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Chair

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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• (0900)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the meeting on this beautiful day that is bringing us a few snowflakes.

We are meeting today to discuss the government's response to our report on bilingualism. As you will recall, we devoted several weeks to the report. We spent a long time working on it before going on to Bill S-3. We covered almost every aspect of the topic.

Before moving on to the report as such, I have an announcement that may come as a surprise to you, but we will not be travelling next week. However, there is some good news: we will be going to our ridings in two weeks. So it is not so bad: we will travel one way or another.

Our committee will therefore not travel.

Here is the schedule for the next few weeks, well, what is left. Next Thursday, our meeting will be televised, since the Commissioner of Official Languages will be appearing on the estimates. That is very important. She will make a presentation, and the committee must scrutinize that and discuss it with her. The subject of our meeting on Tuesday, the 22nd, has not yet been confirmed. Originally, that was to be the week of our trip. Following that, we will be hearing from representatives from Foreign Affairs as part of our study on linguistic duality in embassies.

November 29, which may be our last day here, we will be hearing from the Honourable Mauril Bélanger and talking about accountability and reporting. That meeting will also be televised since we will be hearing from a minister.

Should I go beyond the 29th of November? That is not necessary; we will stop here.

We can go to the only point on the agenda: analyzing the government's response to the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages during the 1st session of the 38th Parliament.

The first report that I tabled dealt essentially with advertising and communication in official language minority media. The second report deals with what is being done, the way in which official languages are being used in the public service.

Mr. Clerk, I do not think that there is a specific way of presiding over this. It is an open discussion on all of the reports is it not?

If people want to comment on one point over another, they do so. Everyone obviously read the report last night, after the Conservative caucus.

If I am not mistaken, your caucus dealt with that.

So I am opening up the discussion. Members may speak to any point; there are no constraints.

Ms. Brunelle, you have the floor.

• (0905)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): I will start by saying that four or five recommendations gave me some food for thought.

Let's talk about the first recommendation. We wanted to know what importance the government attached to the idea of creating and maintaining a workplace conducive to the effective use of both official languages. The government does consider that important. The government even tells us that it is taking the necessary steps to provide training. However, we can see, namely on page 2, that these courses are being updated: [...] to take into account the new policies and the message that official languages are rooted in the core values of the public service.

I think that it is important to have core values and for us, as parliamentarians, to constantly send out a clear message on the importance of being able to offer services in both official languages, that it must be true that these values are rooted in the public service, and that must be done over a long period of time.

I was wondering if we had any information on the obligation of results for the government in light of the courses given to public servants.

An article in *Le Devoir* yesterday said that the federal government is spending more than \$120 million per year to help public servants learn French. I have nothing against the fact that \$120 million has been earmarked for that. The amount may well be too low. However, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Ms. Adam, wrote in her last report that no progress was being made on the quality of bilingual services being offered to the public. That led me to ask the following question: what is the obligation of results? How do we evaluate the amounts spent based on the results obtained?

According to the report, Ms. Adam says that 80 per cent of Canadians want to receive services in their official language. The needs of the population are real. Are we able to respond to that? How are these courses provided?

The response did not really satisfy me.

The Chair: I find it interesting that you mention the \$120 million, because we sent a letter on April 4th last, asking how much had been invested. We were told that they did not have the figures. It is in your report. I find it interesting that we learn today, through the media, that it was \$120 million.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: The story said that the government recognizes the lack of efficiency in its system. One has to wonder what could be done to make it effective.

The Chair: We will take note of that. A series of letters could be sent following today's meeting with the intention of getting clarification on some elements, or to put more emphasis on one point or another.

Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): You were thinking, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes, I was thinking of you.

Mr. Marc Godbout: That is good, those are happy thoughts.

Can we deal with any part of the report?

● (0910)

The Chair: Yes, of course. As I was explaining earlier on, and the clerk has confirmed this for me, there is no specific way in which to chair this. We are not necessarily going point by point, nor are we working clause by clause either. It is according to the subject of interest.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I would like to deal with recommendations 7 and 8.

The Chair: What pages are those on, in French and in English?

Mr. Marc Godbout: In French, they are on pages 8 and 10.

Recommendation 7 asked that the data on language training services be provided, and recommendation number 8 asked that all federal departments and agencies earmark specific funds for language training. The response to recommendation 7 said:

The Agency and the Treasury Board Secretariat agree that it would be desirable to have [...] data [...]

However, there does not seem to be any process for gathering data or at least for coordinating it.

In response to recommendation 8 on dedicated funds—it was very important to us that people have access to funds for training—we are told that it is the responsibility of deputy heads and that this is done on an individual basis. There seems to be a problem with consistency. If this indeed comes under Treasury Board, which is a central agency, it could ensure the accountability framework at that level. The other central agency is the Privy Council. May I point out, Mr. Chairman, that unless we are talking about one of the central agencies, like the Public Service Commission—but I do not think this is its role—we do not have access to central data.

This is the problem Ms. Brunelle alluded to. Whether it concerns the amounts spent, the number of persons involved in training or the number of training programs, it seems that decisions are made on an individual basis. It seems to me that we must organize all of this information, in order to be able to follow the progress or lack of progress on this file. I'm not exactly sure what our questions might be, but we must know if there is already a plan. That would allow us to consider language training within the framework of the action plan. For the moment, this overview seems to be lacking.

The Chair: I hope you do not expect me to answer each of your questions.

Mr. Marc Godbout: No, but the question must be asked.

The Chair: It is being asked, Mr. Godbout.

Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Recommendations 3 and 4 especially have caught my eye, in particular. In recommendation 3, the committee was concerned about negative repercussions on service to the public in the official language of the client's choice and on the language of work of federal employees. In recommendation 4, the committee was interested in guaranteeing the right of federal employees to work in the official language of their choice.

This brought back to my mind the case of the move to Vancouver of the Canadian Tourism Commission. Ms. Adam discussed it when she appeared before the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology on April 11, 2005. She was very worried about what would happen with the right of the commission employees to work in the official language of their choice. She reminded the committee that the Vancouver area is not designated bilingual for the purposes of the language of work.

She made two suggestions that the committee took up: passing an order to exclude such employees or adopting a set of regulations. This, however, is not part of the government's response. Reference is made only to a temporary measure covering all cases.

Maybe the committee could follow up the situation to see how it turns out. A temporary measure was taken but there is no order or regulation. In all likelihood employees who are transferred to Vancouver will be working in English with definite impact on service to the public. Especially in the case of tourism, a clear signal must be sent: in Canada, things are also done in French and there are people able to serve the public in that language.

In her remarks, Ms. Adam said also that as is the case in many official language matters, the willingness of parliamentarians and senior public servants to act makes all the difference. I think this is also true for all the recommendations and government responses. It would be interesting for the committee to monitor the situation.

● (0915)

The Chair: Quite so. You made a very good point. An increasing number of agencies will likely move outside the capital. Those that are already here will not relocate their head office, but among the new ones, a number will certainly locate outside the capital region. They must be able to operate in both languages.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, Ms. Brunelle, that is a very good point. I think there should be an order-in-council whenever an agency relocates its head office from a designated bilingual area to a unilingual area. That's one way of doing it.

In my view, the minister strives to go further. Whether or not they are located in an area that is designated bilingual, all head offices should operate in both official languages. I think this is what we are aiming for.

I agree that we should monitor the issue closely. I think we are moving towards something that would go further than an order-in-council.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Are regulations being considered, in your view?

Hon. Raymond Simard: Yes, but the situation has to be monitored.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you are suspiciously quiet today.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): What would replace the bilingualism bonus mentioned in recommendation 14?

The Chair: Recommendation 14, Mr. Lauzon?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes. Recommendation 14 says, and I quote:

The Committee recommends 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.

[English]

How are we going to reflect that competence in salary? With levels in the public service.... Let's say it's a PM-06. If you have a university education and you have three degrees or one degree, you get the same pay.

[Translation]

The Chair: That is a good question. Actually, Mr. Côté could provide an answer since it was Mr. Bergeron who raised it.

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): I am giving it some thought.

The Chair: We need to know more. I agree with you. Unless I am mistaken, the public service was very reluctant.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Chair, if I'm not mistaken, there was resistance from the unions. The other witnesses told us that this was obsolete, that it belonged to the past. The amount is still the same, I think.

The committee has made this recommendation before. If the unions are not involved and cannot find a solution, it won't happen. I don't know if we should insist and call them before the committee. It will be very difficult if the unions are not involved.

The Chair: Mr. Ménard.

Mr. Marion Ménard (Committee Researcher): I will provide a summary of what has been said.

The Public Service Alliance position on the bilingualism bonus is that it should be adjusted to the current cost of living because it still sits at \$800 or \$815. Of course, both the Alliance and the Professional Institute of the Public Service are against abolishing it.

In her previous annual reports, the Commissioner of Official Languages, as far as I know, was in favour of scrapping the bilingualism bonus. In other words, being bilingual would be a skill required to hold a position like any other skill.

● (0920)

Hon. Raymond Simard: I would like to make a comment that may have a connection with recommendation 2. We have noticed that French is rarely spoken at government meetings, in the National Capital Region or outside. Some witnesses told us that they work in French only 5 to 10 per cent of the time. This really surprised us.

I checked how things were done in my province of Manitoba. Under a new initiative, meetings are conducted in both official languages. It's very effective. This is done only in Manitoba, I think; I will check, though.

It seems however that the cost of translation is a problem. Meetings are not always scheduled two days ahead. So that is a problem. Maybe the committee could look at that issue someday. Whatever the case, the cost of translation and the availability of people to attend meetings seem to be the two big impediments. In Ottawa, this is not a problem, but in Manitoba or in western Canada, it could be.

The Chair: Ms. Brunelle.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I would like to ask Mr. Simard or anyone else who is in such an area a question about recommendation 11. The committee was recommending that federal institutions and organizations broaden the geographical area of selection for candidates. The response to that recommendation was that the PSC was committed to, and is working towards, expanding areas of selection to enhance access to federal public service employment opportunities.

I would like to know if you are satisfied with that response. The issue is allowing francophone employees to work in their language and to have better access to public service opportunities, because we know that francophones are more easily bilingual. How do they see this response? How will we know if the results are achieved? I certainly support making increased efforts in order to facilitate access, but I'm wondering how we can verify if the results are achieved and if there are a greater number of francophones in the public service.

This problem is also connected to the issue of non-imperative staffing. I hired many employees in my past life. It is possible, for example, to establish a new profile for a position and decide that an undergraduate degree is a minimum requirement. Why do we not decide that being bilingual is mandatory? If that were the case, bilingualism would always be imperative. That would certainly allow us to guarantee enhanced access to public service positions to francophones outside of Quebec.

It seems to me that it really would be simpler to put an end to non-imperative staffing. I know that this involves many issues in terms of collective agreements, among others. I am not naive.

I'm wondering what the committee can do to improve this situation.

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours, Mister Love, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, you were considering giving me the floor. Thank you for that.

I come back to recommendation 11. In my opinion, it is important that we see some progress. Take the example of New Brunswick. There are a certain number of jobs available in Moncton and the surrounding area. There is a population pool elsewhere in the province that is able to work in both languages, but these people do not have access to these positions, because they are completely outside of the area.

I read the response and I feel that it represents a step in the right direction. In fact, a greater percentage of the population is being offered the opportunity to have access to these jobs. These people have the training and the ability to speak both official languages. Moreover, it is an issue of respect towards this population: it must have access to these jobs.

It is still, to a certain degree, unacceptable that someone would have to move to a given region in order to be able to submit an application. At least this gives people better access to public service jobs, whereas currently they do not have access unless they move.

• (0925)

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

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I agree with what Mr. D'Amours has said, and I would go even further. I think we should eliminate the geographic areas of selection. The time has come to make that recommendation. In fact, there is not only Moncton and Edmunston, or Moncton and Caraquet.

I will give you an example. At home, in Moncton, we saw that there was a position available in Sackville, or in Memramcook. The area boundary was at Pokemouche. An employee, working in the area of Pokemouche, was living just across the way in an area called Blanchard Settlement. He only lived a few houses away, but he was not able to apply for the position.

And there is worse. One person had built a house in Moncton. Because they had not yet moved in—they were to move in a month's time—the person was not able to apply for the job. It is as ridiculous as that.

I would go further. As far as the capital, Ottawa, is concerned, there is no reason why any Canadian should not be able to apply for a position within the federal capital.

The Chair: I thought that had changed.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No.

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

Mr. Marc Godbout: That is the plan that was announced yesterday by the president of the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marc Godbout: It had already been decided.

The Chair: That was a few weeks ago.

Mr. Marc Godbout: It will apply until 2007. Then, there will no longer be any restrictions.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They didn't make very much noise about it. I apologize, I didn't know.

The Chair: It was announced in English.

Mr. Yvon Godin: For example, if the jobs were concentrated in Moncton, then why could people not work there? That is not what I am advocating. I think that, if federal jobs are to be transferred, then they should go to rural areas where the unemployment rate is the highest, in order to help those regions. Instead of moving people from the rural areas towards large urban centres, we should provide greater employment in the regions where these people live.

Moreover, these jobs should be open to everyone. In my opinion, the area of selection should be completely abolished. A person who works for the federal government is paid with taxpayers' money. That person should not have to borrow a friend's address or make one up if he has no intention of moving. It encourages cheating. That is all it does. And people miss out on job opportunities.

I think we should simply do away with the area of selection.

The Chair: For what it's worth, I agree with you.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, on page 16 of the response, in the middle of the second paragraph, it says:

[...] a short-term strategy [...] ([...] providing access to federal job opportunities to qualified Canadians across Canada). The PSC is examining ways to increase the use of a national area of selection, focusing first on all officer-level positions open to the public in the National Capital Region.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It doesn't say that they will do away with the area, but rather that they will be making greater use of it.

The Chair: I will ask our researcher to find the information. I seem to remember hearing, a few weeks ago, that there would be a gradual phasing out. It will not be cancelled immediately, but, according to Mr. Godbout, by 2007, at least for the National Capital Region.

As to the other regions, I still agree with you.

• (0930)

Mr. Yvon Godin: If it says that there will be a gradual phasing out, ending in 2007, then it has not yet been done.

The Chair: The decision has been made.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but it has not yet been implemented. They will have until 2007 to do it.

The Chair: We will find that out. Instead of discussing it now, Mr. Ménard will provide the answers at our next meeting.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: To answer Ms. Brunelle's question, while adding to what Mr. Godin has just said, I don't think anyone would be surprised to hear that most of the good federal government jobs are located in the National Capital Region.

For example, we had some highly qualified people, but they could not apply because they lived in Winnipeg. That is totally unacceptable. There has been pressure in recent years to completely abolish this restriction. There is no reason why a qualified person from New Brunswick or Manitoba could not apply for a job here in Ottawa.

The government did react. I am not sure, but I believe Marc is right. In 2007, the restrictions will be completely phased out. Anyone, from anywhere in this country, will be able to apply. It made no sense. People came here to see me, and as Yvon said, they were trying to find a temporary address so that they could qualify for a position.

The Chair: Isn't that situation a little odd? Does it comply with the Charter? Can a person be subject to discrimination based on his place of residence?

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's a good question.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I would be surprised if it is allowed, because even municipalities are prohibited from discriminating. They cannot force their municipal employees to live within the municipality. I don't see why the federal government would be allowed to do that.

The Chair: We will do a little more research. The next committee will look into that.

Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Mr. Poilievre and I learned something else yesterday: two-thirds of the federal government jobs are located outside the National Capital Region.

The Chair: Two-thirds of federal jobs are outside? Who told you that yesterday?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): The president of the Public Service Commission said it.

The Chair: That is a lot of jobs.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We must not forget that Ottawa only has a population of 700,000.

The Chair: It is 785,000.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In any case, there are 30 million Canadians.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Ottawa is the capital.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Parliament is in Ottawa.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: And the capital is too.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The House of Commons is in Ottawa, but that does not mean Canada does not include the rest of the country.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Just for your information, Canada is one of the most decentralized countries in the G-7.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: May I make a general comment?

The Chair: Yes. As I was saying to the clerk, there is no hard and fast rule when chairing this meeting. It is not a clause-by-clause review. We open up the debate and deal with each section as it comes up.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I would like to point out that the report deals with the problem that I have been raising since we began our work, namely, the failure rate for anglophones taking French exams. I am happy to see that we have asked the Public Service Commission

to take a look at this problem which is of great concern to me as a member from the National Capital Region.

So I would like to start by thanking the chairman for having included this issue in the report.

● (0935)

[English]

Again, I think it's very important that the committee recognizes that the pass rate of 33% in 2003-04 is a black mark on our official language policy. I think it's very important that this report keeps recommendation nine and calls on the Public Service Commission to identify the precise reasons for this high failure rate and offer some solutions.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godbout, you have the floor.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I would like to deal with recommendation 12, on page 17, which covers the exclusion order, as well as imperative and non-imperative staffing. Our request was quite clear. We asked the Public Service Commission to report on how this policy is applied. Ms. Brunelle made a reference to that earlier.

It says that the Public Service Commission is an independent organization. We already knew that. However, Parliament has requested these statistics. The PSC is independent in that it reports directly to Parliament. However, unless I missed it in the response, we were not told whether or not these figures would be forthcoming, or if we would be given some justification for imperative and non-imperative staffing policies.

The Chair: Is the answer not in the last sentence? "The analysis of the data will be included in the PSC's annual report." No, we have not received an answer, but it will be included in their report. That's what I have noted.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I don't think that the first paragraph is clear, because it says that they have approved a "monitoring plan". I concluded that it would report on this issue. However, it doesn't necessarily say that there will be...

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I have a question. Where was this report tabled? Is there any expectation of a result? There is even some talk about an action plan. If our results don't meet the mark, it might be a good idea to decide how we will go about correcting that. Will we have access to this data? How will it work?

Mr. Marc Godbout: If the data referred to what we were requesting on the use of the PSOLEAO, then, personally, I think that the answer is not clear. Am I mistaken, Mr. Simard?

Hon. Raymond Simard: No, not at all.

The Chair: Can we try to find more information, Mr. Ménard?

Hon. Raymond Simard: Wouldn't the commissioner usually make some comments on this? Perhaps our committee is not authorized to examine that?

The Chair: I would have thought so. We are certainly entitled to ask, but...

Hon. Raymond Simard: The commissioner usually provides her comments or makes a specific report to the Public Service Commission. So we do have authorization. We invite her to appear and we are entitled to ask her questions.

Mr. Marion Ménard: Her comments on the public service are included in her annual report.

• (0940)

Mr. Marc Godbout: Mr. Chairman, what we are looking for are statistics that tell us if the non-imperative positions are related to an exclusion order or if they are becoming commonplace. I would like comparative figures for a number of departments covering a number of years.

The Chair: The commissioner will be here, the day after tomorrow, to talk about appropriation. I don't know if it is usually done, but could we not take advantage of her appearance here to ask her a few questions? Last time, we had not decided if we were going to ask her to come back to finish answering our questions on the report. We could set aside a few minutes to ask for clarification.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Mr. Chairman, the commissioner does not have that information; you would have to ask the president of the Public Service Commission. It would then be up to the commissioner to respond. I am somewhat hesitant at this point.

The Chair: That is the rule, and that's how it must be done.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I believe that the president of the Public Service Commission reports on what is requested of her by the House of Commons.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: It is the Public Service Commission that establishes the hiring rules and staffing procedures. As Mr. Godbout said, if it becomes the rule, then it will no longer be necessary to be bilingual. One might become bilingual someday, but it will not be imperative. That is a problem that we can relate to the commissioner's annual report. We could discuss it with her this week, but when we see the information about the regions, and when it is obvious that the service is not up to par, then we can conclude that the active offer level in the regions is very low. It is 55 per cent. If we take all of the departments, this means that few services are provided in French. There are not many employees who are capable of speaking and providing services in French. That is what all of this means.

The Chair: Indeed.

Can we tell the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages that we might be asking the commissioner a few questions about her report?

Mr. Marc Godbout: On the PSOLEAO?

The Chair: On the report, and more particularly on the PSOLEAO.

Mr. Marion Ménard: Of course.

The Chair: We will do this officially. I believe she will be informed today.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Could we ask the same question of the president of the Public Service Commission?

The Chair: Is that the wish of the committee? I think we should wait until we hear from the commissioner. She may tell us that we should do something in particular, that one thing might be available

and something else might not. We will only have to wait two days, since she will be here the day after tomorrow. Then we can send a letter on the same day.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Mr. Chairman, what I am not happy about is the fact that the commissioner is not responsible for this—the president of the Public Service Commission is. I don't know why we wouldn't deal directly with the person who is accountable.

The Chair: We'll have to anyway. I'm simply suggesting that we ask the commissioner to shed some light on this. She may have suggestions for obtaining more information. If you think there is no point in waiting, then we can send the letter today.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: On the matter of the Public Service Commission's annual report, do we have the authority to ask that it be tabled before Parliament? Take, for example, the gender analysis required for the status of women. A report before Parliament is only required for immigration. That's when we see whether the situation of women is improving or not. It would seem to me that when one is required to at least table the results, then ministers are put on alert and they feel compelled to make changes. I would like to know where this infamous report will be tabled and if we can request it be tabled before Parliament.

The Chair: Mr. Ménard will find out. The Minister of Heritage is the one who tables it.

We should also discuss what we want to do about all these issues. We need to be realistic: we won't be here in two weeks. Therefore, what purpose does the current exercise serve? Will the answers to our questions be communicated to the next committee?

• (0945)

Mr. Marc Godbout: We appreciated the previous committee's answers. It's called their "legacy".

The Chair: You speak English very well.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Chairman, we should draw up a list of questions and comments on those topics we are interested in. As you said, not much will happen over the next two weeks but there will be another Standing Committee on Official Languages that will be able to focus on these issues.

The Chair: Fine. We should proceed responsibly and that's what we're doing.

In any case, we don't need to discuss this for hours on end. We have covered most of the recommendations. We know what we have to do. We still have time to discuss this. I don't want to bring the discussion to an end. We still have lots of time.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: There is something that really bothered me when I read the response to recommendation number 5 on page 4. It states:

Capacity in the second official language must be integrated into employees' career and professional development plans and be supported within a public service learning framework.

When I read that I get the feeling that mastering a second language is no more important than mastering new computer software or any other type of job-related skill. Shouldn't acquiring capacity in the second language not be the priority and carry more weight within a civil servant's professional development plan? I was somewhat disappointed by the response. It gave me the impression that not much importance is attached to both languages in Canada. I wonder if you share my opinion.

The Chair: It's as if being bilingual was no more important than any other aspect of training.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Yes. I understand that certain accounting skills or other skills may be required for a specific task. That is part of the professional development plan. You may choose to learn another language, but it's as if it were neither here nor there.

Is that a general trend? Perhaps I'm just a worrier.

The Chair: No, we can raise that issue. Is language just another aspect of training or is it particularly important?

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Recommendation 13 reads as follows:

The committee recommends that the Privy Council Office require that those appointed to deputy minister positions meet the CBC requirements in the second official language.

The government's response is:

As the majority of appointments to the deputy minister positions continue to be made from within the public service, specifically from the ADM group, this policy will ensure that over time, the majority of deputy ministers will meet the CBC linguistic requirement.

Should we not require that all deputy ministers meet the CBC linguistic requirements? Why only the majority? They should all be bilingual.

That means that there are deputy ministers who are not capable of speaking both official languages in Canada. We've already discussed this within the committee.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's unacceptable!

• (0950)

The Chair: How many deputy ministers are there?

Mr. Yvon Godin: The public elects members of Parliament, some of whom become ministers. When the time comes to hire people, those at the top should be setting the example.

The Chair: I agree with you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In my opinion, they should all be bilingual. We should not accept that only the majority of deputy ministers be bilingual. That's very nice of us to be happy with simply a majority.

When a deputy minister is hired, he should be able to speak both official languages. That should be the federal government's policy. We should set the example. Imagine if a deputy minister cannot speak both official languages in his department. That's where it all starts. How can that deputy minister tell an employee that he should be capable of speaking both official languages when the minister himself can't?

We have often debated this issue. I think that we reached a consensus on that. How can we possibly accept being told that there is only one competent person in Canada out of 30 million, but unfortunately that person does not speak both official languages? That's the argument that is given to us and I don't accept it. If we do it once, then we can do it for all the positions. We seek a person for the job but we don't require that both of this country's official languages be spoken.

The example has to come from higher up and I think that that should be included in the government's response to recommendation number 13.

Do you agree with me in saying that there isn't one single unilingual French-speaking deputy minister in Canada?

The Chair: I should just point out that as chairman I have to be neutral. However, I tend to agree with you. That would be especially true in the case of a minister also being unilingual. And it will happen!

Mr. Yvon Godin: Exactly.

The Chair: If the minister is unilingual and the deputy minister is unilingual...

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I would add that the contagion effect is also very significant. For example you can see it when... [*Editor's Note: Technical Difficulty*] ...it has an effect on all staff. You also see it when you meet colleagues who studied at the same university as yourself. Obviously, you tend to have things in common and you may be tempted to be biased towards them and to try and integrate them. If the deputy minister promotes the francophonie and speaks French on a regular basis, then he will attract other people like himself and that will send out an important message. It is therefore essential that we ensure that French is present in the workplace.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think it starts there. We are here to make recommendations. We have to set the example.

Mr. Simard doesn't exactly agree, judging from his expression. I'd like to hear what he has to say on this.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Quite honestly, I'm somewhat torn. I absolutely agree that the tone has to be set by the leaders; if the message isn't given that one wants to have a bilingual office then it becomes difficult. However, I think that the government wants to have the option of hiring people from the private sector in order to diversify its areas of experience. Yet those people are not necessarily bilingual. That is why I am somewhat torn.

I think that it is an advantage to be able to hire people from the private sector, with various types of experience. However, I can see that that wouldn't have the same impact, especially if the minister and the deputy minister are unilingual. It's complicated. Therefore I am somewhat torn.

Mr. Yvon Godin: One shouldn't think that no one in the private sector is bilingual.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Yes, but there are also unilingual people.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why is it that not one francophone has been hired in Canada? And yet we could use interpreters. I challenge you to name one unilingual francophone deputy minister. Is it because we're not qualified?

Hon. Raymond Simard: Usually the francophones are bilingual.

Mr. Yvon Godin: There must be qualified francophones in Canada who do not speak English.

• (0955)

The Chair: Deputy ministers who wouldn't speak English?

Mr. Yvon Godin: I don't want to point fingers; I simply want to give an example. Let's be honest and admit that that type of situation would not be considered acceptable. That also applies to job offers. If we were to use automatic translation software in order to translate job offers from French to English and we made those translations available to the Canadian public, the extremely poor quality of language would be considered unacceptable. It would immediately become a national scandal. We're here to make recommendations and I think that this one should be starkly clear. We need to start with the deputy ministers.

Hon. Raymond Simard: That recommendation is there already.

The Chair: What we said the first time...

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's exactly what the recommendation says.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, it says the majority of deputy ministers.

Hon. Raymond Simard: The response mentions the majority, but the recommendation says that all deputy ministers should meet those requirements.

The Chair: Yes. So the committee could repeat...

Mr. Yvon Godin: In terms of the CBC-level requirements, the government's response says "[...] this policy will ensure that over time, the majority of deputy ministers [...]". It doesn't say all deputy ministers.

The Chair: The government says "the majority of deputy ministers"; however we say "deputy ministers".

Mr. Yvon Godin: Then I think we should simply refine our recommendation. If we all agree, then we could make it clear that the CBC-level requirement applies not to the majority of deputy ministers, but rather to all deputy ministers.

The Chair: Does the committee support the idea of repeating the recommendation that was adopted, if my memory serves me well?

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I'm sorry but from what I understand of the recommendation in front of me, bilingualism should be mandatory for all deputy ministers. Is that right? It's possible that I'm missing something.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That is in fact what the committee had recommended. We simply want to reiterate that recommendation.

[English]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: We don't reiterate every recommendation.

The Chair: We could. We could change the recommendations; we could reiterate.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Could we reiterate all 14 recommendations?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Then, Mr. Godin wants us to repeat what we have already said?

The Chair: We would reiterate the recommendation, given that Mr. Godin is not satisfied with the response.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, our recommendation differs from the government's response. The recommendation that we ourselves drafted is clear. It's the response that is not satisfactory.

The Chair: We could say that we're not satisfied with the response.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The response comes from the government, and it is up to the government to implement it. We should perhaps try to help clarify things, so that a real distinction is made. The fact that the government is talking about the majority of deputy ministers whereas the issue is the CBC level in the second official language is ambiguous.

The Chair: There is a nuance here: you are not unhappy with the recommendation but rather with the government's response.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is correct.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: It is going to be rather difficult to change a recommendation that is crystal clear. We cannot add anything to it.

Hon. Raymond Simard: On the other hand, Mr. Chairman, a committee that is not satisfied with a response has the right to say so. Our committee could specify that they would like to see all deputy ministers comply with bilingualism requirements. There is nothing preventing us from doing so.

The Chair: I am your humble servant.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like us to make it very clear that we are not satisfied with the response.

The Chair: Do the members of the committee agree with Mr. Godin?

Mr. Poilievre does not. Are any other members also in disagreement?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We have already made our recommendation, and I do not see why we should repeat it. Everything was clear from the start.

Mr. Guy Côté: I do not want to suggest that Mr. Poilievre has not understood the situation. However, I think we would be justified in telling the government that its response was unsatisfactory. The idea, here, is not to reformulate the recommendation.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I imagine our recommendation has already been read. We can reiterate it, and the government can in turn reiterate its response.

• (1000)

The Chair: We must make a distinction: at this stage, we are not discussing reiterating the recommendation, but rather informing the government of our disappointment in its response.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If not, what are we doing here? Our job is to make comments on the government's response, and that is what we have been doing all morning. There is an answer with which we are not satisfied, given that the government is talking about the majority of deputy ministers whereas we were talking about all of them in our recommendation. If we are going to start being afraid to repeat ourselves and to say that it is useless to express our disagreement, I am starting to wonder why we are having this meeting.

The Chair: It is simply an issue of informing them of our disappointment with their response.

How would you like to proceed, Mr. Godin? By sending a letter?

Mr. Yvon Godin: We could indeed do it that way. We could also ask our advisors for guidance.

Mr. Marion Ménard: It seems to me that the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency, which is responsible for official languages within the public service, is going to publish its annual report soon. Normally, the committee invites the president of Treasury Board or senior officials from the official languages branch of the agency to present their report.

The Chair: We have already decided to do so.

Mr. Marion Ménard: Would you like to ask questions on this subject? That is an option. You could also write a letter.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm sorry: I am a little confused. What exactly are we doing here? We are assessing the difference...

The Chair: That is what we are doing.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What is the process to follow, afterwards? We made comments. And now, are we going to write a...?

The Chair: We can write a letter or table a report in the House.

Mr. Yvon Godin: And what happens to all of the comments made around the table this morning?

The Chair: We will subsequently discuss several of these issues in committee. No witnesses have been confirmed for next week, at least for the moment. That situation could change, but if that is not the case, and according to the information we receive in response to our questions, we could come back to this.

The process we are following this morning is not immediate and final. We really must let people know that we are disappointed or that we are missing data...

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is the usual process.

The Chair: That is correct.

Mr. Yvon Godin: And so, why are you asking me specifically if we need to send a letter?

The Chair: In the other instances, it was obvious, given that we were asking for information, whereas in this situation, we are expressing our disagreement on a given subject. We will therefore send a letter.

In my opinion, there is no consensus on this point.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We could vote on it.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We could propose a compromise. In the response, it says that in the case of associate deputy minister positions, the language requirements must be complied with. In our letter, we could ask why this requirement is not applied globally to all deputy ministers. The text does not really explain this, but I'm sure there are good reasons for it. Normally, deputy ministers are hired from within the public service, but in my opinion, we are trying to attract people from the private sector, so that we have a broader skill set.

Be that as it may, we could ask the question. There's no harm in asking.

The Chair: These are two different approaches: one of you wants to ask a question whereas the other wants to say we are disappointed.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I agree with Mr. Simard's approach.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I support Mr. Simard. We want to know why and we will act in consequence. We need good reasons.

The Chair: That is fine.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If I am not mistaken, there has already been a minister responsible for official languages whose deputy minister was a unilingual anglophone. You will not have me believe that he was the only candidate in the private sector and that another could not be found.

The Chair: We agree then that we should send a letter asking for much more information on the subject.

An hon. member: Getting more information! We do not agree.

The Chair: A legitimate question has been raised; we want more information. That is what Mr. Simard has suggested. Mr. Poilievre has seconded that and feels it is necessary in order to say that we have received our answer, but for now, we do not agree.

•(1005)

Mr. Yvon Godin: As the NDP likes compromises, I accept this one.

The Chair: That is good.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The first letter will be only...

The Chair: ...to get information.

That is fine. I believe that on this side, there are no more comments. Do you have any other comments to make on the other side? If not, I remind you that barring any fortuitous or unforeseen event, we will meet Thursday morning. The meeting will be televised. Our witness is the Commissioner of Official Languages and the meeting will deal with the estimates. Before then, we will send her a note letting her know about the possibility of there being questions on her report, particularly on this aspect.

I thank you for your work and for the importance that you give to official languages. We will see each other Thursday morning.

The meeting is adjourned.

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