



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 005 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, June 6, 2006

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Chair

Mr. Guy Lauzon

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC)): We will begin the meeting. I would like to welcome our guests, who are Ms. Dyane Adam, Mr. Renald Dussault, Ms. Louise Guertin and Ms. Johane Tremblay. I would like to welcome the members of the committee.

Ms. Adam, you now have the floor. Following that, the members of the committee will have questions for you.

Ms. Dyane Adam (Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, committee members, I am pleased to meet with you today for what is most likely my last appearance before you as Commissioner of Official Languages.

[Translation]

On May 9, I filed my seventh and final annual report, and I am pleased to present the highlights to you today. I have also included a copy of my four recommendations to the government. A further recommendation will have to be added concerning Air Canada and I will address that issue later on.

[English]

This new report is entitled “Official Languages in Canada: Taking on the New Challenge”. It's presented to a new government. This report sets out the courses of action for implementing the significant changes that were approved by Parliament over the last year. This is a forward-looking annual report and a call for action in governmental responsibility. It reiterates what I have been saying over the past seven years, that without ongoing leadership by the government, the official languages file cannot move forward and may even lose ground.

With the strengthening of the Official Languages Act last November, each institution must henceforth take positive measures to enhance the vitality of official language communities and promote linguistic duality. My annual report suggests courses of actions that I believe are essential to the government's firm commitment to renewal and consolidation. It also contains the second addition of the report card for federal institutions.

Apart from that, my recommendations focus mainly on four areas: horizontal governance, promoting linguistic duality, vitality of official language communities, and new regulations.

[Translation]

The most significant amendment made to the act in the past year requires that federal institutions establish a strategy to foster the vitality of official language minority communities. Institutions must review their policies and programs in light of the new provisions of the act to ensure that these communities receive all the benefits that majority communities do. Federal institutions will need to build relationships with the communities and consider them as partners in this move towards enhanced vitality.

The government and the communities must adopt a consistent approach to vitality based on indicators and research to arrive at better-targeted actions and achieve concrete results for the benefit of Canadian society. We will have to document the measures taken and clarify the objectives by identifying vitality indicators that are relevant and appropriate to the specific circumstances of official language communities.

The government is accountable to Canadians for both the actions that it takes and the actions that it fails to take.

I therefore recommend that the Minister of Official Languages ensure that all federal institutions, within their respective mandates, establish a strategy to foster community vitality that is based on factual data, continuing research and concrete results.

[English]

Now I will turn to the promotion of linguistic duality.

Development of official language communities and promotion of linguistic duality requires closer relationships between the federal government and civil society's stakeholders. With the strengthening of the act, each federal institution will have to embody linguistic duality as a fundamental value and promote it in light of today's Canadian society.

We must situate our official languages framework in the context of a changing Canada. Globalization, the information age, the knowledge society, and technological innovation all remind us that there are new and ever-growing forces at play. The linguistic makeup of our country is also evolving through an increase in mixed marriages between francophones and anglophones, the influence of newcomers, the demographic profile of rural and urban regions, and the increased role of the provinces and territories in community development.

Cultural diversity and linguistic duality are central values of Canadian society, and federal institutions must consider them as equally important.

I therefore recommend that the minister of official languages initiate a dialogue with the various stakeholders in Canadian society to identify the measures to take in order to fully integrate the fundamental values of linguistic duality and cultural diversity into our governance models and derive the full benefits that flow from them.

• (0910)

[Translation]

To help the government implement these new requirements, a chapter of the annual report is devoted to the issue of horizontal governance, or the mechanisms that govern the relationships between the federal government and official language communities. It proposes directions for effectively handling horizontal official languages issues.

The government must use appropriate and ongoing mechanisms to coordinate activities with communities themselves, but also with all key players, especially other governments. Such coordination mechanisms, for example in immigration, have also produced excellent results.

You know the communities I'm talking about. The government must engage in dialogue with them to learn more about them and adjust to their diverse needs.

I therefore recommend that the Minister of Official Languages ensure the effectiveness of the horizontal governance mechanisms of Canada's linguistic policy.

[English]

The second part of the report deals with ensuring the federal government's compliance with its obligations. All the investigations, studies, and audits show that the government has succeeded at implementing administrative processes and plans to meet its obligations, yet even though the means are in place, the results are not yet particularly convincing.

This year, the analysis of overall observations presented in the second edition of the federal institutions' report cards shows us that the institutions' weakest performance occurred in two areas: service to the public and language of work. It is disappointing that the results are mixed and that the institutions' overall performance is mediocre.

The federal government must take action to ensure that active offer of service and use of English and French become part of institutional culture. It needs to assume its responsibilities in order to improve the current performance of the institutions and to eliminate persistent stagnation. After more than 35 years of waiting, a serious push is necessary.

[Translation]

Finally, as I noted in last year's annual report, I encourage the government to seriously examine the state of its linguistic framework. The government must adopt a regulatory framework that sets out the precise methods by which federal institutions must fulfill their obligations in the areas of community development and promotion of linguistic duality. We must review our approach to the Act so that we no longer see it as a collection of separate parts (on communications with the public, language of work, promoting

duality, etc.) but rather as a coherent and logical whole, that reflects society's changing realities.

Considering the amendments made to the Act over the past year and our country's socio-demographic changes over the past decade, it is clear that the current regulations are no longer relevant to the realities of Canadian society. The levelling-off witnessed with respect to the delivery of services to the public in the official language of their choice is only one example of the need to modernize the regulations. It would therefore be appropriate to create new regulations, based on a coherent and effective implementation of the act.

I therefore recommend that the President of the Treasury Board modernize the *Official Languages Regulations—Communications with and Services to the Public* to allow Canadians to receive services of equal quality in the official language of their choice; and examine the relevance of adopting new regulations that aim to specify the implementation of the obligations set out in other parts of the *Official Languages Act*, particularly parts V and VII.

Finally, Air Canada's situation has been a concern throughout my mandate. I would be remiss if I did not tell you about the one last request I will be making of the federal government. I have to do with Air Canada's situation. You probably remember that the latest restructuring created a regulatory vacuum concerning the language obligations of its various subsidiaries.

I therefore am asking the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to introduce a bill as soon as possible to ensure that Canadian travellers, both anglophone and francophone, retain their right to be served in their official language of choice by all Air Canada subsidiaries, and that Air Canada employees also retain their language rights.

• (0915)

[English]

In conclusion, linguistic duality is more firmly rooted than ever before as a fundamental value of Canadian society. However, the decisions and actions of our political and administrative leaders do not always reflect this central social value. As a consequence, the equality of English and French is by no means a given in today's society. Now more than ever, citizens expect that federal institutions will fulfill their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

The government is responsible for enforcing the country's laws, and parliamentarians must therefore demonstrate full respect for the Official Languages Act, so that we can cross the threshold into true equality.

So far, the government has been somewhat timid in its public response to my report. Since public leadership is needed for the federal government to recognize and implement the desired changes, I expect that the government will clearly state the approach it intends to take to get meaningful results.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Merci, Madame Adam. Thank you very much.

In your conclusion, you say that linguistic duality is more firmly rooted than ever before as a fundamental value of Canadian society. And undoubtedly it's your efforts over the last number of years that have contributed greatly to that, so we thank you for it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Dyane Adam: Thank you.

The Chair: We will begin our first round with Mr. Murphy, of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Adam, on behalf of myself as well as the Liberal Party and the people of New Brunswick, I would like to thank you for the considerable work that you have accomplished in the area of bilingualism. In Moncton, bilingualism is our way of life, so to speak. What you have achieved over these years is greatly appreciated.

I'll share your opinion, that is that the government has not been proactive as far as bilingualism is concerned. Nothing in its budget concerns bilingualism, minority francophone communities outside of Quebec nor other subjects that affect the people of my riding.

In the fifth paragraph of your presentation, you state the following:

With the strengthening of the *Official Languages Act* last November, each institution must henceforth take positive measures to enhance the vitality of official languages communities [...]

As a former municipal politician, I look for concrete examples. Can you describe any positive steps that have been taken by institutions to strengthen the act? You will be leaving, but we will be staying on. We must therefore ensure that each institution takes this kind of initiative.

• (0920)

Ms. Dyane Adam: I will give you concrete examples, but I think that positive steps also mean a different approach for each institution. For example, taking positive steps means adopting a proactive and systematic approach in designing, measuring and assessing the programs. The institution, when it sets out its policies and programs, must adopt the perspective of the minority and assess whether or not the impact of this measure or this initiative will give comparable results for both the minority and the majority.

Each institution must also establish permanent links and collaboration with the official language communities—what we call horizontal governance. In order to take their interests and their specificity into account, the institution must establish a permanent relationship with them. It is another way of governing.

What does that mean in practical terms for some institutions? I will give you a few examples.

Canada Post decided to open a postal outlet at the Cité francophone, a community centre in Edmonton. By choosing to open a bilingual outlet in this area, the institution has more or less contributed to promoting the growth and development of communities, because they are very visible being located in this area that gathers together services intended to the Francophone minority. In

short, it creates a living space for this community and contributes to it.

Our federal institutions must review their decisions regarding the choice of location for services and the way in which the services are offered. They must take into account the location.

Here is another example of a concrete step that was taken by Industry Canada. Industry Canada modify the criteria for the community access program in order to better take into account the specific needs of minority communities as regards affordable access to the Internet. If the program criteria were applied to all Canadians, the communities, because they are fewer in number, would not necessarily have access. They would therefore be denied the benefits of the program. These are the kinds of steps we expect the different institutions to take. What's more, it is up to the institutions themselves to define them.

I could give you other examples, like the single window approach for bilingual services in Manitoba, which is a federal, provincial and municipal initiative. This is another example that illustrates how the federal government can act positively to sustain vitality. In this case, the three levels of government worked together to create a one-stop window for bilingual services in that region, where the working language is French. Manitoba is not a region that is designated bilingual by the federal government for language of work purposes. It is a way of proactively supporting the community that allows for more flexibility.

Does that answer your question?

• (0925)

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Brunelle has the floor.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Good morning, Ms. Adam. Congratulations on your work. It is always a pleasure to meet with you.

In your 2005-2006 report, you recommended adopting new regulations that would spell out the obligations under Part V, Language of Work, and Part VII, advancement of English and French, of the Official Language Act.

If you want to intervene through regulations on the issue of language of work, would you not be going against Quebec's Bill 101? We are expecting court cases with S-3. Is there a connection between this new recommendation and possible court decisions? In other words, will these new regulations make up for people turning to the courts? What are these new regulations?

Ms. Dyane Adam: The Official Languages Act allows the government to adopt regulations to guide the federal administration in the application or implementation of various provisions of the act, or to make them more specific. Until now, after 35 years of official bilingualism, the government has only adopted one single regulation which concerns one aspect of the act alone, namely the part which deals with services to the public.

I mainly made my recommendation to modernize the existing regulations, which are really outdated, all the more so because in the last 10 to 15 years, we have noticed that the quality of services has stagnated. Further, the government has changed the way it serves its citizens. Just think of Government-on-line.

Your question was about the language of work or Part VII. Again, under the act, federal institutions must respect the right of employees to work in the language of their choice. Consequently, in Quebec, anglophones have the right to work in their language in federal institutions, and francophones can do the same too, of course.

I expect there will be regulations on the language of work, because I think that the right of employees to work in the language of their choice is not really being recognized. French is still generally underrepresented within the federal government. In Quebec, the right of anglophone employees to work in their language is not respected either within federal institutions, and the same goes for Quebec francophone employees, more specifically when they communicate with Ottawa or with the headquarters of a federal organization.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Do you think that regulations will strengthen this process? Do you think that quotas or something else might be imposed? What exactly do you mean when you say “guide and make more specific”? How do you think that can be achieved?

Ms. Dyane Adam: If I take the example of service to the public, the regulations will say that institutions must, where numbers warrant, provide their services in both languages. More specifically, when they communicate with the Canadian public, they will have to do so in the newspapers of the majority as well as those of the minority.

The act does not address these specific situations. It's just too specific. A regulation is created to make something more specific and definite. A regulation will say that in such and such a situation, this type of action must be taken. Regulations provide more focus to what the various institutions must do, because there are thousands of public servants who work for the federal administration.

Respecting the language of work of employees remains a general objective. The regulations will define and guide the daily work of employees so that their employees' rights are respected.

I could be even more specific. Regulations are like a recipe book or a guide book which employers and employees can refer to, to better understand their rights, to better exercise them and make sure they are respected.

As far as Bill S-3 is concerned, which is what your other question dealt with, I did not really understand what you were talking about when you referred to court action results.

● (0930)

Ms. Paule Brunelle: It seems that you were recommending the adoption of regulations. Perhaps I misinterpreted what you said, but if regulations were adopted before any court action was taken following the adoption of Bill S-3, that might address certain problems.

Ms. Dyane Adam: With the adoption of Bill S-3, Part VII of the act has been strengthened and made subject to judicial control. I made recommendations to the current government and I insisted that it take rapid action in that regard, because I feel it is extremely

important that these institutions take measures immediately to ensure that the new Part VII is fully upheld. If they do not act and do not change their way of doing things, we may indeed be faced with the risk of legal action, which is not at all what we intended.

The government must respect the law. It is possible that, once in awhile, legal action will have to be taken to hold the government accountable or to clarify its obligations, but legal action should never be taken to get the government to understand what it has to do. The law is clear. The government must take positive measures.

My lawyer has just told me that judgments can clarify obligations, but of course they always entail financial and human costs, as well as delays. Further, they highlight the fact that the government does not respect the rights of its citizens, nor does it uphold its own laws. So there really is a problem.

The Chair: I am sorry, but your time is up.

We now move on to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner Adam, on behalf of all citizens, I wish to thank you for all of the years that you have served as an officer of the House of Commons, and a representative of this country's two official languages. This is important since one of our country's law states that everyone enjoys the right to be served in both official languages, especially at the federal level.

Similar legislation that applies in New Brunswick means that New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada. Despite this, we still have problems, for example with the RCMP. I do not know if they will finally come to an understanding at some point, but both the RCMP and the federal government seem to be passing the buck before the courts. After so many years, it is regrettable that we are still at that point. After 400 years, respect for both languages and bilingual services provided to Canadians is still a subject of discussion. As a member of Parliament, I wish to thank you.

I know that you are at the end of your mandate. Your responsibility is not to give orders, but rather to make suggestions and to report to Parliament on results of your inquiries, with the power to go before the courts. You have assumed your role well, and once again, on behalf of both French speaking and English speaking Canadians, I wish to thank you.

Last week, we talked about translation services. I would like to hear some of your thoughts on that subject. Service Canada said that the Commissioner for Official Languages was against stopping the posting of job offers for which the translation was not done by human translators. Your opinion on this subject is important.

Service Canada intends to set up a system under which if a translation is not done or revised by a human translator, the job offer will not be made public. It is the person in charge of e translation services who made those comments, and she is an expert on the subject.

Would you agree with me that automated translation has its usefulness, but unlike a human being, a machine does not have feelings. For something to be said, it must have meaning. In automated translation, a machine does word for word translation. Madam Commissioner, to allow the situation to go on in the hopes that it will one day disappear amounts to an insult to the language and identity of both anglophones and francophones.

Service Canada told us that the same was happening with English translation. We were told that the automated English translation of a posted French job offer was terrible. I checked to see if this was the case, and indeed it was.

Given the clarity of the Official Languages Act in this regard, how can we tolerate that the government should set up a system that will one day allow humans to be replaced by machines?

The Director of the translation bureau says that this is quite impossible. I would like to hear an expert state the opposite. If it were possible, I am sure that such a system would have already been put in place. In all sincerity, I must say that I am proud that the government has taken a decision to not post any job offer unless it has been revised by a human translator. I hope that the government will maintain its decision. That is what was said at last week's committee meeting. I will monitor the issue closely to make sure that there is full compliance.

Madam Adam, the reason I ask you this question is because you mentioned that you were against that decision, namely the posting of the 13 per cent of job offers translated by machines. That goes against everything you have said since I have known you.

• (0935)

Ms. Dyane Adam: I am not saying that I am against the decision. I am not sure of what was actually said.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I will try to be clearer.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I will tell you what is my position.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They told us that they wanted to put an end to the practice, and that you were against that.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Are you talking about automated translation?

Mr. Yvon Godin: No. We were told that 13 per cent of the translated job offers are not checked by people. For those translations, you recommended proceeding the same way.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Exactly.

Perhaps it wasn't what was said...

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to know your opinion on that subject.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I have been on this file since I became the Commissioner for Official Languages. I believe that the problem existed even before that. We have received many complaints with respect to that. However, whenever we recommended that a department put an end to automated translation, or provide necessary human resource such as revisers in order to make sure that both the French and English are of equal quality, we encountered a lot of resistance.

On that topic, the position of my office has always been firm. Any situation in which the treatment of both French and English are not

equal is simply unacceptable. If you were told the contrary, then that statement was wrong.

We were recently told that the current government was committed to making sure that only revised job offers be posted. That's exactly what we requested for several years to the previous government, in order to ensure full compliance with the law.

In fact, this comes as a sort of departure gift at the end of my mandate.

• (0940)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your time is up.

We will now move on to Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Godin, we have figured out why automated translation is inadequate: it is run by the same person who translates fortune cookie messages!

With respect to automated translation, I believe that the problems mainly stems from the fact that there is a four hour publication deadline. If we were to decide to extend the deadline to 12 hours, in order to spread out the rush period, I believe that we would greatly resolve the problem. It would be possible to carry out without a lot of additional human resources.

Ms. Adam, I have just learned that your are leaving us. I still find it sad to see a person your age leave so early. In many cases, the person leaving takes away a wealth of knowledge and experience.

You have always sat at the end of the table, and never on this side of the table. If you were an MP, what would you have liked to do?

Ms. Dyane Adam: My goodness, what an open question? I could take several hours to answer.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We have time.

Ms. Dyane Adam: You are parliamentarians. If I were a member of Parliament like you, I would want every member of this committee, regardless of political affiliation, to promote the true equality of English and French. You were appointed to this committee because, one way or another, you recognize that language duality is a distinct characteristic of Canada which unites us. It is not enough to recognize this in the Canadian Constitution or in a quasi-constitutional act such as the Official Languages Act.

Implementing a law and ensuring that it is fully respected represents the greatest part of the work and is one of the greatest challenges. The commissioner is an officer of Parliament. Ultimately, the commissioner provides you with evidence. My team works to establish in which circumstances the government fully or partially respects the law, or not at all. The commissioner then shares her observations with you.

However, as parliamentarians, members of Parliament and members of this committee, you are collectively responsible to ensure that federal institutions and the federal public service are accountable. In English we would say that you must "take them to task".

If I was a member of Parliament, I would always keep in mind the fact that we must hold decision makers, namely those who can bring about change, accountable. The commissioner is not responsible for implementation; she simply diagnoses a situation and proposes, as Mr. Godin said, potential measures.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Lauzon is keeping an eye on the time.

The Chair: You have three minutes left.

Mr. Luc Harvey: I never have enough time to ask questions.

You are leaving your position, but I hope that you will remain active in this field. If possible, I would like you to remain involved with this committee. I'm sure that everyone agrees with me. Until now, this committee has always worked well. That might not be the case for other committees, but on this one, we want to go forward in a definite direction.

In two minutes, can you recommend three priority subject areas?

● (0945)

Ms. Dyane Adam: I have already made certain recommendations. Thanks to Bill S-3, which was generally supported by all parties, the act was strengthened. The Official Languages Act is a monument. We thought that it was impossible to touch it, but we did so. The federal government must recognize this change and do so immediately. That was the object of the recommendations with were made to government.

You have to make sure that every federal institution and department presents a strategy as regards the promotion of language duality in Canadian society and the vitality of communities. It would also be important to know what their plans are and to force them to implement them, because they have a lot of other work to do. I can tell you that in three years, many of these organizations would not have done anything at all unless they were brought back into line. They feel you have the power to do so, as does your government. This bill has to bring about change in the daily operations of those organizations.

As far as Air Canada is concerned, we have to make sure that we move towards official language equality, and not away from it.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Thank you very much, Ms. Adam.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Was I within my time?

The Chair: You have used up your time.

Mr. Simard.

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

I would like to welcome Ms. Adam and her team.

I would also like to thank you. I am a member of Parliament and I have been a member of this committee for four years, during which I have come to know you and to greatly appreciate you. When you come from a province where you represent only 4 per cent of the population, you appreciate having someone in the commissioner's office who understands minorities. Thank you very much for all the work you have accomplished.

I would like to ask you two questions. They are very general questions and they might be difficult to answer.

First, I think that you were the person most suited for this position over the past seven years. You have established structures and a system. What do you think the next commissioner's role should be?

Circumstances change. For example, at the Caisse populaire Saint-Boniface, a person who was very well versed in finances has just ended her mandate. We are now looking for someone who will be responsible for promotion and marketing. Without wishing to put words in your mouth, I see someone who would travel throughout the country and tell Canadians that they have a right to certain services. That individual would actively undertake promotion on the ground.

In Manitoba we recently celebrate the 25th anniversary of the organization called Canadian Parents for French. What these people have achieved in Manitoba over the past 25 years is absolutely incredible. Yesterday I attended the graduation ceremony at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface and I was astonished to see, in the college where the language has been dispensed in French only, the number of graduates with English names. I am sure that they constituted at least a third of the student population. I thought, as I often do, that perhaps we had missed the mark in terms of integrating these people and, thereby, increasing the francophone cultural presence.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I think you have put your finger on one element that, in my opinion, has been neglected. I'm talking about the promotion of linguistic duality within Canadian society. In fact, you'll see that one of my recommendations is to better focus on that goal, which is a part of our act. Of course, this is a recommendation to the government.

Since I've been commissioner, I've been struck by the extent to which linguistic duality seems to be a matter of greater concern for minorities. It concerns francophones outside Quebec, anglophones in Quebec, and francophones in general in Canada. We all agree that French is in the minority in this country. I personally have always worked for bilingual institutions, whether they be universities or hospitals.

If the majority does not subscribe to a value, or if they are indifferent to it, then you cannot talk about a Canadian society-wide project. You need to do more promotion and, most importantly, encourage both linguistic communities to work actively together. You need to empower both in terms of reaching that common Canadian goal.

That being said, all the necessary elements are in place to allow the next commissioner to make choices that best suit his or her personality. For my part, I'm putting the ball in your court. It is the responsibility of the political actors, in this case the elected representatives, to promote linguistic duality. No commissioner can do it as much as you can. Commissioners have neither the necessary resources nor the time. A commissioner cannot be everywhere in the country at the same time. That is why I say that it is up to our elected representatives to always speak in English or French, depending on the circumstances, in their ridings. Of course, that also applies to the government, to ministers, and so on. If, on top of that, senior officials did the same, then there would be no need to promote linguistic duality in Canada. We have the players we need.

To sum up, if I were the next commissioner, I would not be travelling from one end of the country to the other. I would do my best to convince our elected representatives, our senior officials and the government to speak in both official languages and to actively support linguistic duality.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you for your answer, Ms. Adam.

Mr. Lemieux, if I've understood correctly, you will be sharing your time, that is five minutes, with Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Yes, thank you.

Commissioner, thank you for your presentation. You have worked very hard right from the beginning of your mandate.

At the end of your report, you recommended that the President of the Treasury Board modernize the official language regulations. Could you share your concerns with us and tell us which regulations you think have not been effective and what alternatives you would propose?

Ms. Dyane Adam: I could answer that question but I'll give the floor to a member of my office who is an expert in that area.

Johane, would you like to answer Mr. Lemieux?

Mrs. Johane Tremblay (General Counsel and Director, Legal Services, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Earlier on, the commissioner mentioned that the public's right to services in both official languages depends on demand. That is provided for in the act.

The regulations provide for those cases where demand is significant. There are demographic rules which depend on the size of the minority population and on the ratio of that population to the majority population.

In the annual report we showed the shortcomings of the use of these demographic rules in terms of the impact it can have on the community, be that francophone or anglophone, and the delivery of services in both languages. There are inconsistencies within some communities. For example, in Yarmouth, because of the numbers and percentage involved, the francophone community has the right to services in their language. However, the anglophone community in Sept-Îles, which is bigger but only corresponds to the threshold of 5 per cent of the population, does not have a right to services in English.

That is an example of inconsistent application of current rules. This is something that should be reviewed based on principle. If a community demonstrates a certain level of vitality, then they should have a right to services in the language of their choice. That is a concept that we are exploring. There should be criteria based on the presence of those communities and their level of vitality rather than on their numbers or the proportion of the population that they represent.

In terms of Air Canada, there are rules that determine whether certain trips are bilingual or not. That has led to confusion amongst travellers who do not know whether they have a right to be served in their own language by ground staff but not in the air, and vice versa. That is another example of inconsistencies that we have looked at.

We continue to review these issues in order to find solutions that will result in Canadians having a right to services of equal quality. Regulations do not determine how services will be offered. We feel that there should be a minimum number of rules that will guide federal institutions in order to be able to provide services of equal quality.

Earlier, the commissioner gave as an example the location and number of offices. Sometimes, in larger cities, there's only one office that is designated bilingual. In Vancouver, for example, if people have to travel from one end of the city to the other in order to obtain services in their own language, they're unlikely to do so.

Those are all aspects of service delivery that merit further review.

• (0955)

The Chair: You may ask one brief question.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Adam, you said that linguistic duality is a part of our Canadian identity but that it is threatened by indifference and that there is a risk of ghettoization.

How do you see the government reaching young people? How do you see the future of this duality, which is a characteristic of our society? Can we intervene? When I was young, I went to Vancouver on a language exchange. What do you think of that type of program? Do you think that we can still foster that enthusiasm or are we fighting an off-field battle?

Ms. Dyane Adam: I think that your question is very timely. The fact that you're asking is proof of the benefits of your language exchange experience.

Young people are more bilingual today than they used to. In fact, there are twice as many bilingual individuals as there were 35 years ago. In fact, they have become more multilingual as well. But that isn't the case for all young people. I used to work in universities and therefore I was very much involved with young people. Young people do not define their identity in the same way previous generations did. We have seen in the more bilingual regions that young people often identify themselves not as francophones or anglophones, but rather as bilingual. That did not previously exist.

I think that the best way to reach young people — we mentioned this earlier when we were talking about priorities for a new commissioner or for yourselves — is probably to use new communication technology. Young people participate in blogs and the like. I think that is how we need to reach them. I don't think that it will happen by making speeches, and so on. We have a young public and we could find a better way of encouraging them to become involved. They already constitute fertile ground in terms of their openness to diversity because many of them, particularly those who come from urban centres, have grown up in multilingual and diverse circumstances.

Of course, education is a provincial not a federal, jurisdiction. However, the federal government's main challenge is to find a way, as we've done with the action plan, to assist provinces in their efforts to improve access to training in the second official language. We could offer resources, and consider recommendations, as some have recently done, to the effect that post-secondary institutions commit to preserving knowledge of English and French acquired in secondary institutions. In some areas of the country, because post-secondary institutions do not offer programs or services in French, young people lose their knowledge of that language.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner Adam and Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Blaney.

Now we will go to our second last member of the second round. Oh, I'm sorry. I was going to go to Mr. Godin, but I guess I will go to Madam Barbot.

• (1000)

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): : Ms. Adam, I'm sorry that I missed your opening remarks.

You said earlier on that it is the minorities who are concerned with language. That's easy to understand; it's because of their assimilation concern, etc. That's normal.

What has struck me, since I've become involved in this issue, is the quality of the language. It's all very well to talk about promoting a second language, but you do not focus on quality... I'm not just talking about translation. We talked about this earlier; it was horrible.

How can we reach people who speak the language?

When I hear some people speak French which is not French, it hurts. I would rather they speak to me in English if their language is not French.

You have suggested that people speak French and English. We had a Prime Minister who spoke two second languages. I don't think that that is something to strive for. I understand that it is difficult for a country that calls itself bilingual to achieve that quality of language everywhere. However, I think that when someone has the floor to speak in an official capacity in French, then it should truly be French.

I myself was very embarrassed, in an international setting, when I heard a minister read a text that was absolutely incomprehensible.

How can we make people understand that speaking a language is not just providing information. It's more than that. Whether a person is francophone or anglophone, I can conceive that someone speaks their language, while acknowledging that the context is bilingual. Obviously, this is very difficult because it involves people but there must be a way to solve this problem because not only can it be incomprehensible, but it makes a very bad impression on foreigners who are listening to us.

My other question is about linguistic duality and the juxtaposition of the linguistic duality and cultural diversity which, in my opinion, are completely different concepts and, I would go as far as saying, have nothing to do with each other. I'd like to know what you think.

In terms of official languages, I understand that we're talking about French and English. It's one thing to promote French and English when you're talking about linguistic duality. There may be other goals as well but I don't think they are necessarily consistent with the promotion of official languages as it is being increasingly practices.

What do you think?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Your first question was on the quality of language. When an official has to provide services to Canadians in both official languages, or in one or the other official language, I expect that service or those services to be delivered in quality French or quality English. The same goes for writing.

With regard to respecting language of work, in the federal government that responsibility is the supervisor's. The supervisor must achieve an identified level in the federal administrative system, a level C. Will that person be perfectly bilingual? No. Very few people are. Personally, I know only a few people who are.

Does linguistic duality in Canada mean that everyone speaks both official languages perfectly? No. I believe that the two languages — English and French — are spoken differently in Canada. Immigrants to Canada adopt either English or French, and master it to varying degrees. In my opinion, they should not feel self-conscious, or be ashamed about speaking one or the other of the two languages, since it is in speaking that we improve our language skills.

I am certainly not an Académie française fanatic.

• (1005)

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: That is not what I was talking about. Nor was I talking about an immigrant or even an English-speaking immigrant, who learns French. That is all very well, it is a sign of promotion. People have to speak. All I'm saying is that when we are represented by someone who does not speak the language, there are circumstances where...

The Chair: Forgive me, Mrs. Barbot, but your time is out.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: What a shame, it was just getting to be interesting.

The Chair: I'm very happy with your answer to the first question, Mrs. Adam.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In fact, this line is so interesting that I will continue it.

Mrs. Adam, I fully agree that we have to be careful. I do not think that the member's intent was to send the message that we need to speak a language perfectly. That would make a lot of people uncomfortable.

When I was 16, I was in the North of Ontario in a small town called White River and I was trying to learn English. I can assure you that I spoke very broken English at the time, and I don't always speak it well now. Today, however, I am a member of Parliament and I represent a significant English-speaking community in my region. I think that people know my English is not always easy to listen to, and sometimes my French can be as well. However, they accept those faults and appreciate the fact that I speak the language. When someone makes the effort to speak a second language, I truly appreciate that.

Otherwise, we could simply get rid of all the Acadians because our French is occasionally quite pitiful. Perhaps, though, we are the ones who speak good French, since we still use words like "icitte", which comes from old French. Sentences like "*Viens icitte, pis prends l'broom, pis ramasse la dust dans l'corner*", in which at least half the words are English are still current in our part of the country. That is our culture; that is who we are. This is how we have been speaking for 400 years.

I am using up time, but it is my time to ask questions and to make comments.

The Chair: It is indeed your time.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I remember when I went to work in Dubreuilville, in Northern Ontario — there were people from Quebec there, trying to make me speak French like a Quebecker. I refused because I'm Acadian and proud of it. We use English words and French words. We don't use words correctly. When I meet Quebeckers, they say they like my accent. Thank you. Please go on liking my accent!

We have to be careful about the message we sent. For example, Radio-Canada wants language skills to be perfect. If we insist on that, we will eliminate a large number of francophones. It seems to me that Radio-Canada has a duty to be present in all regions of Canada, including regions where people have lost their French to some degree. We want them to have a presence at Radio-Canada, and to have the ability to have their voices heard across Canada. Many people want Radio-Canada employees to speak impeccable French in front of the lens. Forgive me, but that is not Radio-Canada's role. Its role is to present news, broadcast from the regions and other content.

Let's come back to Air Canada. I find it difficult to understand how a plane can leave Halifax offering bilingual services, provide only unilingual services in the air, revert to being bilingual when it lands in Toronto, remain bilingual during the trip, but revert to being unilingual when landing in Regina. I find it very difficult to understand what you are trying to explain. Is the service bilingual in Halifax? Yes. Is it bilingual in Toronto? Yes. But in the air, the service remains unilingual.

What happens to flight attendants on board? Where they thrown off the plane with parachutes?

Ms. Dyane Adam: The table in the last annual report to which you refer clearly shows the inconsistencies we find in how the current regulations are applied. That is why we need amendments. For a passenger, a Canadian citizen who is told he has language rights when travelling with Air Canada, those rights should not exist on some flights, or in special situations. This is something that I believe must be corrected.

Earlier, we talked about the need for regulations. There have been other questions on this issue. Ms. Tremblay answered them. We could spend a long time on this. All I can say is that the commissioner's office is making efforts to help the government in the process of reviewing the regulations. Further on, when the time is right, we will have much more concrete suggestions on how to change the regulations relating to service to the public. Then it will be up to the government and to Parliament to make decisions. Unlike many other kinds of federal government regulations, official languages regulations must be passed in Canada's Parliament. Thus, if there are amendments or if there must be amendments, all of you must become involved in the process.

•(1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adam.

We have a great deal of time left. If the committee agrees, we could go to a third round if you have further questions.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Yes.

The Chair: Do committee members all agree?

We will begin with the former chair of the Official Languages Committee, Pablo Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Adam, it is a pleasure to see you again. I also want to thank you and congratulate you for the excellent work done by you and your team, with which we have had the pleasure of working and — at least, I have — during the previous Parliament, particularly with regard to consideration of Bill S-3. I was a pleasure to work with you. You will clearly be missed by both MPs and communities.

Over the years, in the course of your work, have you dealt with any perpetual enfants terribles, meaning departments or agencies that have shown no improvements from one year to the next? In short, which departments or agencies should we be focussing on in order to try to make a difference?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Yes, some departments are known for their attitude. Departments may have difficulties, shortcomings, etc. But this is understandable. Departments are huge machines providing numerous services. With regard to attitude, I would mention Air Canada, which has shown a great deal of resistance. Some people will say that it is because Air Canada is a private company. But that is not the reason. It has consistently behaved in this fashion, even when it was a crown corporation, since the OCOL was created.

Airport authorities have also failed to recognize their official languages obligations. When institutions do not want to comply with the legislation, the OCOL must consider taking a more forceful approach, such as a legal remedy. We did this with VIA Rail. Air Canada is the institution that is being subject to the highest number of legal remedies, not only by the OCOL but also by complainants.

The Department of National Defence has also been difficult. Toward the end of my mandate, this department was the subject of two or three investigations. We consulted the annual reports tabled by previous commissioner and we were able to go right back to the time of the first commissioner, Mr. Keith Spicer. We noticed that we have been making almost the exact same recommendations for the past 35 years and that the same problems remain. Therefore, this department deserves very close consideration. It is a matter of representation abroad and domestically; military personnel are everywhere.

Obviously, there is also Public Works and Government Services. This department also deserves very close consideration. We had talked about a favourable outcome with regard to the Job Bank, because this file remained unresolved. So there seems to be a desire to change the situation.

The leadership should also be examined. I may sound like a broken record, but if the official languages are not supported by a very strong leadership within government in terms of policy and administration, progress will not occur. The bureaucratic process is cumbersome and it needs a kind of whip, just like the government.

The Department of Canadian Heritage is now responsible for both the delivery of official languages programs and acting as coordinator, whip, for all federal institutions including itself. How it will be able to do both jobs at once if not clear, and I have some concerns in this regard.

• (1015)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: What is happening with the official languages in terms of the provision of government services using new technologies such as the Internet?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Overall, things are going very well. I am not saying that there have not been any shortcomings. How do you say "Guichet emplois" in English?

Mrs. Johane Tremblay: "Job Bank".

Mme Dyane Adam: The Job Bank was a problem. The government seems to want to resolve it, but this file should be monitored. On the other hand, the Web sites are fairly compliant with the legislation. Sometimes, there are problems with the quality of the translation. This has already been discussed, but, overall, it is all right.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adam and Mr. Rodriguez. Now it is Ms. Barbot's turn.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I want to come back to the question I had raised earlier, because I think that we got our wires crossed. I was not talking about the average citizen. I taught French for years, and I know the level of effort required. I speak at least five languages more or less fluently. But it is neither here nor there.

Canada is supposedly a bilingual country. However, I believe that the quality of French spoken by individuals who are officially

representing Canada abroad should be the best. For that reason I suggest that we ensure that individuals speaking on behalf of Canada really do speak French, because many people speak French. Otherwise, let these individuals be replaced by others who will not embarrass us internationally because of the poor quality of their French. That way, people will no longer ask us if that is how we speak in Quebec.

On another hand, I want you to explain to me the difference between linguistic duality and cultural diversity.

Ms. Dyane Adam: First, I want to mention that we looked long and hard at representatives of the federal government abroad in terms of linguistic duality. We conducted two studies that may interest you.

One of them looks at policies of the Department of Foreign Affairs. How does this department integrate linguistic duality into its policies? We are conducting a follow-up to this study, which was published in 2004 or 2005.

We also conducted a study of the Websites of embassies and foreign missions here, in Canada, and international organizations using French and English as official languages. It was very instructive. This study might also interest you.

Linguistic duality is basically the equality or the recognition of the equal status of our two official languages. We are talking about linguistic rights that are entrenched in the Canadian Constitution or the Official Languages Act. We are also talking about values. Each bill is based on a vision, and the Constitution only translates a country's vision into legal terms.

In my opinion, the values who underline linguistic duality are the equality among citizens, respect for differences and justice.

What links these two concepts?

In Canada, cultural diversity is expressed in two languages, French and English. First, I am wearing my commissioner's hat, which truly illustrates the marriage between the two main linguistic communities. The OCOL also represents the social fabric of Canada. Each linguistic community is represented, and the fabric of each comprises numerous threads representing the different cultures.

Canada, and then Quebec, was one of the defenders of cultural diversity before UNESCO. Cultural diversity is mentioned in this declaration, but not linguistic diversity.

In my mind, what links cultural diversity and linguistic duality is that both concepts are based on the same values, meaning equality among citizens, no matter what their culture is, respect for differences, because being open to different cultures also means respecting and welcoming that difference and, of course, social justice.

Linguistic duality exists in Canada because those who built this country adopted two official languages, two cultures, two religions, two legal systems, etc. Those factors have shaped the temperament of Canadians, because they have always lived with this kind of unease and discomfort caused by the need to constantly accept differences, unlike the situation in a unitary state. This is also the reason why Canada and Canadians are recognized throughout the world as a people who, although not perfect in its treatment of immigrants, is more welcoming than most other countries in the world.

In my opinion, this is because we have matured and adopted a model based on diversity. Linguistic duality is one difference. In this sense the two make a whole, and feed-off of each other.

•(1020)

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I think that most people would associate cultural diversity more with Canadian multiculturalism than with the notion...

The Chair: I do apologize for cutting you off, Ms. Barbot, but, as you know, five minutes go by in no time at all.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: It would be worth holding a forum on this subject.

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra.

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you.

Based on your comments, Ms. Barbot, I'll make sure that I ask my questions in English, so I don't...

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I didn't mean to stop you from speaking French here, not at all. We're all the same here. I don't mind.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: All right.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: It's not really what I meant.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: One of the questions I have, and I'm a bit fascinated—maybe out of a bit of understanding or the research I've done—at the whole aspect of horizontal governance and I guess what I would describe as the.... When the whole concept of horizontal governance came into action—whether in the private sector and then leading into the public sector—there was a feeling that by flatlining and moving in that direction, it would a lot more all-encompassing, a lot more of a process in which employees and employers could actually work together and drive the companies to greater heights, both internally and externally. The difficulty with this was that the practice worked extremely well in theory, but not in practice.

So when I look at your recommendation in terms of ensuring the effectiveness of the horizontal governance mechanisms of Canada's linguistic policy, I wonder (a) how that would work from a practical perspective, and (b) the one thing that would be beneficial is if we were able to measure those outcomes...and whether we would set standards to meet those outcomes and therefore have something to actually measure them against.

I'm wondering if you could comment on both of those questions.

•(1025)

Ms. Dyane Adam: First, I think we need to define what horizontal governance is, because in my annual report we have a

whole chapter on that. We did publish other works in this area and we also reviewed existing work. What we found is that there are different definitions. So this is a problem.

We gave ourselves a definition. What we mean by that is not necessarily that you manage a company or a department together. What we mean by horizontal governance of official languages refers to the mechanism put in place to ensure ongoing cooperation among departments.

Let's talk about the federal institutions themselves. This is a horizontal file. It's not about transport; it's not about heritage. It goes across all those departments—and how, as a government, will you achieve a consistent approach and really focus on results?—and then evidently, between departments and civil society.

We already have concrete examples of horizontal mechanisms in place. For example, in the area of health, there are proven mechanisms. In that area, there are two committees—community and departmental—that focus on the issue, develop a plan, address the priorities, and together they more or less develop a plan of action, allocate resources, and assess the results.

I could go on. In immigration we have the same thing. This type of cooperation between communities, the stakeholders, and the government has allowed, for example, the federal government to sign agreements with the provinces with linguistic clauses that take into account the specificity of the official language minority communities.

Since the federal government was tuned in on the communities, it was easier for the government to also establish a dialogue with the provinces on those communities. The same thing happened with the early childhood file.

So I think that is the mechanism we are pushing for and the results at which we are aiming.

Have I answered your question?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I think partially. I think in terms of the point about the measurements, or the results, that you speak about, maybe I'd tie in the word “effectiveness” and just trying to define.... I see it as more of a statement than necessarily an action.

Ms. Dyane Adam: No, it's real.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: And I wondered how to transfer that. With the word “effectiveness”, it's very difficult to measure what effectiveness means. To me, what you think is effective and what I think is effective are different things.

The Chair: I'm going to have to ask you to respond very quickly.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Okay.

The Chair: Time goes quickly even in English.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Yes.

Effectiveness is about achieving results, so if the results you're aiming at in this case are that you want to increase and support the vitality of official languages communities, for example, you need indicators. This is one thing we have. You need to establish indicators of how you will measure the vitality. Anyone who is an expert in development will tell you.... Take, for example, economic development. I do not see the federal government pushing for economic development in any community in Canada without the communities themselves. You know that. They will take the time to bring these communities on board, and the people who have the businesses. If they do not, it won't be effective, I can tell you, because they'll face major resistance. Second, they're not likely to make the best decisions, and you will have to repair rather than move forward. That, for me, is effectiveness.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, for a third round of questions.

•(1030)

Mr. Yvon Godin: My last question is for you, Ms. Adam. I would like to have an honest and sincere answer, although obviously I know that you are always honest and sincere.

In February 2006 the administrative support structure for the minister responsible for official languages was moved from the Privy Council Office to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Ms. Dyane Adam: That is correct.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you have any concerns about this transfer of responsibility? The government felt it was important to transfer this authority from the Privy Council Office to the Department of Canadian Heritage. In theory, the two departments rank equally in the government hierarchy, but which one has decision-making powers? Which one holds the purse strings? The authority seems to have been downgraded to a lower rank. I would like to hear your opinion on the matter.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I mentioned this matter earlier. I do have concerns and let me tell you why.

Prior to 2001 there was no minister responsible for official languages. The position was created in response to some of my recommendations and those made by other groups. It was felt that a minister was required as official languages concerns all departments; we established that there was a need for a champion or a leader, who would coordinate and ensure, be it by stick or by carrot, that departments respected their obligations. In addition, we felt that it was incumbent upon the government, through a group of deputy ministers and a group of ministers responsible for official languages, to exercise this responsibility.

The minister responsible for official languages was not mandated to ensure service delivery. He had a more objective role, offering an outsider's perspective. Now, however, the minister responsible for official languages is responsible for official language program delivery — and these programs are major Canadian Heritage programs, — while also receiving support services from the Deputy Minister for Canadian Heritage.

I know few people who would be able to maintain independence when asked, as this minister has been asked, to defend his or her

department and provide services while simultaneously acting as a critic of the department. Such a situation creates a problem. Even if there are two distinct structures, it does not change the fact that they are operating under the same deputy minister and the same two assistant deputy ministers.

How can they send out an independent message to the federal government? I feel that such a situation could lead to confusion and conflict of roles and responsibilities. When such a situation occurs within an organization — and we have all been members of organizations —, the result is stagnation. We are running the risk of stagnation. More time will be spent on clarification and on getting the message across than on real action.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Have you finished your question, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you saying that time slows down for Acadians?

The Chair: It is just that Mr. Simard would like to use the remainder of your time to ask a brief question.

[*English*]

Hon. Raymond Simard: In fact, Mr. Chair, I was going to speak about horizontal management. Mr. Dykstra brought it up, and I think it's a very good point. Maybe an example I can give in St. Boniface is that Health Canada financed the

Centre de santé de Saint-Boniface.

They have just established the best system in Canada, in that they ensure that you will have a doctor's appointment within two days. It's unseen anywhere else in the country, and it's being copied. The Minister of Health in Manitoba is stunned by what they've done. They're very small but very focused. It is working very well.

[*Translation*]

I would like to ask two brief questions.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The NDP...

Hon. Raymond Simard: Could you please tell us about the importance of maintaining and developing the Official Languages Action Plan?

My second question is on the Official Languages Act. It was adopted in 1969 and, I believe, amended in 1988. It has already been 18 years since it was last revised.

Do you think that the time has come for the committee to study this question, or, indeed, is it time for a comprehensive review of the Official Languages Act?

•(1035)

Ms. Dyane Adam: I'll answer your last question first. When I began my mandate, I was told that the Official Languages Act was similar to a monument, that is that you only attempted work on it if it was absolutely necessary.

I've been in my position for seven years now, and I would say that we have made significant changes to the act without much debate. The changes have not caused much of a stir, and the act has more teeth.

In my opinion, if the government acted on part VII as we recommended, then it could do some very good work. The legislation is currently quite satisfactory. What we need to do is focus on implementation tools, such as regulations. I think that should be the priority for the next while.

The other question was on the Official Languages Action Plan. I know that the current government is committed to supporting it and complying with it, but we do not know. The Action Plan for Official Languages had various goals. One of those goals related to the federal public service. The goal was that the public service be an example in terms of official languages. Resources were assigned for the purposes of that goal for three years. One could ask what the current government is going to do. It has not announced anything. Will it keep the innovation fund for official languages? Will it continue to invest in language training? We still do not have enough bilingual labour. That is one of the current questions with respect to the Action Plan for Official Languages.

Given that the action plan comes to an end in 2008, it is important to think about reinvesting and about the process that will be undertaken almost immediately by this government in order to ensure that the plan is reviewed and, if need be, improved by adding elements that were left out. In my opinion, your question is very relevant and it is time for the government to consider that issue.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adam. Mr. Harvey would like to ask you a question.

Mr. Luc Harvey: After having heard four rounds of questions, is there one question that you would have liked to be asked and that has not yet been asked?

Ms. Dyane Adam: I do like your questions. Are you by any chance a psychologist?

Mr. Luc Harvey: Perhaps I have become somewhat of one after having raised four children.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I will make one comment. I must say that I enjoyed working as the Official Languages Commissioner. I particularly appreciated working with parliamentary committees and with you as individuals. Over the years, relationships are formed. I have also learned, through my work, to better appreciate the work of members of Parliament and of those who make significant sacrifices in their personal lives in order to fulfill their public mandate. Sometimes, when I read the newspapers and I see how the Canadian public treats its politicians or elected officials, I think to myself perhaps they're right in...

My purpose here is not to flatter you. I think that your duties are very demanding. I have greatly appreciated the work we have all done together, the support you have given me and my team, the respect that you have shown us and the fact that you have taken our recommendations into account. I have always felt that there was communication, commitment and an impact. I think that most of the time, you have done your work. As a Commissioner, I have been well supported and I thank you for that.

● (1040)

Mr. Luc Harvey: My parliamentary secretary is absent, but I would like to thank you. In order to do so we will follow parliamentary custom.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Do we stand up in Parliament?

[*English*]

The Chair: Before I adjourn the meeting, I'd like to say that this will, in all probability, be the last time Ms. Adam will be appearing before the committee, at least in her capacity as Commissioner of Official Languages, as her mandate will be coming to an end in the coming weeks.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind committee members that a small reception is being held in honour of Ms. Adam. The reception will be in this room after the meeting.

Ms. Adam, I hope that you and your team will be able to attend.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Thank you.

The Chair: I spoke with representatives of the Minister of Transport this week. They are willing to appear before the committee. However, they won't be able to come before next week. The clerk has spoken with officials who have said they will be able to come.

Thursday?

The Clerk of the Committee: Tuesday.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You mean next Tuesday?

The Chair: Yes, in other words, in one week. On Thursday, I believe we will be meeting with Ms. Verner.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, does that mean we will be meeting with Ms. Verner on Thursday and Mr. Cannon on Tuesday?

The Chair: No, he is not ready.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We'll be meeting with his officials.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When will he actually come?

The Chair: It will not be next week. That is all he could tell us.

Mr. Yvon Godin: He won't come next Thursday or next Tuesday? Then the truth is that he does not want to come.

The Chair: Yesterday, he told us that he would not be able to come next week.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand, Mr. Chairman. However, we asked the minister to appear before this committee. I think this is important.

The Chair: Yes, I explained that to him. He agrees.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it possible to set a date?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It won't be in September, nor in October.

The Chair: I spoke to him yesterday afternoon.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am serious: I want the minister to come before this committee and I don't want it to be in September, October or November. We have to be able to talk about the important issue of Air Canada. Otherwise, Air Canada will continue to act as it wishes. For that reason, it is important to meet with the minister.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Godin, I can confirm that Lawrence truly wants to come but he simply is not available next week.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In that case, I would like to know if our officials can see if he is available the following week. We can then confirm that meeting.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Chairman, if we're planning on drafting a report before we rise for the summer, then it would be important to meet with the minister and to hear his perspective. We could spend one meeting on the report. I don't know if that gives our research staff enough time. However, it is important that we do this work and that we table a report before we rise for the summer.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to contact the minister's office.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

The Chair: Is that all?

Hon. Raymond Simard: That is fine.

The Chair: Then let us go and honour Ms. Adam.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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