



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 012 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 28, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Guy Lauzon

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, September 28, 2006

•(0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

[English]

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

[Translation]

I would like to start by welcoming our witness for this morning, Mr. Graham Fraser.

[English]

I want to welcome Mr. Graham Fraser.

[Translation]

Here is how we will proceed. We will start with a 10 to 15 minute speech by Mr. Fraser. We will then move on to a period of questions from the representatives of the various parties. Just prior to concluding our meeting, we will move to in camera for 15 minutes in order to discuss the committee's future business.

Welcome, Mr. Fraser. Feel free to start whenever you are ready.

Mr. Graham Fraser (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Members of Parliament,

[English]

good morning.

I am honoured to be before you to discuss my nomination to be Commissioner of Official Languages.

While this is far from the first meeting of your committee that I've attended, it's the first time I've done so in this chair. I'm reminded of an appearance I made before a neighbourhood working committee that was engaged in the planning of urban renewal for the Treffan Court neighbourhood in Toronto. I wanted the approval of the committee to write a book about the process and was very aware of the tensions that existed between the homeowners, the tenants, and the businessmen, so I was very nervous. I made my presentation. The committee gave its approval. I went on to write the book. But after the meeting one of the homeowners said to a community worker, "If he writes like he talks, it's not going to be much of a book."

It is a particular honour to be considered for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages. I have followed the careers of the previous commissioners, read their reports, gone to their press conferences and committee hearings, met most of them, interviewed

several of them for my own work, and I have a great deal of respect for all of them. It is a challenging and important position.

Let me introduce myself. I was born in Ottawa and moved to Toronto as an adolescent with my family. I attended the University of Toronto, where I did a BA and later an MA in history. I became a journalist in 1968, and with a few breaks to travel, study, or write books, I've worked in Canadian journalism since then—for the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Maclean's*, and *The Gazette*—in Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, Washington, and Ottawa.

I've spent a significant part of my career writing about Quebec for the rest of Canada and, in a column for *Le Devoir* between 1995 and 2000, about the rest of Canada for Quebec. But the critical experience that made that career possible occurred when I was a unilingual English-speaking university student. In 1965 I went to work on an archeological dig at Fort Lennox on Île aux Noix on the Richelieu River, south of Montreal. That summer I not only learned French, I discovered how little I had known or understood my own country. I developed a deep interest in and affection for Quebec that has lasted ever since.

It was also, paradoxically, an experience that helped me to understand both the difficulty of learning a second language and something of the immigrant experience, for learning another language and culture makes one more empathetic to those who have moved here from other countries.

At one point a bilingual fellow student said to me, "You're very different in French than you are in English". "Of course I'm different", I snapped, "I am stupid, I am inarticulate, and I have no sense of humour."

[Translation]

Ever since, I have always thought that linguistic duality and cultural diversity are not contradictory, as some would have us believe, but deeply linked. In fact, without the recognition — conscious or unconscious — that Canada comprises two language communities, the very notion of multiculturalism would be difficult to accept.

And while this link between linguistic duality and cultural diversity is a close one, it strikes me as poorly understood — even to this day.

To my mind, one of the key tasks of the next commissioner will be to continue explaining this important relationship — not only for the majority language communities, but for the minority communities as well. Canada's French-speaking communities are now welcoming large numbers of immigrants, in much the same way as the English-speaking communities are doing.

And I might just add at this point that I think there are already examples of immigrants who have come to Canada and become part of one or the other linguistic community. Not only have they become competent in the second official language, they are also quite eloquent. There are examples of this both within this committee and in Parliament in general. So to anybody who says these notions are contradictory, I say, here are some living examples of the contrary.

● (0910)

[English]

Since my nomination I've been asked several times to articulate my vision for the commissioner. I felt I should wait until meeting with you to do so.

The first most important point is my belief in the importance of linguistic duality in Canada. I think it is one of the central defining characteristics of the country.

As you know, the commissioner has six roles or functions in the enforcement of the Official Languages Act: a promotion and education role, a monitoring role in terms of the impact of government initiatives, a liaison role with minority communities, an ombudsman role dealing with complaints, an auditing function in terms of the public service, and a judicial intervention function.

I described the role of the commissioner recently as part cheerleader, part nag. And in looking more closely at those six functions, three fall into the cheerleading category and three into the nagging category. These are also related. The more successful the commissioner is in promoting, educating, monitoring, and carrying on the liaison function, the fewer complaints and court actions there will be.

[Translation]

The commissioner is an agent of Parliament — something that takes on special importance now that there have been amendments to the act. For these amendments have not been instigated by the government — neither the current government nor the previous one. Rather, it is thanks to you, Canada's parliamentarians, that this act has been amended for the first time since 1988. This has been a lengthy endeavour, and I commend you for your perseverance.

Last spring, I was impressed to hear Minister Josée Verner, before the same committee, express her commitment and that of her government to these changes. As you know full well, these amendments give the minority communities some very powerful instruments to ensure that the government takes their interests into account. I believe that the top priority of the next commissioner will be to ensure the successful implementation of part VII of the act.

Unfortunately, when one talks about governance in French, there is a concept that gets lost in the translation, so to speak. The phrase in English is “the public service”, whereas in French, one talks about “la fonction publique.” The concept of “service” is very important:

the machinery of government must **serve** citizens, and not just **function**. And if citizens are not served in the official language of their choice, a crucial link between citizen and state is broken.

Addressing you today, I find myself in a rather interesting situation. Six months ago, I published a book on language policy called *Sorry, I Don't Speak French*. My aim in writing this book was to remind Canadian anglophones that the language issue remains of the utmost importance for our country.

With your indulgence, I would like to share with you a few of the key points I tried to stress in my book, which form part of my perception of Canada's linguistic duality.

First, I made the observation that language policy does not exist to protect, or even promote bilingualism, even though it cannot succeed without a certain number of people being bilingual. It exists to protect those who speak but one language. There are 4 million unilingual francophones in this country — and 20 million unilingual anglophones.

The act is there to guarantee that the 7 million francophones, and more specifically these 4 million unilingual francophones, are provided with federal services as effectively and efficiently as the 20 million unilingual anglophones are — including the minority anglophone community in Quebec. The act is not there to force people to learn another language, nor to create a country where everyone is bilingual.

When people talk about language policy, they often refer to it as “a dream”, as though it were unrealistic or unfeasible. Well, if I believed that, I would not be here today. Something I tried to get across in my book — and this may strike you as prosaic — is that English and French are **Canadian** languages. French is not some private code, nor is it the private property of Quebecers. The French language belongs to all Canadians, just as the English language belongs to all Canadians. It is a legacy — and an opportunity.

● (0915)

[English]

Over the last two years, I've spoken about language, language rights, and the history of language legislation in a variety of platforms across the country, in lectures, interviews, and on open-line radio shows from Vancouver to Halifax. As a result, I can tell you from personal experience what a recent poll for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages confirmed recently. There's an enormous pool of goodwill towards linguistic duality in Canada. There are concerns about access to immersion education, about the effectiveness of federal regulations, but the hostility to the goal of linguistic duality is now marginal.

But there are other broader challenges that face the next commissioner beyond the amendments to the law. Immigration is transforming Canada's cities, and it will be a continuing challenge to convey the importance of linguistic duality to those newcomers. Immigration, cultural diversity, and economic and technological change have been constant factors in Canada, not only over the last four decades when the Official Languages Act has been in force, but throughout our history.

The next commissioner will have to respond to those changes, just as the previous commissioners have done, but the fundamental question, in my view, remains the one that the late André Laurendeau and the late Davidson Dunton would ask at the beginning of the public hearings of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism four decades ago: Can English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians live together, and do they want to do so? I believe an official language policy that works is essential if the answer to those questions continues to be affirmative.

Thank you. I'd be glad to answer your questions.

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

Now we will start our first round. We have questions from each party for a seven-minute period.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rodriguez, the floor is yours.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, all. Good morning, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Good morning.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for being here with us today. I would like to say right from the outset that I have a lot of respect for the work you have done over the years, both as a journalist and as an author. You see, I had the opportunity to read your book on a beach in Mexico.

It was very interesting, Mr. Chair. What is more, I would recommend that all members of the committee get a copy of the book.

There is a plug for you, sir.

There is no getting around the fact that you have big shoes to fill. I am sure you will agree that Dyane Adam, the Commissioner of Official Languages, adopted a very proactive and engaged approach when it came to official languages. And I am convinced, based on what I know, that you will make this role yours and do what needs to be done.

I have two questions I would like to ask you, the first of which is rather general. You referred to the six elements which make up the role of commissioner. When you get to the office tomorrow morning, what will your number one priority be? What do you intend to do?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think that my number one priority will be to focus on the amendments to the act. We will need to determine what the impact of these amendments will be, how they will change the relationship between the office of the Commissioner and minority communities, that is between government and minority communities.

I believe that the amendments to the act will have a bearing on the six elements I referred to. My role will be to promote, to educate, and to liaise. This may lead to complaints concerning the commissioner's role as ombudsman. My role will also involve monitoring any action the government takes and may also include legal action.

My number one priority will be to understand what these changes will mean. The name of the bill has been used for a long time in reference to these changes. I myself avoid any reference to the bill, because we are no longer dealing with a bill, this is the law. It is my responsibility, therefore, to understand this new act in its entirety.

I have observed in the past that when legislation is amended, it takes time for the machinery of government to absorb the effects of such changes. Right from the beginning of my term in office, I would make a point of understanding this particular dynamic.

● (0920)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Especially since, as you said, this new legislation will have a horizontal component to it. In other words, each and every department will be involved and will not only have to understand its new role but also be able to, and want to, play this role in the future.

You said that Bill S-3 has now become law. And I agree. Its implementation is also one of our top priorities. We would be interested in knowing how the government intends to implement the new act.

This week's cutbacks have struck us as quite paradoxical. It is my personal opinion that they were ideologically based, since there was no need for them in the first place. They were made, however, because they were considered necessary. The Court Challenges Program was cut, and that, in my opinion, is quite a paradox. Once upon a time, the Conservatives voted in favour of Bill S-3 enabling communities to take the government to court should it fail to fulfil its obligations. This important bill, which was used in many court cases, was also left to die. I cannot help but think about the francophone schools and Montfort Hospital, which, obviously, suggests the following question, albeit a slightly sensitive one for you to have to answer.

What do you think about the elimination of the Court Challenges Program?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am in a bit of an awkward position. First of all, Ms. Adam is still the commissioner and has made a statement on this matter. I do not want in any way to minimize the importance of her statement nor those of the community organizations which have taken a stand.

I just got here and I am between a rock and a hard place, if you will. I do not want to answer you with my journalist's hat on, but I cannot speak as if I were already the commissioner either. But I have questions of my own: how can that decision be reconciled with statements the Minister made in the spring? What will the impact of this decision be on the act and on its enforcement? How many cases are currently before the courts? Could this decision have an impact on the outcome of cases already before the courts? Would the commissioner perhaps have to respond to complaints?

Giving responses to this question now may, I think, compromise the role any future commissioner will have to play when faced with certain situations, especially since I do not have all the necessary information in hand.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I understand the position you are currently in. However, I also understand that you have made a commitment, to some extent, and that once in office, you will make it your business to consider this issue.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Of course, this is a matter which concerns me and which is of great concern to minority communities. I will be focusing very seriously on these concerns.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: In conclusion, I would simply like to stress what a good choice Mr. Fraser is for this position, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to wish him every success.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Ms. Barbot.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Congratulations, Mr. Fraser. I would like to thank you for being here. I am very glad you were nominated. I think that we will really benefit from the services, in the full sense of the word, of somebody who is thoroughly dedicated to the cause of official languages. And I think that is important.

You mentioned in your presentation that you learned French, which gave you an understanding of what immigrants experience when they come here from another country. Indeed, this is an important factor in relation to learning a second language.

You also referred to your fondness for Quebec, which I myself have developed. This is something we have in common. I think it is also important to stress how language is not dissociable from culture. Culture and language are intrinsically linked. That is not generally understood. This is an important notion to me because what is behind language, at the end of the day, contributes greatly to who we are and what we do.

For example, you compared the terms “public service” in English, and “fonction publique” in French. There is a fundamental difference in what is meant by these two terms. These notions are intrinsic to the relationship between the two languages and between the two communities. What does all this mean? It means that language is not just words, but what lies beneath them.

You also referred to multiculturalism and said that people had trouble accepting such a notion. I think it is because they misunderstand it. I would like you to tell us what you think multiculturalism is and, particularly, what your understanding is of the two concepts of linguistic duality and cultural diversity, in a Canadian context.

• (0925)

Mr. Graham Fraser: For 40 years, the francophone communities inside and outside Quebec have been transformed, not just psychologically but also economically, from the status of a minority into an integrative society.

I think that at the moment, immigrants to Canada have a genuine choice about integrating into the francophone community, obviously in Quebec, but also in a place like Toronto, for example, where more and more francophones who arrive from other countries send their children to French schools.

For the first time, minority communities outside Quebec, which have always defined themselves as traditional French-Canadian communities, are seeing newcomers from other countries and other cultures. This can be somewhat of a challenge for communities that have always defined themselves as independent and hermetic to some extent; they have to open up their institutions, their schools to people who are not descendants of the original French settlers. That is a change that has been happening in Quebec since the introduction of Bill 101 in the 70s. And now it is a challenge facing minority communities in the rest of the country.

I know that the Acadian community has made some efforts to encourage immigrants to come to New Brunswick. Now that we have a network of French schools not just in Quebec but throughout the country, the challenge is to welcome these francophones who arrive from other countries.

I have always been struck by the fact that with the changes to the language law in Quebec, in 25 years, that province managed to do what it took English-speaking America 150 years to do: namely, to accept that their language would be spoken, with an accent, by others.

When I came to Quebec in the 60s, as soon as people heard my accent, they spoke to me in English. Now, it is accepted that people can speak French with an accent. It is accepted that French is a public language, and not just a private code used by a minority. I think that this is a very important evolution of society, and it has not happened just in Quebec.

• (0930)

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I would like to hear your views on linguistic duality and cultural diversity, because there is a tendency to confuse the two concepts.

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I said, I think these two concepts do come together. Being a francophone no longer means what it meant 40 or 50 years ago. In the past, there was total identification between the French language and the French-Canadian community. It was really unusual for immigrants to come to Canada and to be integrated into the French-speaking community as others always had been in English.

I see the following connection. Rather than having an integrative, welcoming society in English and a traditional, hermetic society, the French-Canadian society, we have two dynamic societies that welcome others into their two linguistic communities. Therefore I see a dynamic at play in both languages and both language communities. That is my view of the situation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser and Ms. Barbot.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Savoie.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank you for your presentation, Mr. Fraser. I am going to make a plug for your book as well. I very much enjoyed the excerpt I read from *Sorry, I Don't Speak French*. I have two questions.

My family and I have been living in British Columbia for many years now. I tried very hard to ensure that my children, who are now adults, would speak French. And now I have grandchildren. My question may be somewhat sensitive, but I do think that it is very important for children to learn French when they are very young. The cutbacks made by the Conservative government to childcare and other services for young children jeopardize the opportunity to learn and develop in French that francophone children had in the past in provinces outside of Quebec.

Can you comment on this?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Without commenting directly on a decision of the current government, and without considering all the ramifications, I would like to make this point. One of the things I have been struck by is the growing interest for French in British Columbia. There are 30,000 students in immersion programs alone. The number is limited by the funds available. I looked at the trends in the eighties, and had funds not been limited, there would have been a million students in immersion programs in Canada, rather than 300,000. That shows the commitment that exists regarding language.

With respect to francophone minorities, I agree 100%. If we look at the figures in the action plan and the resulting report, we see that assimilation is a serious problem. I think one of the ways of dealing with this is to start language training when children are very young.

I was lucky, I was able to learn French, but French is my second language, it is not my mother tongue. I think that when children are learning not just academic material but are also developing an identity, this is a very important issue. However, I do not have enough information at the moment about the details of the program to comment further. This issue is of concern to me.

● (0935)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Programs of this type would have enabled francophone groups to set up nursery schools where French would be offered much more frequently than it is at the moment. There are a few such institutions, but this type of program would have provided financial assistance.

I have a second question, if I have any time left.

A number of years ago, I worked for the Department of National Defence for quite a long period of time. Over the years, I noticed that young francophone recruits from Quebec who were starting their military career had to take courses in order to advance. Often, too often, the teaching materials were in English only. So young Quebecers or francophones who were not that proficient in English had more trouble and failed more often than other students.

I am wondering what the federal government could do to ensure that teaching material is available in French regardless of the career — for mechanics and others, for example — because too often recruits adopt English, because in order to work in their trade, they have to learn the terms in English. And French suffers as a result of this.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I know that the history of the two official languages within the armed forces is not always glowing. In his memoirs, Jean-Victor Allard, who was the Chief of the Defence Staff, wrote that at one time joining the Canadian armed forces

meant that francophones were headed toward assimilation and the loss of their culture. In an effort to counter that, the Collège militaire royal in Saint-Jean was established in 1952. That institution no longer exists, and I think it is increasingly difficult for the Canadian armed forces to meet the needs of francophones.

In the research I did for my book, I had an interview with General Roméo Dallaire. In his memoirs, he said that when he was an officer in an artillery regiment, he discovered that it was impossible for his regiment to achieve its full potential because of language limitations. So he had to work very hard to get materials in French. He saw an immediate effect on soldiers' morale and on their effectiveness.

I think that ultimately it is the question of effectiveness and operational considerations. It is not merely symbolic. I was struck by something he said to me in English. It was this:

● (0940)

[*English*]

To be a Canadian officer you must be able to communicate, not just talk but communicate, in the language of the soldier, because no longer will the soldier die in the language of the officers.

[*Translation*]

Now that we are asking these soldiers to risk their lives, I think the issue is becoming increasingly important.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser and Ms. Savoie.

It is now the Conservative Party's turn. We will begin with Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I would like to start by thanking you for being here today. As the member of Parliament for a riding with a minority language community, I would like to congratulate you on your book *Sorry, I Don't Speak French*, which is very well researched and very interesting. I appreciate the comments you make in your book.

I am the Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, a riding that begins beside Orleans and extends right to the Quebec border. There are 65,000 Franco-Ontarians living in my riding. As you know, we are proud of our heritage as Franco-Ontarians. Our community is dynamic and vibrant. As a result, many organizations, associations and programs offer services in French to Franco-Ontarians, and our government supports those efforts.

I hope you will have an opportunity to visit my constituency. It would be a great honour to have you come to see us.

In your book, you suggested some ways of promoting bilingualism and the official languages in Canada. Recently, our government announced agreements on education with all the provinces and territories for a total of one billion dollars. And, two weeks ago, Minister Josée Verner and her colleague, Minister Monte Solberg, announced a strategic plan to encourage franco-phone immigration. This plan was well received by the official language minority communities.

I would like your views on this type of initiative and other similar initiatives that could strengthen the vitality of official language minority communities.

Mr. Graham Fraser: In principle, I think this type of initiative is very important. I must confess that I have not examined these particular initiatives in detail, but where official languages are concerned, all areas of education—primary, secondary, post-secondary and labour force training—are very important. I think that the issue of immigration is also very important for official language minority communities.

I do not wish to comment on these initiatives in detail, because I have not reviewed them, but in principle, I think that there have been programs in place for a long time to support education in the second language and in the minority language. I will follow this issue very closely to ensure that this support continues and that the programs work as well as possible. I will also be trying to see what can be done to improve them.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I think the important thing is to have programs that offer concrete services. At the beginning of the summer, we announced \$500,000 for one year for the City of Ottawa to help it with its efforts to provide services in French in the national capital.

Could you tell us about how important you think it is for the official language minority communities to have access to services in their language?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think that it is very important. To some extent, the commissioner's role as liaison between the minority communities and the government amounts to support for minority communities so that they can be heard. The commissioner's role is also to try to act as a link between you, the members of Parliament, the minority communities and the government.

As I said, I was born in Ottawa. I am very aware that as the national capital, Ottawa has an additional responsibility, particularly as regards language. And I am sometimes astounded to see that as far as language goes, Ottawa is not very welcoming to francophones. I think that it is a tradition in Ottawa to be resistant to francophones' demands. I think that businesses in the capital should realize that in strictly commercial terms, there is a market of francophones who are unilingual or much more comfortable in French in this city.

People should not find themselves in a unilingual city, to all intents and purposes, once they leave Parliament Hill. As a resident of Ottawa, I sometimes find it ridiculous that Ottawa does not offer a more welcoming face to francophones.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Fraser.

We will begin our second round with Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Fraser, for appearing before the committee this morning.

I understand the problems you have raised. It is quite a sensitive matter for you to make comments, given that the current Commissioner of Official Languages is still in her position.

However, I would like you to answer this question. As you no doubt know, it has not been easy for minorities to improve their

situation over the years. I am referring to francophones outside Quebec, but also to anglophones in Quebec. In fact, there are certain parts of rural Quebec where many anglophones live. Things are not easy for those people. I am not talking about Montreal here, but about other regions.

Over the years, the communities have managed to achieve certain things, and this is how they have been able to improve their lives as minorities. I use the word "minorities", because that is in fact what they are.

Do you think that a weakening of their achievements jeopardizes the continuous advancement of the two official language minority communities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Of course, a loss is a loss. Personally, I spent 10 years in Quebec as a member of the anglophone community — three years in Montreal and seven in Quebec City. In Quebec City I noticed that the needs of the anglophone minority community changed over time. Even in Montreal, the community there is aging. And the needs of a community of seniors are very different from those of a young, active community. In many cases, people 65 and older who have retired also suddenly have significant needs for health care and social services, which they never had when they were working. So then they feel more vulnerable.

I do not think we can say that the needs that appear at certain times will always remain the same. So we cannot view the needs of a minority community as a static phenomenon. They change with the demographic changes in the community. Minority communities will always have certain needs, but they will change over time.

There are also problems associated with isolated communities. These have nothing to do with language, but they must be taken into account. Sometimes schools close, not because of linguistic prejudice, but because there are no school-age children. I think that schools become a particularly important institution for minority language communities. Yes, I am very aware of the needs of minority communities, since I was part of such a minority when my children were young.

● (0950)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I appreciate your comments very much, Mr. Fraser. It is true that the situation is not static, it evolves over time. Citizens move from one region to another, and that can have some impact on the situation. Since things are not static, people have to be able to continue to develop and progress, but ways must also be found to offer minorities the services to which they are entitled.

Let us take the example of schools in the Atlantic region, in Nova Scotia, or the example of the Montfort Hospital, here in the Ottawa region. You spoke about demographic change. If a particular region suddenly has enough people to open a school, that does not necessarily mean that the community will have the resources that it needs to defend its rights.

Do you think that funding cuts to these communities will mean that their future will be less rosy than it is at the moment? Things are not easy as it is. These people no longer have the resources they need, precisely because their situation is constantly evolving.

The Chair: There is just one minute left for your answer.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have made note of your concerns, but I do not want to say things on the second round that I avoided saying on the first round. I share your concerns, and I will look into these matters carefully.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I am very pleased that you agree with me on this, Mr. Fraser.

The Chair: Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): First, Mr. Fraser, I would like to thank you for appearing before the committee today. I would like to raise a very specific matter with you.

I have been a lawyer in Quebec for over 33 years, and I still have an office there. At the moment, the issue of language in the courts is a problem we often have to deal with. As you know, even though the people on the other side of the table do not believe it, our government has made a firm commitment on official languages, and I will tell you why.

On June 22 of this year, I supported a bill that is very important, particularly for people accused of a crime. In the future, the judge and the jury will have to understand the official language of the accused. Heaven knows we have had problems in this regard in both English and French, depending where the charge was laid. We have decided to change the approach regarding this most fundamental right—the right of an accused to be tried in his or her own language. When there is a judge and a jury, this is an important factor. People familiar with the field know that, usually, serious indictable offences are involved—homicide or worse. People facing a sentence of 25 years in prison should know that the jury properly understood their defence. It is perhaps the most important point. I understand that health and safety are important, but sentencing people to 25 years in prison without knowing whether the jury or even the judge understood everything correctly is absolutely terrifying.

On June 22 of this year, our government decided to introduce an amendment to the Criminal Code of Canada. This is a subject I would like to raise with you. Are you familiar with this bill? I think the right to be tried in one's own language is a fundamental right. The Conservative government decided to table a bill to do just that.

Do you feel comfortable with the fact that for the 100 years they were in power, these people did not even claim that there would be a judge or a jury that spoke the language of the accused? There have been some serious cases in Manitoba and in Quebec that resulted from the fact that the jury did not speak the language of the accused. Manitobans know all about this. Those people were in power for 100 years, and this is the first time there has been such an important change in this area. This is just a subsection of the code, but it will change many things for people who are charged with an offence when they are travelling across this country. They will at least have the right to a trial in their own language.

So I would like to know whether you are familiar with this bill and, if so, what you think about it.

• (0955)

Mr. Graham Fraser: No, I was not familiar with this bill. So I cannot comment on it in detail. However, what I can say is what

I said earlier to another member: if people feel vulnerable once they reach a certain age and have to deal with the health care system, clearly it is also true that people who are accused are in an extremely vulnerable situation.

I recently attended a convention of the *Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario* where an award was given to Chief Justice Roy McMurtry for his efforts to ensure that the justice system in Ontario functions in both languages. Before that change, people thought it was impossible for the system to adjust to these needs. Changes had to be made in the administrative structure of the justice system in Ontario, and from what I have heard and the tributes paid to Mr. McMurtry, the system is working quite well and is providing services in both languages.

I do think this is a very important right. While the right of citizens to be served by the government in their own language is important, it is even more important for—

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

It is Ms. Brunelle's turn.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): I would like to congratulate you on your appointment, Mr. Fraser. I am delighted to see your affection for and understanding of Quebec. I am very pleased to know that I may have an opportunity to speak to you more often in the weeks ahead.

My first battles as a teenager had to do with French in Quebec. We know how hard it is to ensure that a language will survive. So I can understand francophones living in minority situation.

You must encourage linguistic equality in Canada. I am wondering how we can do that if we do not start by recognizing that French, one of the two official languages in North America and Canada, is threatened.

Should our attitude not be that there is one language that is fragile, and that our efforts should be focused first and foremost on French?

I would also like to hear what you have to say about the situation of anglophones in Quebec as compared to that of francophone communities outside Quebec. I think the two situations are very different, and that consequently the approaches taken should be very different as well.

• (1000)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Of course, I want to answer your second question first.

As an anglophone in Quebec, I have never felt the frustration that others have felt. The only thing that frustrated me a bit was this mantra repeated by the francophone majority, saying that Quebec's anglophone institutions hold their existence to its generosity. Historically, for obvious reasons that I need not repeat, these institutions were built, created and maintained by the anglophone community.

I recently watched a biography of René Lévesque on television, and I was glad to see how much they emphasized the point that when the Parti Québécois was young, Mr. Lévesque defended the anglophone educational system in Quebec. He never hesitated to risk his own career in order to defend the rights of the anglophone minority.

It is true that when the situation of the anglophone minority in Quebec is compared to that of minorities in other parts of Canada, comparisons are frequently drawn between Montreal and Sudbury, or Montreal and Saint-Boniface. I think that such comparisons are not appropriate. With 600,000 people, there can be a certain degree of economic independence. Communities can fund their own projects; and this community has obvious economic strengths. We cannot expect minority communities outside Quebec to have the same economic or social momentum that Montreal's anglophone minority has.

But these comparisons are more appropriate in cases like Quebec City or Sherbrooke. When I lived in Quebec City, there were very good schools for my children. One of my sons received his entire education in French and another, for various reasons, benefited from Quebec's anglophone schools. We were very happy with this. Our minority community had the resources it needed in Quebec City. Some of my anglophone acquaintances have been living in Quebec for generations and they are still living there and returning there. They have resources in health care, education, plus a newspaper and a television station. I think that this is the kind of comparison we should draw when analyzing the needs of minority communities. Montreal is often used to evaluate the anglophone minority situation in Quebec. I do not think that this is appropriate.

• (1005)

The Chair: Ms. Savoie.

Ms. Denise Savoie: My question is a follow-up on Ms. Brunelle's question. How can we ensure the survival of francophone minorities outside Quebec? You mentioned Saint-Boniface. I live in Victoria, with a francophone population of about 1,400. As you say, we do not have any economic momentum.

What kind of role do you think the federal government should play to help foster these communities? For instance, my community had to fight to get a community radio station. It had a very hard time and very little help. Could the federal government take any steps to make life easier for francophones outside Quebec?

Secondly, what would be the first thing you would do to improve the survival of these francophone minorities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: When I attended this committee in June as a journalist, I heard a presentation by Minister Josée Verner, where she spoke of an action plan. As a journalist, I asked her some questions about this. First, I asked her whether this action plan was alive and well, and she answered that she was studying it to see if it could be improved. Then I asked her whether this action plan was meant as a minimum. She answered that in fact, the action plan was a minimum.

I was reassured by this as I looked into the file because the action plan covers an entire set of problems faced by minorities, by mixed marriages, and even includes the assimilation problems of francophone minorities. If my appointment is confirmed, this is one of the basic issues I want to deal with. I am not ready to

announce the first step of my plan, but I want to listen to the communities in order to identify the most important measures and to find out what our government intends to do in the future, following the road map announced by Ms. Verner last spring.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Let me carry on in the same vein. Mr. Lemieux just mentioned an initiative for attracting francophones. But they should not be encouraged to come and then left to their own devices. This happens all too often. You mentioned language as a social element, and this is what I want to know regarding the government action plan. This plan has to be funded, and the cutting of resources is not the way to go about it. Earlier, someone mentioned a program for young children, which would really give a concrete opportunity for francophones to encourage and help their children to learn French in a social setting. So let me enquire a bit further about the action plan.

How shall we go about implementing this fine legislation in the field, for the benefit of minorities?

• (1010)

Mr. Graham Fraser: What I want to know before giving a clear answer is the connection between the problems and programs that you have identified, and the initiatives that Mr. Lemieux recently mentioned. I do not know whether the government's statements have anything to do with your concerns.

But there is one thing I would like to say. Forty years ago, Premier Jean Lesage travelled to the west. In the speech that he made before the Canadian Club in every city, he said that if an engineer from Vancouver moves to Montreal, he does not lose his culture nor does he lose any services, but if an engineer is transferred or promoted from Montreal to Vancouver, he has to choose between, on the one hand, his career, and the culture and language of his children on the other hand.

Forty years later, if a manager from Montreal is faced with this choice, he has resources that could not even have been imagined in the past. There is Radio-Canada with its radio and television stations, there are French schools and community centres. Minority communities are much more active and have instruments that they did not have before. Now we have legislation that did not exist at the time and could not even be imagined back then.

If we take into account the problems that still exist, I think that we should also recognize the fact that we have made some headway.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser. I am sorry to interrupt you.

Let us start our third round of questions, with five minutes per question. Mr. Murphy has the floor.

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

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Fraser. I wish you all the best in your new position.

First let me note that I come from Acadie, from Moncton, and that I am an anglophone. When I arrived in Ottawa, I was astonished to see that the level of bilingualism found here was less than what we have in Moncton. I find this disturbing, because this is, after all, the national capital.

By the way, I would like to suggest that you encourage local politicians to adopt a bilingual policy. If it can be done in Moncton — and we all know about the impact of bilingualism on political life — it can be done in Ottawa, without a doubt. That was a comment, and not a question.

My question is about the impact of Bill S-3. I was not here at the time, but I know that the adoption of Bill S-3 was a very important event, not only because the Conservative Party decided, at the last moment, to adopt a position that is favourable to bilingualism, but also because this bill is very important for the quality of bilingual services everywhere in Canada.

Let me quote what you wrote when you were a journalist, because what journalists write is, as we all know, always true. Last December, you wrote the following in *The Toronto Star*:

[English]

S-3...requires the federal government to promote French-speaking minorities outside Quebec and the English minority in Quebec and gives them the right to go to court if the federal government doesn't take their interests into account.

[Translation]

This week we learned that the Court Challenges Program is about to be cancelled. As I prepared for this meeting, I remembered these words and I wondered whether the Court Challenges Program would deprive the public of a needed resource.

• (1015)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have the very same question.

Mr. Brian Murphy: It is a good question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: However, I am not ready to give you an answer now.

As I said previously, I do not want to minimize the importance of the commissioner's statement, but I have a whole set of questions. One of my questions is very similar to the one that you just put to me. At this stage, I am still dealing with questions and I have not gotten to the answers yet, but I am looking for them.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Have I any time left?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Let me raise another issue that is very important for our region, namely immersion courses. In Moncton, we see a good model; we have immersion courses that are working well. However, this is something like a hockey game. Now, you can play hockey as a child, as a young boy, but there comes a time when you can only watch hockey games.

The same applies to immersion courses. Language training begins early in our province, but, as you already wrote, anglophones who have learned French end up by losing what they learned when they go to university. I would also like to encourage universities to implement a mandatory second language policy.

Have you any comments about this?

Mr. Graham Fraser: In my statement, I said that one of the things that need to be emphasized, trivial as it may seem, is the fact that French is a Canadian language. This is just a polite way of saying that anglophone universities often teach French as a foreign language. Since my book was published, I have often said that we

have all that we need to make our language policy work, but now we have to put the elements together in the right way.

In my opinion, one of the elements in the system that is not working as it should is the fact the 300,000 students who took immersion courses, when they arrive at university, find out that French is being taught as a foreign language. This is, in fact, just a comment and I will continue repeating it and raising the issue.

On the other hand, none of us here are in charge of the curricula taught by universities and by primary and secondary schools. They are under provincial jurisdiction. I can only try to promote this issue. I will try to use persuasion, but neither I nor you can do very much about this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chairman, I am sorry but I have to leave for a press conference about another matter, because the Conservatives are keeping us busy, with all their budget cuts. Let me just say that the Liberal Party supports Mr. Fraser's appointment, and we want this to be put on the record.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Ms. Barbot, you have the floor.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Fraser, you just talked about promotion. In my opinion, that should be one of the most important aspects of your mandate, especially since it may be easier to work on that when you first arrive. Your answers show that you have a vision of what bilingualism is and that your vision is anchored in reality. You say that the purpose of the Official Languages Act is to protect minorities, but many people are not aware of that. So I would like to see you promote that aspect.

Other francophone communities sometimes say that Quebec has abandoned them. They do not understand the extent to which Quebec was and still is in survival mode. In my view, our language promotion policies are not incompatible with the protection of francophone communities outside Quebec. So I would like to know how you plan to do that promotion.

• (1020)

Mr. Graham Fraser: There is no doubt that Quebec nationalism has meant that language concerns were more centred on Quebec and that there has been a shift from French-Canadian nationalism to Quebec nationalism. That is part of the changing dynamics in French Canada since the 1960s.

But I think that there are important ties being created, in part through the development of the Francophonie and agreements between Quebec and other provinces. If I am not mistaken, there is now an agreement—I have not seen the details—between Quebec and British Columbia regarding the use of both languages at the Olympic Games. I did not mention that in my opening remarks, but I will be following developments in that area closely to be sure that the Olympic Games respect Canada's linguistic duality.

As an anglophone who does not come from Quebec, I think that I have a certain advantage when it comes to promoting linguistic duality. People will have less of a tendency to say that I am defending my own turf. I have strong ideas about linguistic duality and I have managed to express them from Vancouver to Halifax. I have been surprised to see how much goodwill and support there are for that idea. I believe that there is no longer that sort of hostility that used to exist toward French.

I can also tell you that I do not perceive major partisan differences. There is a kind of consensus between the members of this committee that these questions are important. You are also promoting linguistic duality. I think that there is fertile ground now to promote these ideas and I will try to continue to do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser, and thank you, Ms. Barbot.

We will go now to Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Fraser, on your nomination. I think that this is positive for francophones and official languages. As a francophone from Quebec, I have come to understand Canada's linguistic duality since my arrival in Ottawa.

I have made a commitment, along with my government, to steadfastly defend francophones and our official languages. The Prime Minister is doing a great deal in that regard. He always starts his speeches in French, and our linguistic duality is very important to him. There is a feeling now that the two communities and the two languages can coexist.

You have in-depth knowledge of both communities. I find it wonderful to see that a true anglophone has taken the opportunity to learn French. You enriched your life with our difference. Yes, we are different, but we are all fighting for the same thing here. That is what is interesting.

I would like to mention the important initiatives that we have developed for education. Ms. Josée Verner has signed bilateral agreements in education with every province and territory for a total of \$1 billion over four years. I think that this is very important. We know that the provinces and territories match the federal funding, so that means that \$2 billion will be invested between now and 2009 for official languages alone.

There are concrete examples. For instance, Ms. Josée Verner announced in May that funding would be provided to schools and community centres in Fredericton and St. John, New Brunswick.

I would like your opinion about the importance of those kinds of measures, especially for our children's education.

• (1025)

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I have already said, I feel that education is extremely important. I am not going to get into talking about the importance of decisions regarding certain programs, and I am not in a position to assess the importance of various initiatives either. I am not saying this to play down the importance of these initiatives in any way. I think that the next commissioner should look at the implementation, operation and real impact of these initiatives, in order to see how the funding is allocated for English and French as a second language and for minority language education.

On that point, I think that there is a real need for increased cooperation between francophones and francophiles. I am very much aware as well of the threat to minority communities because of immersion. So we have to look carefully at how the funding is divided between minority schools and second language teaching. I know very well that there is a difference between the role that I used to play as a journalist, without necessarily having access to all the details of programs and their impact, and the responsibility that I will have if I am appointed commissioner. But I certainly do not want to underestimate in any way the impact of programs and initiatives.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser and Ms. Boucher, we have time for two more questions.

We will begin with the member for Saint-Boniface, Mr. Simard.

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

Welcome, Mr. Fraser. I am pleased to support your nomination.

I have two short questions. First, I have not had the chance to read your book *Sorry, I don't speak French*, but I come from a province where I have often been told: "*Sorry, I don't want you to speak French.*"

Less than 25 years ago, the building of the Franco-Manitoban Society was burned down and the director and his family had their lives threatened. Twenty-five years is not so long ago!

But things have changed a great deal. There is more awareness now because of immersion programs and Canadian Parents for French, and so on. The reason I mention this is because I think that the Commissioner of Official Languages also has a role to play in raising that awareness.

We could have a commissioner who mainly sits and keeps half an eye on the government or one who goes around the country speaking to minority groups about their rights and to majority groups about the need to respect those rights and the importance of speaking both official languages.

In your role, are you limited to doing certain things, or do you have some leeway to promote official languages and not just stay here and monitor the government?

• (1030)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, I have a lot of leeway to promote official languages. I find myself in an interesting situation now because, as an author, I have been invited to give a number of talks in the fall, which I accepted last spring, a long time before this process started.

I do not know when or how the process will end, but I have not cancelled those speaking engagements. So I will be speaking in Vancouver at a conference of immersion teachers, and to a translators' association. One of the things that I plan to do in the first year of my mandate, if I am appointed, is certainly to visit all regions of Canada, in order to meet people, talk to them about various issues, learn from and listen to groups, provincial authorities and academics.

One of the problems is that we are often not fully aware of what is being done in other parts of the country. I think that the commissioner has a role as a rapporteur, if I can put it that way. For example, people in Saint-Boniface do not necessarily know what is happening in Moncton. Despite all the efforts made by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes du Canada, this is a big country. Not everyone is involved in these organizations. I hope to play a liaison role, not between minority communities and the government, but between the minority and majority communities in all regions of the country.

Something that struck me...

Hon. Raymond Simard: I would like to get in here, Mr. Chairman. How much time do I have left?

The Chair: One and a half minute.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I would like to go to my second question, if I may, Commissioner.

There is something that has always been a mystery for me. In the North American context and given the fragility of the French fact here, I have never understood why francophones outside Quebec and francophones in Quebec have not developed closer ties over the past 20 or 30 years. I find that surprising. We are just starting to see Quebec add to their own numbers the 2.6 million people who speak French, which includes one million francophones and 1.6 million francophiles.

In the research that you did for your book, did you discover why it has not been possible to have closer ties and a really solid relationship with Quebec?

Mr. Graham Fraser: At the time of the first referendum, I sought to know whether sovereignists were optimistic or pessimistic. Some told me that they were pessimistic because they were counting out francophones outside Quebec, and others told me that they were optimistic because they felt that Quebec could blossom as an independent country.

As a Canadian, I am naturally on the optimistic side. I believe that we can promote the rights and vitality of francophone communities not only in Quebec but also elsewhere in the country. I think that one very real aspect of Quebec nationalism has meant that French Canada has been seen as a dynamic that exists only within Quebec borders.

That perspective goes hand in hand with Quebec nationalism, a very important force within Quebec society. It does not mean that Quebec nationalists cannot be open to the world and to other francophone communities. In any case, Quebec nationalists have had their own special reasons to want to create a French society only within Quebec.

• (1035)

[English]

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

This committee is the official languages committee, and we recognize both official languages. Because most of us are bilingual, we have a tendency to speak in French most of the time, and every once in a while it's refreshing to use both official languages.

So I will give our last question to the Conservative member of Parliament, Patrick Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fraser, I would like to address the question of the importance of linguistic duality and official languages in Canada.

A recent survey by the office of the official languages commissioner suggested that support for bilingualism in Canada has gone from 56% three years ago to 72% today. You can see the success in this, for example, with immersion programs in Alberta and British Columbia, which had a stark increase in support, or summer language programs. I know I took some when I was a university student, and they've become increasingly popular.

What is your assessment of the progress of these different initiatives to promote the learning of a second language in Canada?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think they're very important. I learned French myself because of a federal program that was designed to try to recruit future archeologists. After a summer of digging trenches and ending up finding an outhouse in the fields outside Fort Lennox, I did not pursue a career as an archeologist. I discovered that I was actually much more interested in Quebec than I was in archeology, and I spent the next two summers working on a similar student project in a mental hospital in the east end of Montreal. At the time, it was called l'Hôpital Saint-Jean-de-Dieu. It's now l'Hôpital Louis-Hippolyte-Lafontaine.

I think those exchanges, those projects, those programs that enable young Canadians to learn the other language, and to do so in the context of working in the other society, are extremely important. They changed my life.

I think one of the continuing challenges for immersion...I mean, I'm a big supporter. As a parent, I saw my sons go through immersion. As a result, I'm aware of the shortcomings as well as the strengths of immersion. I think one of the challenges for immersion is to actually connect the immersion program with a French-speaking society. There is always the problem that children are learning the provincial curriculum in translation as opposed to actually connecting with a French-speaking society. But I think immersion has flourished the way it has out of an enormous amount of devotion and conviction and hard work by parents, by teachers, by provincial governments, and by support through the official languages and education program, which has invested over the years. I think these initiatives are extremely important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It's obvious, or it seems obvious to me, at least, Mr. Fraser, that you have the support of the members around this committee. It's my impression anyhow. I can't speak for every member. We certainly want to thank you for your time.

• (1040)

[Translation]

A decision will be made tomorrow. I hope that you will then become the Commissioner of Official Languages and that you will begin your duties right away.

We will suspend the meeting for two minutes and then resume in camera. Thank you.

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.