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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning everyone, committee members and guests. This morning, it is our pleasure and privilege to have Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages and his team.

Mr. Graham Fraser, on behalf of committee members, I would like to welcome you. This is the first time you've had the chance to appear before the committee, because you are starting your seven-year term. You have stated your vision of Canada, and you view the two official languages as forming an integral part of the identity and dialogue of our country, all based on respect for the values that are shared by committee members.

Without further ado, Mr. Fraser, I invite you to make your opening remarks. Then committee members will be able to question you.

Mr. Graham Fraser (Commissioner of Official Languages, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, members of Parliament, *mesdames et messieurs*, I am very pleased to meet with you today to discuss my very first annual report, which was tabled on May 15, and to present its highlights to you.

Before I start, allow me to congratulate you as a committee for having taken the initiative of visiting official language minority communities and reporting on their vitality. The report you published gives us a valuable record of their thoughts and concerns.

The foreword of the annual report summarizes my vision of the importance of our two official languages in Canadian society and the role of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

I start from the premise that our two official languages, English and French, belong to all Canadians. We live in a country where people speak 150 languages, some in existence well before the Europeans arrived. Nevertheless, the national conversation takes place in English and French. I believe that our two official languages belong to all Canadian citizens and are powerful tools for building bridges between us. This notion is based on respect—respect for unilingual citizens, for official language communities, for members of the public who are served by the federal government, and for employees who work for it.

Most Canadians wholeheartedly support the official languages policy, although they may not fully understand its application. The

education and promotion roles of my mandate are therefore essential. It should not be forgotten that these two key activities complement my responsibilities to defend language rights and to assess the government's performance.

Since the current administration took office, it sent positive signals with regard to Canada's linguistic duality. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who frequently starts his speeches in French, sets an eloquent example in his public appearances in Canada and abroad. Furthermore, the Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages, Josée Verner, has stated on several occasions, including where I'm sitting now, that the government has no intention of doing anything less than what's set out in the action plan for official languages.

While these are positive messages, they are marred by actions that significantly diminish their impact. In fact, I've noted a considerable gap between the government's words and actions. I'd like to discuss with you certain government actions taken over the course of the last year.

The budget cuts announced last September triggered an avalanche of complaints to my office from people who thought that some of the measures would have a negative impact on official language communities. The termination of funding for the court challenges program in particular delivered a serious blow to the ability of minority communities to defend their language rights. The elimination of the innovation fund is another prime example of the worrying measures taken last September.

I'm sure you've heard about the scope of our draft preliminary investigative report on the court challenges program. As you may have noted, we found that the government did not assess the impact of this program cut on official language communities. We will be taking into account comments received from the complainants and the institutions in question in the preparation of our final report.

[Translation]

In addition, we are still awaiting news on how the current government intends to follow up on the Action Plan for Official Languages, which forecasted investments of \$787 million over five years in several sectors that are key in promoting linguistic duality. As the Action Plan will come to an end next March 31, there is growing concern among stakeholders. The recent announcement of \$30 million of funding over two years to support official language communities can hardly replace a plan that resulted in major action in several strategic areas.

Unless the government acts quickly, I feel that the momentum created for official languages in 2003 will be lost.

That is why I recommend that the Minister for Official Languages, in cooperation with the communities, provinces and territories, develop an initiative, over the coming year, that will succeed the Action Plan for Official Languages and consolidate what has been gained. During the design process, the federal government must carefully consider expanding the scope of the Action Plan to include, in particular, arts and culture, youth initiatives and new measures for promoting linguistic duality.

The federal government has made significant changes to the official languages governance structure. In February 2006, two different roles were assigned to the Minister for Official Languages, namely the coordination of all federal institutions' activities related to official languages and the management of Canadian Heritage's official language support programs.

Another important change was the transfer of the Official Languages Secretariat from the Privy Council Office to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Finally, the Committee of Deputy Ministers on Official Languages was disbanded. This committee supported the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet in his leadership role within the federal administration of giving concrete expression to the objectives of Canada's language policy.

I am afraid that these changes will weaken horizontal governance.

I therefore recommend that the Minister for Official Languages review the Official Languages Accountability and Coordination Framework, taking into account the changes made to official language governance and the new obligations of federal institutions following the legislative amendments of November 2005.

The government's actions, and in some cases its inaction, raise doubts about whether it is truly committed to implementing the amended Part VII of the Official Languages Act. And yet we all remember that the legislation received broad support from the political party that now heads the government.

In December 2005, the Clerk of the Privy Council wrote to federal institutions to encourage them to examine the extent to which they met their mandates regarding the amended Part VII and to make the necessary improvements. Since then, Canadian Heritage has conducted an awareness tour and published a guide that aims "to orient federal government institutions in the performance of their responsibilities concerning the implementation of the government's commitment stated in section 41 of the Act." I congratulate the Clerk of the Privy Council and Canadian Heritage for taking these steps and encourage them to go further by setting out clear goals for institutions and implementing my recommendations.

I recommend that the Minister for Official Languages ensure Canadian Heritage review its accountability mechanisms for the implementation of sections 41 and 42 of the Act in order to put more emphasis on results.

I also recommend that the Minister for Official Languages ensure Canadian Heritage take a more transparent approach in the implementation of section 41 of the Act when determining the

institutions that have the most significant impact on communities and the promotion of linguistic duality.

As regards service to the public, I am deeply worried about a less rigorous implementation of the Official Languages Act in the federal public service. Without sustained leadership from officials, setbacks are imminent.

In this context, I can only find cause for concern in the data presented in the Annual Report on service to the public and language of work. I fear that we will fall behind even faster if, in addition to losing the tools required to provide high quality service, the public service has doubts about the government's commitment to official languages.

● (0910)

I therefore recommend that deputy heads in federal institutions ensure that front-line employees and all agents who respond to client enquiries actively offer services in both official languages at first contact, in order to encourage members of the public to use their official language of choice.

I ask the government to review these five recommendations, which would allow it to demonstrate clear leadership and focus its activities on initiatives that deliver results.

● (0915)

[English]

My mandate as commissioner in the Official Languages Act is to ensure recognition and compliance with the spirit and intent of the act, to protect the language rights of Canadians, and to promote linguistic duality and bilingualism across Canada.

In my role as ombudsman during 2006-07 I reviewed close to 1,000 complaints and initiated investigations of the 774 admissible ones. During the same period we also conducted audits and published reports, including the audit report on the implementation of part VII of the act at the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

My office also commissioned several research projects. Last January we published a study on public perceptions of French culture and learning French as a second language in Saskatchewan.

Over the coming year, among other things, I plan to focus on the role that post-secondary institutions play in second language learning, community vitality indicators, and the place of official languages in public service renewal.

We act as a watchdog when we participate in the drafting of laws, regulations, and policies. Our involvement over the past year focused mainly on the Air Canada Public Participation Act and the Federal Accountability Act. With regard to the court system, my office participated in several appeals last year; among them was the Fédération Franco-ténoise case.

Now that the Federal Accountability Act has received royal assent, my office must rise to new challenges. To respond to one of them, I appeared last March before the advisory panel on the funding of officers of Parliament, better known as the panel, to request additional resources to prepare and implement two major government initiatives: access to information and internal auditing. I have good reason to believe that my request for additional funding will be approved. In the medium term, the office of the commissioner will have to respond to new issues, which will in turn lead us to rethink our normal administrative needs.

The beginning of my mandate is an ideal opportunity to review how the commissioner plays the ombudsman role and to study how effectively this assists in attaining the act's objectives. My office must continue to ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act. To make sure that subsection 41(2) of the act is respected, we will have to monitor the level of government commitment to linguistic duality and community participation in drafting government policy.

We must also be watchful as to how the government meets its mandate to implement part VII and develop a new action plan. Above all, we will have to emphasize the promotion of linguistic duality in official language majority communities.

Thank you for your attention.

[*Translation*]

I would be happy to answer any questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Commissioner, for presenting the highlights of your annual report.

We will now turn to the members of Parliament.

We will start with the official opposition, Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, I would like to welcome you and the persons with you to our committee.

First of all, I want to congratulate you on this first report. You have just taken up your duties and you have nevertheless clarified and put the emphasis on most, if not all, of the concerns that we have in the House, particularly in this committee.

Two things have been of great concern to us: the first you mentioned in detail, that is the end of the Court Challenges Program, and the second, concerning the action plan that was established by Mr. Dion five years ago, when he was the federal government's Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs.

I would like to ask you some questions on that action plan. We know it will be expiring very soon. I myself have introduced a motion in committee that will be discussed after this meeting, to invite the ministers responsible to tell us where they stand. However, having regard to the recommendations you have made in your report, could you tell us what the remaining challenges in Canada are, whether it be in French, the minority language, or in English, the

minority language in Quebec, that might lead you and the ministers to continue the action plan and even to increase its budget and objectives?

Again in relation to linguistic duality, I know that you have travelled across the country since you were appointed. In your opinion, what are the types of resistance that there may be to bilingualism, to the development of the official language minority communities in Canada, among both Francophones and Anglophones? How could an extension and improvement of the action plan counter those pockets of resistance in the country?

So the idea is to focus on the action plan and on the possibility that it may lead us to something specific and concrete, if ever the Conservative government decided to extend it, which, as we speak, I don't think is a foregone conclusion.

● (0920)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Thank you very much, madam. You've asked a good number of questions. I could take much more than the allotted time to answer them.

First, I want to thank you for your congratulations. My predecessor, Dyane Adam, left me with a very strong team that has helped me enormously in understanding the issues.

With regard to the action plan, I've been impressed by the French-language health networks that have been created or reinforced outside Quebec. I've also been struck by the fact that, thanks to the action plan, 4,000 employees of the health services network in Quebec have been able to take specialized courses, developed by McGill University, so that they can offer services in English to the Anglophone minority. Those services are still in the initial stages, and are therefore not quite established. I think it's important to ensure this progress is not lost.

In education, the objective of ensuring that 50% of high school graduates are bilingual was quite ambitious. That requires a form of coordination between the federal government and the provinces. In addition, when I mentioned in my statement that I was going to take a close look at the postsecondary education issue, I noted that there were very few incentives in that area to encourage high school students to continue studying their second language. I believe that we should focus on selecting incentives in order to encourage them.

Last fall, the present government announced a program to promote Francophone immigration to minority communities. In visiting the minority communities across the country, I observed the extent to which immigration was still crucial to their vitality. One can understand that observation, and there is a welcoming attitude, an energy and a vitality in those communities that impressed me. People are ready, but there has to be follow-up to those announcements, so that the will to increase Francophone immigration in the minority communities is maintained.

As for early childhood, one of the challenges is to ensure that those who have the right to send their children to minority schools exercise that right. Early childhood is an important entry into minority schools, particularly in the case of exogamous families. Some parents have that right, but have lost their language. For some of those people, the language used in the home is not the language of the minority. Studies have shown—and the experience of the Government of Ontario, which has carried out certain pilot projects, is particularly significant—that early childhood is a very important factor.

In addition, at a meeting between all our employees and representatives of the minority community, someone from the Quebec community groups networks raised the question of the importance of the employability of minority Anglophones in Quebec. I believe the situation is the same in the minority communities.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: And I mentioned in my statement the importance of arts and culture. I could continue.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser is our main witness. We will immediately go to Mr. Nadeau, of the Bloc québécois.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Ms. Tremblay, Mr. Fyfe, Mr. Dussault, Mr. Fraser, Ms. Finn and Mr. Godin. Oh, I had forgotten: Mr. Godin was not one of the witnesses.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Tell me, Commissioner, does the fact that the government cancelled the Court Challenges Program contravene the Official Languages Act? If so, what is the situation?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have looked at the government's obligations under the amended act. Here I'm talking about the amendments that were passed by Parliament in 2005. Those amendments require that the government take positive measures. That involves a process that ensures that the government's actions respect the minorities.

Here's a comparison that I like to draw. In some cases, an environmental impact assessment must be conducted before a highway is built, and that is a legal obligation. In the same sense, the government is required to do an impact assessment of its actions on the minority communities.

So we conducted an in-depth study to determine what the decision-making process was. From what we were able to observe, there is no indication that the impact on the minority communities was considered. As regards the decision-making process, we therefore concluded that the act had not been complied with.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you very much.

Our Prime Minister stated that the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program was a good thing because his government would always respect the Constitution. For the communities and organizations that had access to that program, is that statement a

guarantee? Does it justify cancellation of the Court Challenges Program?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It is important to recall that the Charter does not apply solely to the federal government. It is possible that it is highly respectful of the Charter and of language rights, but that the provincial governments make decisions that are inconsistent with the Charter.

Let's take the example of the case funded by the Court Challenges Program involving parents who had taken immersion courses outside Quebec. After moving to Quebec, they wanted their children to be enrolled in an immersion program. Quebec's Department of Education maintained the following position. In its view, it was understood that immersion in the case of Manitoba meant education in French, but that it meant education in English in Quebec. According to that reasoning, parents who had taken courses in the immersion program in Manitoba were not entitled to enrol their children in an immersion program in Quebec. That seemed somewhat paradoxical.

The Supreme Court decided the matter by ordering that parents who had taken an immersion program outside Quebec could send their children to Quebec schools offering an immersion program. Without the Court Challenges Program, that result would not have been achieved. That had nothing to do with the federal government's respect for the Charter.

There are a lot of other cases. The Mahé decision, for example, enabled Francophones to obtain school boards controlled by Francophone communities across the country. Once again, that had nothing to do with the federal government's respect for the Charter. The idea was more to ensure that other governments complied with the Charter. I am not casting the slightest doubt on the respect the Prime Minister and his government have for citizens' Charter rights.

● (0930)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The abolition of child care centres distresses you. You mentioned that in your report. In what respect does it breach the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I said in my last answer that the early childhood centres are an essential entry into the education system for minorities.

In my travels, I met the president of a college where there was a day care centre that served three purposes: to care for the children of professors, to care for the children of students and to act as a training centre for the college's students who were taking courses to become child care workers themselves.

The loss of funding resulted in a direct loss of \$250,000. In addition, the college is virtually facing the inevitable step of closing that day care centre. That is a threefold loss, for the community, for the students, for the professors, and it's also a loss for the training of young people.

When I raised this question with the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, it was explained to me that that was a result of the operation of federal-provincial agreements, of the difficulty in ensuring that linguistic clauses are reinforced. It's complicated, but the result is that a college president told me that he was facing the problem of the likely necessity of closing a day care centre.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Godin, go ahead please.

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

I want to thank Commissioner Fraser for being here, as well as his team and all the people who work at the Commissioner's office in various places in Canada and try to be the watchdogs of our two official languages. In fact, you are the representatives of Parliament, not of the Government of Canada, and you are here to report to us. You also have the power to go to court.

Let's go back to the Court Challenges Program. It's a tool that has given the communities a chance to survive today. I don't want to say anything bad, but a report can only be a report. If the Prime Minister of Canada doesn't intend to follow its recommendations, it will go nowhere.

On a number of occasions, rights have been won in court, and the government has been forced to do things. One need only think of the schools in Prince Edward Island and Montfort Hospital in Ottawa. We can name a number, but I won't spend my seven minutes doing that.

It is quite clear in your report that you think the government had an obligation to conduct a study. Last weekend, Ms. Verner decided that she wanted to do a national tour to go and meet Francophones, the minorities. Instead she should read our report. We've already made that trip, and we submitted a report to her, which she has completely ignored until now. If she had inquired with the media, she would know that a lot of people in Canada are angry because of what the government has done, particularly as regards the Court Challenges Program.

Here's the question I'm asking you, Mr. Fraser. First, you say in your report, and I quote:

The Commissioner is currently investigating this situation. He requested a moratorium on the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program, but the request was denied.

That means that the government isn't interested.

The Office of the Commissioner, that is you yourself, have the power to go to court. Why do you let the community go to court without any money? Why do you let the people of New Brunswick, for example, who don't have any money, go to court? They don't have any money from the Court Challenges Program; the tool has been taken away from them. Why wouldn't the Office of the Commissioner go to court?

● (0935)

Mr. Graham Fraser: The decision to cancel the program was made between the time of my appointment and the time I took up my duties. After I took up my duties, I wrote to the minister. I

subsequently met him to ask him whether the suspension would in fact take place. The government did not accept my request. In the process, approximately 38 or 40 cases were affected. We are intervening in some of them, and we have begun talks concerning others. We are evaluating the situation one case at a time.

Ms. Tremblay, would you like to make a more detailed comment on those discussions?

Mrs. Johane Tremblay (Director, Legal Affairs Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): The investigation isn't complete, and the usual practice of the Office of the Commissioner is that we wait until the end of the investigation to see whether the government implements the recommendations. If it appears that is not the case, we consider the possibility of intervening in the proceeding instituted by the complainant.

Since the Commissioner of Official Languages was appointed, we have filed an application for leave to intervene before the Supreme Court to support the SANB and Ms. Paulin in the proceeding against the RCMP, which has been appealed. We are also the appellant party in the CALDECH affair.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand that, but the fact remains that the Court Challenges Program paid those expenses and that the government has terminated it, thus leaving the communities to their own devices. The Court Challenges Program was the ultimate tool of the communities. Gains have been made, but that is due neither to the Liberals nor to the Conservatives. As for the NDP, we weren't there. Whatever the case may be, the tool was taken away from the communities.

If you tell me that you are conducting your investigation and that, at the end of that investigation, you are going to make a decision, I can wait. In the meantime, the community is holding its breath. Lawyers like, for example, Michel Doucet, of the University of Moncton, have done volunteer work for the communities. However, the Conservative government told us that other lawyers made a lot of money with this program. If someone is making money, it's the regiment of lawyers who represent the governments and challenge decisions that favour the minorities. It is the government that mobilizes a lot of lawyers, challenges decisions when we win a case before the courts and takes those cases to the Court of Appeal and to the Supreme Court.

As Parliament's official languages watchdog, under the act, you at least have the money from the budgets that our committee has approved. I don't want to attack you on that this morning. The reports are good, but they really reflect the situation. The newspapers report that 50% of federal government positions are still unilingual English. These people can no longer blame the previous government; they've been in power for a year and a half. They appoint ombudsmen who don't speak French. No deputy minister speaks only French. That's what enables us to assess the government's will. It is headed in a very wrong direction.

● (0940)

The Chair: Mr.—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is there a problem?

The Chair: Your time has almost entirely elapsed, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I know, Mr. Chairman. It's the period reserved for questions and comments, and I've come to the comments.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm going to ask my questions on the second round.

The community is troubled. It was not without reason that 700 people from across Canada met in Ottawa last weekend. I'm delivering a message in my comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Now we'll go to the Parliamentary Secretary, Ms. Sylvie Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, Mr. Fraser. It is an honour for us to have you here. That also applies to the people with you.

Commissioner, in my opinion, your 2006-2007 report is very well done. It presents very promising avenues for our committee's business. You mentioned a number of accomplishments made in the area of official languages.

Could you tell us which ones particularly drew your attention and explain to us why they deserved special mention in your report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'll give you two examples. In the context of the application of Part VII of the Act, local directors of federal institutions have shown innovation in very interesting ways.

For example, Parks Canada made a very interesting offer to the Francophone community in the Jasper region. It proposed an exchange. It offered the community premises free of charge, and, in exchange, the Francophone community was to offer French courses or French conservation courses to Parks Canada employees.

In my opinion, these kinds of very simple, very direct initiatives do not cost taxpayers a lot of money. They prove how very commonplace positive measures can be.

In one of my answers, I also talked about the progress that has been achieved in health and immigration. We've seen the creation of health networks for Francophones outside Quebec. Progress has also been made in Quebec regarding the training of health sector employees so that they can offer services. In the immigration sector, the government has decided to support programs for Francophones to immigrate to communities outside Quebec.

I would also like to point out that nearly 90% of designated bilingual positions are filled with persons who have appropriate bilingualism levels.

There are still problems, and maintaining training is a constant challenge. I have raised some concerns, but it must also be noted that progress has been constantly made in this area.

● (0945)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In our travels, we were sometimes told that it was hard to keep people in their communities.

Do you have an idea of the best way to counter that and to make it so that Francophones stay in their communities? Do you see any avenues or ways of doing this that might help these communities? In some Francophone communities outside Quebec that we visited, we

were often told that it is hard to retain people who are there and who work there.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think there are two parts to that problem. The first is not connected to the language issue. It is the rural exodus. That's happening across the country. Francophones are leaving the small municipalities in Manitoba to go to the cities. Anglophones are doing it as well. It's not just for linguistic reasons; it's a universal phenomenon that is not limited to Canada. It is a global phenomenon. People are leaving small municipalities to go to the cities around the world.

The second factor is the following. I would say that three aspects of the act concern the retention issue. First is the community's vitality. Are there cultural resources? Is education of good quality? Are there health services? In addition, is the federal government able to provide services in both languages? And do employees have the right to work in French?

In a way, there is a triangular effect. At one point, I met someone from the Department of Justice who told me that, in some cases outside Quebec, they needed lawyers who could practise in both languages. That requires quite an intense level of professionalism and bilingualism. He also told me that they knew where to find those lawyers, but that, if they arrived in a city where the minority community did not have enough cultural vitality, their families wouldn't want to live there. If there are no possible jobs for their husbands or wives, they won't want to stay. So they go back home. Those communities have to be welcoming for people who arrive. It's also essential that people want to live there. So there's this triangular element. I don't think we should just dwell on the question whether the post office can sell its stamps in French. You also have to consider the question of community life as a whole.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much.

● (0950)

The Chair: Thank you.

We are now starting our second round. This time, the period will be slightly shorter. We have five minutes for questions, comments and answers. Without further ado, I turn the floor over to Mr. D'Amours.

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

Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here this morning. Since I only have five minutes, I'm going to ask you questions that I think you can answer quite quickly. You'll see.

Commissioner, you may say, or some may think, that I am digressing somewhat, but I'd nevertheless like you to answer with a yes or no. Imagine some jewellery, for example. A gold-plated piece of jewellery looks good, but does not necessarily have the same value as one that is solid gold. Do we agree on that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm not an expert on jewellery.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You may not be an expert, but you understand me. I'm going to give you my interpretation. I was listening to you speak at the start of your address, and I said to myself that was comparable to what the Prime Minister does. He starts his speeches in French, but what does his government do? It looks good, it's gold-plated at the start, but ultimately it's not gold, it's only gold-plated. That's a serious problem. People can have gold plate and you would say they really want to move forward, but that doesn't necessarily mean the results are there.

Let's consider the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program, the elimination of the obligation for senior National Defence officers to be bilingual and the appointment of a unilingual Anglophone chair to the head of the National Capital Commission. These are actual facts. Do you believe that these items that I've just referred to are measures that could be characterized as positive?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'd like to qualify some of your statements. For example, I wouldn't say that National Defence's plans represent a way of shirking obligations under the act or of making it so that senior officers are no longer required to be bilingual.

If I understand correctly, that represents an effort to be more targeted and to adopt a model that is somewhat similar to that of the public service, where there are unilingual French regions, bilingual regions and unilingual English regions for administrative functions and with respect to the right to work in one's language.

As regards appointments, I believe that's really in order to play a national leadership role. I think it's very important to be able to communicate with all Canadians in both official languages. I haven't concealed my views on that subject.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: But, sir—

Mr. Graham Fraser: In my report, I expressed my concerns about certain trends in the government's decisions.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Commissioner, if we take the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program, for example, that's definitely not a positive measure. Do we agree on that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We'll take at least that one.

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's the finding of a report that has been detailed in depth. That's indeed the finding we made.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: So it's not a positive measure.

Commissioner, if it isn't a positive measure, do you think that eliminating a program that is a positive measure is double talk? What the government did wasn't a positive measure. At the same time, it is that same party that now forms the government, which voted in favour of Bill S-3. Furthermore, the purpose of part of Bill S-3 was to put positive measures in place for the official language communities. They're talking out of both sides of their mouth.

I ask myself the following question. In that situation, under Bill S-3, which is now an act, the government has an obligation to put positive measures in place. However, it has not taken a positive measure by cancelling the Court Challenges Program. Could we conclude that the government was breaching Bill S-3 in certain respects, that it has not complied with one aspect of Bill S-3, because the measures it took were negative?

● (0955)

The Chair: Perhaps you can provide a very quick answer.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have two points to mention. In our report on the complaints we've received with regard to the government's conduct, we concluded that there was a lack of compliance with the act.

Second, I'm making an effort to stop referring to Bill S-3 because it is as though that amendment to the act were part of the act. The act has been amended. We're talking about compliance with the act. The amendments are not asterisks. It is not beside the act, it's not something separate; it's the act.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Now we go to the government side. Mr. Chong, please go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here today, Mr. Fraser. Thanks as well to the members of your office.

In your report, you say, and I quote:

During the design process, the federal government must carefully consider expanding the scope of the Action Plan to include, in particular, arts and culture, youth initiatives and new measures for promoting linguistic duality.

As many of those topics were addressed in the study on the vitality of the official language minority communities and those topics have an excellent chance of being among our future concerns in the context of our work as the government, could you give us more details on your vision for that expansion? For example, what do you think of a trilingualism policy?

[English]

On replacement for the government's action plan on official languages, you mentioned that there should be consideration to enlarge it. What do you think about the federal government using its spending power to get the provinces to adopt a policy of trilingualism? Each high school student, each CEGEP student—each graduate from those institutions—would be required to know three languages, two of which would be Canada's official languages, of course, and the third would be

[Translation]

their choice.

[English]

You would create a situation that exists largely in western Europe today.

Many people might say this is not feasible, but my ancestry is half European; my mother was European. After the Second World War—only 50 years ago—there wasn't a person who could speak another language other than their native tongue. Today in western Europe it's almost impossible not to speak English. People speak to you in English if they hear your accent. They've done it over there.

It would be a great way to address the challenges of national unity and compliance with the Official Languages Act. It would be great for diversity. Let's say you're an aboriginal Canadian; it would be a great way to preserve some of those languages. If you're a Canadian of Chinese descent, it would be a great way to preserve your language. If you're a Canadian of Italian or Hispanic descent, it would be the same.

And it's good for international commerce. We talk about being a trading nation—the Phoenicians of the modern world—yet we are remarkably unilingual compared to many other countries.

The reason I ask this question is because we are often myopic on this committee. We focus on very specific things. We often don't take a step back, as you do, to take a look at the broader picture and to ask these questions. I often wonder whether something like this, while ambitious, might not be something to be considered.

Have you thought about this and the potential costs and challenges of implementing something like this?

● (1000)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I haven't. I certainly haven't looked at costs. You're right that the European community has adopted a slogan; I think it's "mother tongue plus two". It's the idea that Europeans should learn not just a second but a third language.

The one thing I would observe is that learning a second official language is not a barrier to learning a third language; it's a bridge. Where I became most aware.... I guess there are two anecdotal experiences I've had in this regard. One was when, as a journalist, I went on one of the Team Canada trips to China. The federal government pulled together all the Chinese speakers in the region from various embassies. They also hired Canadians in China to work as guides and translators for what seemed like the hundreds of Canadians who were on that trip. What struck me about these very impressive young Canadians, some of whom had been studying in China or working in other parts of Asia—and I couldn't evaluate the quality of their Chinese—was that they were able to explain to the bus driver where we wanted to go and what time we needed to be picked up and so on. They were able to carry on quite vigorous conversations with people and explain things to us. Also, they were all bilingual in both Canadian official languages. Clearly, learning French for the English Canadians and English for the French Canadians was not a barrier to their learning Chinese; it was part of what led them to learning other languages.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

Now it's the turn of Mr. Malo, from the Bloc québécois.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Commissioner, I want to thank you and your team for being with us this morning.

Once again this year, you found that 774 complaints were admissible and you reviewed them. You tell us you travelled across Canada last year and that you visited various official language minority communities. In your opening address, you hailed the work of the committee, which also travelled virtually everywhere and met

with representatives of the official language minority communities. You hailed the committee's work and various recommendations because they offer promising potential solutions.

In light of what you yourself heard and saw, in light of the complaints that were filed, are you in a position to say that the committee's recommendations can, in most cases, meet the expectations and concerns of the minority communities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Unfortunately, I didn't reread your recommendations before appearing today. I read your report and I was impressed by the 39 recommendations and by the evidence you gathered across the country, somewhat confirming my observations when I made my visits. I myself met with some of the individuals who have appeared before you. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to conduct an analysis of recommendation 14 or recommendation 32. In general, I was impressed by the precision of your recommendations.

● (1005)

Mr. Luc Malo: That really follows what you yourself and the team from your office consider are the major concerns of the—

Mr. Graham Fraser: They are the outline.

Gérard, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Gérard Finn (Assistant Commissioner, Policy and Communications Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Yes.

If we look at your recommendations, we can see that you touch on a set of issues, of areas of human activity that constitute vital issues for the communities. You talk about health, immigration and education, among other things. If I refer to last week's summit, those issues, among others, represent concerns of the communities. I think you hit the nail on the head in many cases.

Mr. Luc Malo: How is it, Commissioner, that Air Canada is still at the top of the list with regard to complaints?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There are two reasons for that. Air Canada has had certain problems integrating employees from other airlines that did not previously have the same obligations. There were agreements. As a result of union negotiations, positions were given to people who had spent their careers at other airlines. So they've had some logistical problems that have made it difficult for them to meet their obligations. However, it has to be admitted that Air Canada sometimes gives the impression that it is really reluctant to discharge its obligations. An obvious case is that of Mr. Thibodeau, who was not served in French. Not only did that case wind up in court, but Air Canada appealed from that decision. Ultimately, the Court of Appeal held that Air Canada had an obligation of result. Air Canada is in constant contact with the public. These are not only very important obligations, but the public can verify, every day, whether Air Canada can really meet its obligations. What happened in the Thibodeau case is an example of how far Air Canada is ready to go to resist the interpretation that is made of its obligations.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner. As you know, your predecessor's recommendations concerning Air Canada were adopted by this committee.

We'll now go to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I've already made my comments, I'm going to move on to questions.

Mr. Verner said she wanted to consult all Canadians. I'm going to come back to that later. With regard to the Court Challenges Program, last Tuesday, we heard from the representatives of the organization responsible for that program, and it appears that even they were not consulted. They did not have the opportunity to respond to the government's questions and concerns. Don't you find that a bit much?

If I understand correctly—and you have material supporting that—in the matter of the inclusion of the riding of Acadie—Bathurst in that of Miramichi, the court held that voters were not consulted on that change. In this case, that's serious: these people did not even consult the persons responsible for the program.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Our findings are based on what we were able to learn about the decision-making process. Based on the information we were able to obtain, we concluded that the act had not been complied with. I'm not going to say what consultation should have been conducted but was not or debate what would have been the most important thing to do.

• (1010)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I can't wait to see the end of your report. You've just said that the act was not complied with. So you can go to court to enforce the act. That's part of your mandate.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We've prepared a preliminary report. Now we're waiting for the institutions and complainants to react. Some complainants have already given us their reaction. We'll consider them all before issuing our final report.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Earlier Mr. Chong talked about people from other cultures who speak other languages. First I would like to be able to solve the problem between the two founding peoples. Then we can solve the others. I don't know whether you agree with me.

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I told Mr. Chong and stated in my presentation, we speak 150 languages in Canada, but two of those are official languages: English and French. It is with those two languages that we maintain a national dialogue. I also pointed out that learning the other official language was a major step for those who wanted to learn other languages. Learning a third language is easier than learning a second.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Let's come back to the Air Canada situation that our colleague Mr. Nadeau addressed earlier. As regards the Official Languages Act, I really would like to know what the problem is. It's as though, from the moment it's about official languages, that doesn't count. An act is an act, it seems to me. We are legislators. I was previously a union representative, and I negotiated collective agreements as part of my duties. I was never able to negotiate one that was against the law. That's quite clear.

And yet Air Canada has been able to hide behind the fact that the union forced it to take on those employees. I won't even tell you the word that comes to my mind because it wouldn't be very pretty. The Official Languages Act is clear. The public has a right to be served in both official languages, and Air Canada is subject to the act. Not only is Air Canada against us, but when its representatives appeared

in court concerning the bankruptcy, the judge said he did not want to see the Commissioner of Official Languages interfering in the case.

Isn't it enough that the act is clear? Isn't this situation alarming? Even the judges don't want to enforce the act and push away those who want to do so. You can consult that case. The judge said he wanted the Commissioner of Official Languages to stay out of it while the potential bankruptcy of Air Canada was under review. That's incredible: this language matter alone could have brought Air Canada down.

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's an incident that occurred before I arrived.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I see that—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Your team is in place: it must know what the story is.

Mr. Graham Fraser: As regards Mr. Thibodeau's case, I thought Air Canada displayed unsympathetic conduct toward its legal obligations. I was pleased to see that the court's decision was to impose an obligation of result on Air Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Commissioner, I think the matter should be set aside, in that it should be resolved. I think that too many people give that company chances, whether it's the government, the court, judges or others. I didn't get up this morning and say to myself that I was going to criticize judges, but I'm talking about facts here.

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You say that was very good?

The Chair: Yes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yvon Godin: Enter that in the record.

The Chair: That was very good because you managed to limit your remarks to the time allotted to you.

Now we're going to begin our third round and, without delay, I turn the floor over to Mr. Brian Murphy.

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

Thank you, Mr. Fraser, and your team, for being with us today.

I'm originally from Acadia, and I of course think that the issues we have discussed are very important. We are concerned by a few matters, the Court Challenges Program, among others, which, I repeat, is very important for us.

However, you emphasized something in your report and your presentation. You started by applauding the positions' of Mr. Harper and Ms. Verner, but you said this:

While these are positive messages, they are marred by actions that significantly diminish their impact.

I count six important points that are not positive with regard to the action plan or the act. They are related to cuts in some cases, but two points are of great interest to me. Perhaps you'll have the time to give me an explanation so that I can clearly understand what is going on. They are the fifth and sixth points. You say this:

Another important change was the transfer of the Official Languages Secretariat from the Privy Council Office to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

In what way is that negative with regard to the plan and the acts? I ask myself the same question with regard to the following sentence:

Finally, the Committee of Deputy Ministers on Official Languages was disbanded.

Furthermore, we see on page 41 that, according to the performance report cards, the service to the public results are not good. I have children, and that's a concern for me. They say that's the main purpose of the acts. I wonder why management gets higher marks than those for service to the public.

Lastly, I see on page 65 that, back home in New Brunswick, more than 24% or 25% of complaints concern language of work. That's 14% more than the national average. I wonder why complaints concerning language of work are more frequent in New Brunswick and here in Ottawa than in the rest of the country.

• (1015)

Mr. Graham Fraser: First, I'm going to address the issue of governance.

Since I took up my position, I have seen that, in a hierarchy like the federal government, messages coming from above have more importance than those coming from next door. When the Privy Council had a responsibility for official languages coordination, I got the impression that action plan successes were due in part to the fact that it was the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's Office, that asked the departments questions. The people from the office asked them what they had done and whether progress had been made. That required a faster and more careful response than if it came from a colleague department, if I may put it that way.

I think it's like in life or in any office: you give a faster answer to a question that comes from the office upstairs than to one from an office on the same floor. It's somewhat the same thing for the Committee of Deputy Ministers. When it's the deputy ministers heading the departments who handle the official languages issue, they see that their department complies with the act and makes progress, whereas, if the decisions are not made at that level, it's less effective, and the response is not as fast. In short, the issue is not taken as seriously as if the directives were coming from above.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Perhaps we can answer the other questions later.

The Chair: Very well. Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Now we'll go to the Bloc québécois representative, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sauvageau, Benoît, made a request that the Office of the Commissioner examine the issue of official languages compliance at National Defence. We conducted a follow-up on the matter, that is to

say that we asked that the studies continue. Other persons, organizations or political parties may have done so as well.

Can you tell us where that study stands?

• (1020)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We're doing a follow-up report on the report that was previously prepared in response to Mr. Sauvageau's complaint. I'm going to ask Mr. Dussault to answer in greater detail.

Mr. Renald Dussault (Assistant Commissioner, Compliance Assurance Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): I believe that follow-up will begin in the fall.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So it's a process that will continue.

Mr. Renald Dussault: After we've issued a final report, we always allow the institutions a certain amount of time to react to it and take measures to act on our recommendations. Then we conduct a follow-up. So I think a proper follow-up will be started in the fall.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That's good. Thank you.

Commissioner, I would like to hear what you have to say on the following subject. I may be talking about an area that is not directly your responsibility, or not at all, but over which you may have some influence. I come from the education world. I taught French to Francophones in Quebec, Saskatchewan and Ontario.

I'm thinking, for example, of Saskatchewan, where only 18% of Fransaskois students attend Fransaskois schools. Consequently, 82% of those students wind up in other schools, some in immersion, others in English as a first language.

Efforts have been made to recruit students—which is unfortunate—because a student is worth a certain amount of money. A school board will not let students whose mother tongue is French leave to go to a school they are entitled to attend or encourage them to do so through their parents and so on.

Do you make speeches or take steps to tell the people from Canadian Parents for French, for example, that immersion and the fact that Anglophones are learning French is very good, but that... I don't want to use harsh words, but that's nevertheless where we find a lot of our youths, and assimilation is very significant in the communities of very vulnerable areas. I would like to know whether you make approaches, whether you give talks or whether you have discussions with the people from Canadian Parents for French—I'm thinking of that organization because it exists, does promotion and tries to recruit young people from back home—to make some distinctions and see whether there isn't a way to come to an agreement to help us recover the largest possible number of students from the minorities. I know that education is a provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have observed that, contrary to the situation 15 years ago, there is now very friendly cooperation between Canadian Parents for French, on the one hand, and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Commission nationale des parents francophones Inc., on the other. I was struck by the fact that Jim Shea, of Canadian Parents for French, sat on the steering committee preparing for the Sommet des communautés francophones et acadiennes, which was held last weekend. People for Canadian Parents for French attended the conference of the Commission nationale des parents francophones Inc. So there is a communication network.

I know that the people from Canadian Parents for French are aware of the problem. I don't believe we should address this question from the standpoint of raiding. I don't believe they see it that way. However, they are trying to address the question in terms of sharing resources. By associating, they have more opportunities in terms of buying books, promoting artists' tours, organizing cultural events and so on. In my conversations with the people from Canadian Parents for French, I got the impression that they were doing that in the greatest respect for the needs of the schools of the French-speaking community. Perhaps you have more details than I do on that point, but that's my impression.

•(1025)

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

Mr. Richard Nadeau: It's already over, Mr. Chairman!

Thank you very much, Commissioner.

The Chair: We now move on to Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to discuss the future of the two official languages in Canada, because I believe we have a major problem in Canada.

[English]

I think statistics show that the number of unilingual francophones in Canada is declining as a percentage of the population. That's the broad trend.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Sure.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm talking in terms of the two official languages, not in terms of allophones and other Canadians whose first language is something other than those two official languages. The view in the country in terms of the two official languages and the broad trends is that French is in decline and English is on the rise.

That's been the broad trend over the last 100 years, and it is still going on. The number—optimistically, and giving us cause for hope—of bilingual speakers is also on the rise. However, we have a big, broad problem here, which is that the federal government, its institutions, its agencies, its crown corporations, its areas of direct administration are officially bilingual, but the reality on the ground in the country is that the vast majority of Canadians are not bilingual.

So there's a gap between the country's national institutions, which employ over 400,000 people, and the education system, which is not requiring students to be bilingual. So we're really creating a system of elites in this country who have access to bilingual education and who can speak the two languages, and a system for everybody else

who can't speak the other official language. It's a huge problem in the long run, I think.

It's creating a situation that if you want to access the upper echelons of the public service, the crown corporations and the like, you can't, and that's the reality. I think we have a structural problem within our society that we, in the long run, have to address. In my view, the best way to address this is with the education system.

I believe in the preservation of the French fact in Canada. However, in my view, there is a big gap between the education system, which doesn't require students to know the other official language in order to obtain their diploma, and the country's national institutions. I don't understand why there isn't more of a consensus to address this gap.

If the education system were graduating students who couldn't read or write or who couldn't do mathematics or who the business community felt were not up to par, you'd hear a hue and cry from the business community that the country's universities and its high schools were simply not up to standard and we needed to improve this. But you don't hear the same hue and cry about the country's largest employer requiring someone to know both official languages to move up or to participate, and the fact that we're simply not doing that with our public education systems I think is a huge structural problem.

I'd be interested to hear if your office in the past or present has done any work on what it would cost, what it would take, to use the federal spending power to encourage provinces to require that both official languages be known as a requirement for graduation, and I think to accommodate the increasing diversity of this country, to do what the Europeans do, which is one plus two.

•(1030)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I've tried to look at language issues in terms of opportunities rather than obligations. But certainly I'm very aware of the fact that when I graduated from high school, a second language was required for entry into university. It was possible to replace maths and sciences with languages. That was one way you could.... And I've occasionally thought that if that had not been the case, and maths had been a requirement for graduation, I would still be in high school, but that's another issue.

I'm not sure whether it's possible—and certainly it's outside my mandate—to go back to that era of reimposing obligations. It certainly would be interesting to know what the costs would be.

Before we got there, though...what strikes me is the absence of opportunity, totally aside from the obligations. I spoke to a parliamentary intern from Manitoba who was obviously interested in public life and who was a parliamentary intern at the Manitoba legislature. She told me that in addition to her work she was a jazz musician, and that when she was in grade 9 she had to choose between music and French. She said, and I agree, that she shouldn't have had to make that choice.

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Fraser.

Now we'll go to Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Now it's Radio-Canada's turn. What is its mandate? You must know that the SNA, the Société nationale de l'Acadie, is preparing to challenge the CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate. The corporation is paid for by Canadian taxpayers. When I use the terms "national" or "federal", I'm referring to Canada; it's not Quebec or Montreal.

The problem is that Radio-Canada really serves Montreal. I used to say that it was Radio-Québec, but I was corrected by my Quebec friends, who told me that it was not Radio-Québec, but rather Radio-Montréal. There's the same problem in the Gaspé, Lac-Saint-Jean and all those places.

Radio-Canada has programs that are really made for Montreal. The only thing we at least had at 11:00 p.m., New Brunswick or Atlantic time, was RDI. However, we complained so much to Radio-Canada that they finally withdrew RDI and scheduled it for some time during the day. They used to interrupt our programming, but they can't do that anymore, because it's they who decide on the programming.

I'm asking you a direct question: do you believe the government is justified in hiding behind the fact that Radio-Canada is responsible for its own programming? Isn't that shirking its obligations with regard to Radio-Canada?

Mr. Graham Fraser: First, we received the report that the Société nationale de l'Acadie published on Radio-Canada's programming. I had a meeting with the president, and we talked about it. I found that report very interesting.

We're currently thinking about how to address the situation. We also plan to conduct an audit of CBC/Radio-Canada, but the corporation is disputing our mandate with regard to its operations and everything pertaining to its programming. It also insists that it's governed solely by the CRTC.

So we are discussing that issue with CBC/Radio-Canada .

Mr. Yvon Godin: If that's the case—Radio-Canada won't like what I'm going to say—perhaps it's time we got rid of it completely.

If Radio-Canada says that the Commissioner of Official Languages and the minister should not interfere in its affairs and that it's the one that does the programming... Ultimately, it's preferable for Francophones to watch CBC because at least they can find out what's going on across the country, whereas, if they watch Radio-Canada, they only know what's going on in Montreal. Perhaps some people only want to live in Quebec and have a country. I don't know. I don't think that's the case: I'm an Acadian French Canadian who lives in Canada, and I like to see Francophones from Alberta on Radio-Canada's airwaves. People want to see themselves on Radio-Canada's airwaves.

However, French Canadians are starting to watch English television because they can't see themselves on Radio-Canada. Imagine: there are 5,000 persons in Caraquet, and there were 25,000 at the Acadian Festival that time when Radio-Canada broadcast the festival and told us that we were lucky that it had been broadcast! It's insulting to be told that we were lucky that it broadcast the festival, particularly since it was done with our money, that of our taxpayers.

Now you're saying that Radio-Canada told you that it wasn't your business, to use the French term from back home. That's completely bilingual.

• (1035)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We're talking with Radio-Canada about how to proceed.

I nevertheless found the Société nationale de l'Acadie's approach of conducting a study on Radio-Canada's television interesting. That approach is worth a second look.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It isn't the people who work at Radio-Canada—that is to say the journalists and all those people—who lead, who hold the power. When a cat is run over on Saint-Catherine Street, they aren't the ones who interrupt the news in the Atlantic to show the poor dead cat; it's the senior management in Montreal that does it.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm going to take your comments into account in our discussions and conversations with Radio-Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Commissioner, I'm going to tell you how many times the program *L'Atlantique en direct* has been interrupted since January, before it was taken off RDI. I'm going to send that to you; you'll see what I'm talking about.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Thank you very much, I'd like to have your

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you very much.

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

That completes our first three rounds. As you know, our business will follow, but one person has asked to speak. If the committee is willing, we could grant Mr. Harvey three minutes.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): I'd like to ask Mr. Fraser a question.

The Chair: If the committee agrees because, in view of the schedule, it is will be difficult to start a fourth round.

Ms. Folco, the floor is with you.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: We have to consider a motion, but I'm willing for us to let Mr. Harvey speak. However, I don't understand why Mr. Chong spoke during the second round, if Mr. Harvey had a question to ask.

That said, we agreed last Tuesday that we would begin work on the motion at no later than quarter to. I would ask you to respect that decision.

The Chair: Do I have the consent of the Bloc québécois and Mr. Godin to allow a final three-minute question, then to move on to committee business?

Mr. Yvon Godin: If you have a good question, I agree.

The Chair: Go ahead, Commissioner.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, before continuing, I've been given clarification concerning one of Mr. Nadeau's questions. We will be starting the follow-up to the situation at National Defence and Mr. Sauvageau's complaint in November.

The Chair: That's very good.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I wanted to clarify the answer that I had given to your question.

The Chair: If you are willing, Commissioner, there will be a final question. This is a period of three minutes for the question and the answer.

Go ahead, Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Fraser, I want to thank you and your team for being here today.

I would really like to confirm for you that the official languages are very important for us. We don't just talk about it; we live it as well. My children are completely bilingual, and some are even multilingual. The official languages, curiosity and interest in other languages are important factors not only for my party, but also in my personal life.

The action plan will soon be renewed. I'd like to know what you think are the innovative and essential aspects that the next plan should contain.

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I mentioned, I think that health, education and immigration are three very important elements. With respect to education, the issue of early childhood is important, for the reasons I raised earlier this afternoon.

To answer Ms. Boucher's question concerning retention in the minority communities, I think certain aspects of the arts and culture—culture in its broadest sense—are important in making it possible to live in French outside Quebec. You have to have access to a cultural environment, even if you are far from Montreal.

I also know perfectly well that the issue of second language learning can present a risk. As Mr. Nadeau mentioned, immersion schools have raised certain fears in minority communities, but it is possible to stress the importance of collaboration between francophiles and Francophones in the minority communities.

As Mr. Chong said, there is a problem in postsecondary education. When the universities do not encourage students to continue studying in French—English is mandatory in Quebec—students drop French at the age of 14. They make a quite pragmatic choice with regard to what will help them get into university in the program of their choice. You have to look at matters vertically and see how we can encourage young people to learn a second language—

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: —and gain access to university in important programs.

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

That brings our question period to an end.

[English]

Mr. Commissioner, we would like to thank you for appearing before this committee with your team. You reminded us this morning that French and English are a richness for this country, and you are its guardian. You can count on the support of this committee to assist you in your mandate. We wish you the best.

Thank you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with committee business, as planned.

While the clerk distributes the document concerning the groups we intend to hear from in the coming weeks, I invite Ms. Folco to comment.

I'm ready to hear comments on the notice of motion given by Ms. Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: It's no longer a notice of motion, Mr. Chairman. It's now a motion.

The Chair: As agreed at the last meeting, we will therefore now discuss Ms. Folco's motion.

• (1045)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I won't repeat myself. Everyone has had a chance to read the motion in both official languages. So, if possible, I would like the debate to be reasonably short. I would like this motion to be official and to be sent to the minister concerned. In addition, today is Thursday.

I have nothing further to add to what I said on Tuesday. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Folco.

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Ms. Folco, I read your motion. I believe that Ms. Verner has repeated often enough that Ms. Oda has nothing to do with this. Minister Verner handles everything alone: horizontal issues and all the rest.

Unlike the Minister of Canadian Heritage under your government, whose mandate was to coordinate the implementation of the advancement of linguistic duality, Ms. Oda no longer has that mandate; Ms. Verner is entirely responsible for it.

Two motions to invite Minister Verner have already been put before us. We all voted for Ms. Verner to appear. Since Ms. Oda no longer has the mandate to coordinate implementation of the advancement of linguistic duality, we in the government will abstain from voting, for the good and simple reason that it is not up to her to come and defend that implementation, but rather Minister Josée Verner.

We have already had two motions to summon Minister Verner, the motion of May 1 of this year and another motion introduced on May 31.

The Chair: Are you moving an amendment?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In my opinion, the amendment would simply be to delete Ms. Oda's name, because she no longer has a mandate to coordinate implementation of the advancement of linguistic duality. It is Ms. Verner, Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages, who has that mandate.

The Chair: An amendment has been moved. The speakers have a right to speak.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I have no objection to deleting Ms. Oda's name. However, in view of the time we have left, I would like us not to waste time hearing from her, because an invitation has already been made, as Ms. Boucher said. Instead we should ask a question and ask for a written answer. Even if she comes here, we will ask her questions and she will answer. The motion states, and I quote:

[...] to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages before the House rises in June 2007. The purpose would be to review, and report on what strategic plans are now being designed [...]

If time does not permit, we should ask the minister to respond by letter to the Chair of the Committee.

We have to finish the debate on the Court Challenges Program. Between now and June 22, there's only that. I think they would have more of a chance of really answering Ms. Folco's question. We want an answer. They know what you're talking about. You asked the question in the House; you did everything in your power. The minister has to respond and indicate whether they will continue the action plan. I have no objection to that. I think we should do it and request it in writing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Folco, go ahead, please.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chairman, first I intend to leave Ms. Oda's name in the text of this motion.

Second, as regards dates, I wonder whether the clerk has obtained an answer from Minister Verner to the request we sent her on May 1.

The Chair: The clerk informs me that he contacted Ms. Verner's office and has not obtained an answer to date.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Graeme Truelove): I was told they would consult the schedule and calendar. They will be calling me back to give me possible options, but I have not yet had any news.

• (1050)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chairman, it is now June 7, and this motion was introduced on May 1, as Ms. Boucher said. It's now been more than a month.

The intent of this motion was not to hear from one or two ministers once again. I would like this motion to be adopted as is. When Ms. Verner informs the Chair of the date of her appearance before the committee, we can then add to the questions that the committee will ask her those relating to the action plan. I have no objection to that being done in a single meeting. I want to be sure that there are questions concerning the action plan at the meeting at which Ms. Verner testifies. The Court Challenges Program is fundamentally important, but, after that, there will be the entire issue of the action plan. By means of this motion, I wanted to inform the minister or ministers that we are pursuing this plan. It's an open secret. I maintain my motion as it stands, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chong and Mr. Godin are on the list.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Chairman, perhaps we should debate the amendment—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Luc Harvey: We should debate the amendment before debating the motion.

The Chair: The debate concerns the amendment the purpose of which is to delete—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: —the name of Minister Bev Oda because she—

The Chair: —the name of Minister Verner and to summon Minister Oda.

Now I turn the floor over to—

Ms. Raymonde Folco: No, Mr. Chairman. The purpose of the amendment is to delete the name of Minister Oda and to have only Ms. Verner appear.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's correct.

The Chair: Yes, that's the amendment that is moved. We will now hear comments on the subject.

Mr. Chong now has the floor.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Folco, do you agree on the amendment?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: No, but the Chairman said that we would invite Ms. Oda, not Ms. Verner. I simply wanted to correct that, because that wasn't what Ms. Boucher said.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's not what I said.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I'm opposed to the amendment.

Hon. Michael Chong: There's no reason to hear from Ms. Oda, since Ms. Verner is responsible for that commitment.

[*English*]

Under the act the Minister of Canadian Heritage has responsibility, but when Madame Verner and Mr. Emerson became ministers the government signed a letter delegating the authority from the Minister of Canadian Heritage to Minister Emerson for the Olympics, which falls under Heritage, and to Minister Verner for Official Languages and the coordination thereof, which also falls under Heritage.

Practically speaking, Minister Oda has no say in what goes on in Official Languages, so there's absolutely no reason to have her appear in front of the committee. She has delegated that authority to Minister Verner.

The same goes for sport. She has delegated that authority. She doesn't get involved or say anything about it, so there's no reason to have her in front of committee. She's not going to be able to answer any of your questions. That's why we are proposing the amendment.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, go ahead, please.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I don't think that the fact that she and her government delegated another person releases her from her responsibility under the act. I want the motion to remain as it is. I want us to invite her and to move forward, because we have to see what we're going to do with the witnesses. It's coming fast. For the moment, I don't approve the witness list.

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm ready to vote.

The Chair: That's good.

Mr. Harvey's name is on the list.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Minister Verner came here before the committee to explain to us that she had full and complete responsibility for official languages. Furthermore, the Commissioner of Official Languages indicated the same thing in his report, stating that Minister Verner was fully and completely responsible for official languages. I'm objectively trying to understand why we're trying to have Ms. Oda appear. I have nothing against that, but once again I'm trying to understand the thinking of my opposition colleagues.

•(1055)

The Chair: No one else wishes to speak.

Is the committee ready to make a decision on the amendment moved by Ms. Boucher?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The amendment—

The Chair: The amendment would read as introduced by Ms. Folco, except that we would delete Ms. Oda's name.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: Is the committee ready to vote on the motion introduced by Ms. Folco? Do you want me to read it? No, that's fine.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next item on the committee's business agenda is the witness list that was distributed to you. I am ready to hear comments on the witness list that was distributed to you.

Mr. Godin, go ahead, please.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I had entered the names of witnesses. I don't know who selected the witnesses or how that was done, but the name of a person like Michel Doucet does not appear on it.

The Chair: To simplify matters, I would invite committee members to make clear recommendations and to identify the key witnesses.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why do the names of certain persons, like Michel Doucet and Pierre Foucher, not appear on the list?

The Chair: Michel Doucet, that's good.

Are there any other persons?

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's Michel Doucet.

The Chair: Are there any other persons—

Mr. Yvon Godin: There was also the president of the Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick. I had indicated the name of the director. I don't know whether the president has refused to come, I don't know, but there was the president, Marie-Pierre Simard.

The Chair: As you know, there were approximately 40 witnesses. We tried to keep them. As to whether it's the president or the executive director, we can inquire with the clerk of the committee or after the meeting. We can provide clarification as necessary.

I'm taking note of your questions concerning Michel Doucet and the director or president. I could clarify—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I know that it's stated on your list: the acting director.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Yvon Godin: She has just been appointed. I want to know whether Marie-Pierre Simard, the president, has been invited.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I want to make a comment, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. I'll get back to you on that matter.

Mr. Yvon Godin: As for the others, we will send them... I don't want to take any more time, because there are only three minutes left.

The Chair: Ms. Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I have a very brief comment, Mr. Chairman.

I would simply like to congratulate you, the team and you: in the three meetings, I see there will be French- and English-speaking people.

The Chair: That's the job of the committee clerk. Thank you, Ms. Folco.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Michel Doucet's name was stated. In my opinion, we should also ask two other persons to appear: Mr. Caza and Mr. Roger Gauthier, from Saskatchewan.

The Chair: All right, I'll take note of that. That's Mr. Caza and—

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Roger Gauthier.

The Chair: From what organization?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: He's from the Commission nationale des parents francophones.

The Chair: All right, that's noted. Of course, we will check with the clerks to see if the witnesses are available.

Mr. D'Amours, you may make your comment. Then it will be Ms. Boucher's turn.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I'll be brief, Mr. Chairman.

I simply want you to confirm for me that the three names that were provided to you and that are not on the list, those of Mr. Doucet, Mr. Caza and the president of the SAANB, will indeed be attending one of the three meetings and will not just be considered.

The Chair: I can confirm that for you at this time. What I am presenting to you this morning is a draft.

Next Tuesday, at our next meeting, we can provide you with the revised list based on this morning's comments.

•(1100)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, let's clarify a minor point.

Next Tuesday, are we going to hear the witnesses?

The Chair: Of course.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Then I don't understand why you're saying that you will be providing us with a revised list next week.

The Chair: As you can see, some witnesses have confirmed their attendance. I have already taken the initiative of calling witnesses, because I want to be sure that people will be here next Tuesday. The witnesses whose names appear on the lists of June 14 and 19 have not been summoned. That's why it is still possible to make adjustments.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: All right.

Can you simply confirm that you are going to take steps so that Messrs. Caza and Doucet can in fact be invited to one of the planned meetings, and that they are not just considered?

The Chair: We are going to review all the comments in relation to the list. However, I assure you that we will take them into consideration in revising the list.

Does that answer your question, Mr. D'Amours?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: What I mean—

The Chair: If 40 names are moved around this table this morning, we definitely won't be able to enter them all. If there are only two or three names, probably—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We're talking about two names.

The Chair: If other witnesses are not added—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: [*Inaudible - Editor*] and the SAANB are on the list.

The Chair: If other witnesses are not added, we will be able to do that, Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: All right.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: My comment is similar to that of Ms. Folco. I feel there's something for everyone. We have as many Anglophones as Francophones, which is good.

In addition, I have to tell my colleagues that I very much enjoyed this morning's meeting. It was conducted in an atmosphere of professionalism and friendship.

The Chair: On that happy note, I thank you for your attention. We'll see each other next Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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