends up assimilating the minority languages.

Mr. Carsten Quell: I could give you the results of the 2022 public service employee survey—

The Chair: Mr. Quell, I'm going to have to interrupt you, since your time is up. I'll come back to that later, though.

I want to let you know that we have to leave the meeting room at 10:15 a.m. because another committee will be holding a meeting in here.

I'll give Ms. Ashton the opportunity to speak for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

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

My first question is for Mrs. Hamoui or Ms. Jones.

Section 34 of the new Official Languages Act states the following:

A person appointed by the Governor in Council to the position of deputy minister or associate deputy minister or a position of an equivalent rank in a department named in Schedule I...shall, on their appointment, take the language training that is necessary to be able to speak and understand clearly both official languages.

How do you plan to guarantee that this will happen?

How many deputy ministers in office today are bilingual?

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: First, the Clerk of the Privy Council has instructed all current deputy ministers to comply with the changes to the act. If they don't fully understand both languages, they will be required to undergo training. He also asked them to report on it annually in their performance appraisal. This process will begin next year.

Deputy ministers can go to their department or their organization to get an assessment of whether they need training. If they do, they must take it and report on it annually.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Can you tell me how many of the current deputy ministers are bilingual?

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: Currently, 88% of deputy ministers identify as people who are at least functionally bilingual.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Is there a way for citizens to check whether deputy ministers speak French, or to verify other information about the rate of bilingualism?

Mrs. Rima Hamoui: We can obviously tell you what the rate of bilingualism is. However, information specific to an individual is personal in nature. The bilingualism rate isn't a publicly available figure, but we can certainly provide it to you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My last question is for Mr. Quell or Mr. Adam.

The report of the Commissioner of Official Languages mentions that you're setting up a new language training program for public service employees, in collaboration with the office of the commissioner.

Could you tell us where you're at with this project and what innovative elements of this program will effectively ensure bilingualism in the public service?

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton. I'm sorry, but I'm running out of time. We really have to end the meeting, because another committee is going to be meeting in this room.

Before we conclude, I'd like to make one thing clear to the witnesses. You were asked relevant questions, but we unfortunately ran out of time for some of the answers. I have the difficult task of

having to respect the time we have. I'm thinking in particular of questions from Mr. Samson, Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Ashton. As chair, I would really appreciate it if you could send the clerk of the committee any answers or parts of answers you didn't have time to give us by the end of the month. That will give you plenty of time. The clerk can then send these answers to the committee members.

As for me, Mrs. Hamoui, as chair, I'd like to know, for the benefit of the committee, what functional bilingualism means. Is it a technical definition? If so, what is this technical definition? Also, how does the test for being recognized as functionally bilingual differ? Is the test different depending on whether the person's first language is English or French?

That said, I'd like to thank the witnesses very much for being here. I'm sorry for the lack of time.

In closing, colleagues, I would like to remind you that when we return on April 8, we'll resume the meeting time we lost due to votes this week. So in the first hour of the April 8 meeting, we'll finish this study. Then, in the second hour, we can give our drafting instructions to the analyst.

I wish you a good parliamentary break. I know we're all going to work hard in our ridings.

The meeting is adjourned.

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