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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0900)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Welcome, everybody, to the first meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is January 29, 2008, and this is the committee's 10th meeting since prorogation.

Today marked the beginning not only of a new year but also of a new stage in the committee's work, as we are beginning a brief study on public service take-up of the action plan for official languages.

Before introducing today's witnesses, I would like to remind the committee members that the steering committee has prepared and sent out a list of witnesses for the next four meetings. Our next meeting will be televised and the sole witness will be the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Without any further ado, I would now like to introduce our witnesses. We have with us today Mr. Bruce Manion, Assistant Deputy Minister at the Department of Canadian Heritage; Mr. Jérôme Moisan, Senior Director at the Official Languages Secretariat; and Mr. Hubert Lussier, Director General of Official Languages Support Programs. We will therefore be hearing representatives from both the official languages program and the secretariat.

I would now like to hand over the floor to our witnesses.

Mr. Bruce Manion (Assistant Deputy Minister, Planning and Corporate Affairs, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We felt it appropriate to provide you with a brief overview of the current Action Plan for Official Languages. To this end, we submitted a written presentation this morning—I believe you all have a copy. With the indulgence of the committee, before answering your questions, we would like to quickly walk you through the presentation to bring you up-to-date with the current situation regarding the action plan. I appreciate that you all have a degree of familiarity with the action plan, but I am not sure whether everybody has the same level of knowledge and understanding.

Page two provides an overview of the five-year action plan launched in 2003 covering the period 2003 to 2008. It has three priority streams: education, community development and exemplary public service. A fourth component, the language industry, was added to these three priority streams. Accountability and coordination measures for the action plan are the responsibility of the Official Languages Secretariat which is now under the

auspices of the section of Canadian Heritage for which I am responsible.

On the next page of the presentation, you will see a list of the 10 federal institutions that were the most involved in the initial action plan. It should be noted that Industry Canada also includes the four regional development agencies and the National Research Council, all of which were primarily involved in the fourth stream, the language industry. In addition, the Official Languages Secretariat was transferred from the Privy Council Office to Canadian Heritage on April 1, 2006.

The next slide provides a breakdown of the proposed funding for the four priority streams. More than \$380 million over five years were earmarked for education; around \$270 million over five years for community development; \$64 million for an exemplary public service; and \$20 million for the language industry. In addition, \$16 million over five years were set aside for accountability and coordination measures, for a total of \$751 million. Supplementary funding was allocated between 2005 and 2007, including \$12 million over three years for the Enabling Fund for Language Minority Communities, bringing the total amount invested in this fund to \$36 million. Ten point six million dollars in supplementary funding was also provided for health and \$12 million for the Canada School of Public Service, bringing the grand total to \$810 million.

Page five provides you with an overview of the main findings of the mid-term report published in 2005. The report focused on the first two years of the action plan and its objective was to determine the status of the various initiatives that had been planned; it was not, however, a formal evaluation of these initiatives or indeed of any programs that were part of the action plan.

The main findings of the report related to expenditure that had been undertaken by that date. At that time, \$187.5 million had been spent out of a total envelope of \$751 million. The report also observed that the various departments had set up infrastructures, thus getting the ball rolling for future program implementations. However, as is often noted when new programs are launched, a certain degree of foot-dragging and inertia had to be overcome. In spite of a fairly slow start, the mid-term report observed that the ground was set for the process to speed up. The foundations were laid to allow full implementation of programming and expenditure over the remaining three years.

The mid-term report also noted progress such as improved dialogue between federal institutions and their partners—the provinces, the communities, and other official language stakeholders—as well as significant advances in several areas including early childhood, justice, health and immigration.

● (0905)

As is the case with any initiative, progress is faster in some areas than in others. The mid-term report showed a positive impact on the use of both official languages in the federal public service, although shortcomings still exist with regard to public servants' knowledge of departmental responsibilities under the Official Languages Act. There also remains work to be done regarding language training for public servants. The report also highlights the creation of the Language Industry Association and the construction of the Language Technologies Research Centre, inaugurated in May 2006.

In general, feedback from both the anglophone and francophone communities was positive at the time of the mid-term report. Nevertheless, communities remain concerned about the length of time needed to approve funding and the red tape with which they are confronted. I will return to this issue a little later.

In 2005, a horizontal results-based management and accountability framework for the entire Official Languages Program was developed. Further information on this framework can be found in page seven.

The framework is essentially a means of coordinating all government action in the field of official languages, particularly that which is related to the action plan. It promotes accountability, and allows us both to measure the results that have been achieved with the additional funding and to monitor the overall progress made by the government in official languages.

When the framework was launched, it was heralded as a sterling example of multi-departmental, multi-program horizontal coordination. It has maintained its reputation amongst our central agencies to this day. Our primary objective is to gather information on how the programs and activities stemming from the action plan are performing in order to be able to produce the indicators provided for in the management framework.

On page 8 you will find a breakdown of the \$810-million budget, showing planned and actual expenditure for the key departments over the five years. I would take this opportunity to point out that although total expenditure was expected to stand at \$611 million by 2006-2007, only \$601 million had actually been spent. This gives a 1.6% disparity over four years, perfectly within the standard parameters for public financial management.

I am now going to ask Hubert Lussier to give you some more information on those elements of the Action Plan for Official Languages that specifically relate to Canadian Heritage programs.

● (0910)

Mr. Hubert Lussier (Director General, Official Languages Support Programs, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you.

The aim of my brief presentation is to draw your attention to one of the important elements of the action plan. As Bruce just pointed

out, a significant percentage of the \$750 million was earmarked for programs under my purview. With your indulgence, I will therefore make a few remarks on this subject.

Canadian Heritage has managed programs supporting official languages for almost 40 years now. The resources granted under the action plan allowed us to strengthen mechanisms that were already in place. I think it is important to bear that in mind. Although certain provisions of the action plan created entirely new initiatives, Canadian Heritage used the additional funding to strengthen existing mechanisms.

In the interest of succinctness, there are two official languages support programs. One is called the Development of Official Languages Communities, and one of its major components addresses education in the minority language, i.e., French outside of Quebec and English in Quebec. This program also supports communities through their community networks and supports provinces in the provision of provincial and territorial services to minority communities. That is the first program.

The second program is called Enhancement of Official Languages and primarily focuses on second-language learning. In other words, it focuses on knowledge and understanding the other language. The action plan also provided new funding for this program.

To conclude, the action plan aimed to address specific challenges that had been identified at the time, including primarily, but not exclusively, those relating to education. Page 12 provides you with an overview of some of our objectives, including recruiting and retaining entitled students in French-language schools in minority communities. That was one of our principal objectives. Other objectives included improving access to post-secondary education, raising standards in post-secondary education and developing school community centres, which are key to recruitment and retention in a number of communities. All of these measures fall under the education component of our support program for French-language minorities outside of Quebec and English-speakers in Quebec. The plan also allocated support for provinces for the provision of new or improved community services. Obviously, I am referring to provincial and territorial services.

Obviously, this involved significantly less money than was allocated for education; if memory serves me well, it was around \$19 million over five years. In terms of community support, the plan also provided resources to community networks for individual projects relating to culture, community radio and communication. With regard to the enhancement of the official languages program, the program focusing on second-language learning, our objectives included improving teaching skills. As there is a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly for teaching French to English speakers, we also focused on modernizing second-language teaching methods.

That completes my brief overview of what the action plan for official languages entailed for Canadian Heritage.

•(0915)

Mr. Bruce Manion: Obviously, we are aware that the renewal of the action plan for official languages was announced in the 2007 Speech from the Throne. We are currently in the process of finalizing our evaluation of the first action plan; we have just completed our consultations and we will be issuing recommendations for the next plan.

We would now be delighted to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

The committee's aim for this morning's meeting is just that—we want to discuss the results of the Action Plan for Official Languages and gain a better understanding of the successes and pitfalls so that we can develop recommendations for the second action plan.

Without any further ado, I am going to hand over to Mr. Rodriguez, a member of the official opposition.

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

Good morning to our witnesses, it is a pleasure to have you with us again. Thank you for appearing before us this morning and thank you for your presentation.

Your presentation was on the original action plan. Was it substantively amended along the way or did it remain largely unchanged?

Mr. Bruce Manion: It remained largely unchanged. There were certain new additions; as I mentioned earlier, some \$50 million in supplementary funding was made available.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Were there any changes other than the addition of \$50 million?

Mr. Bruce Manion: No, it has remained essentially unchanged since its inception. Obviously, adjustments were made to the various programs as a result of decisions made by individual departments. That is simply par for the course in rolling out a program. There were however no substantial changes to the planned programs.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Did the management structure within the plan change?

Mr. Bruce Manion: There were some changes such as the transfer of the Official Languages Secretariat from the Privy Council Office to Canadian Heritage. This transfer did not, however, change the role or the activities of the secretariat. It only changed the reporting structure.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Are you saying that you do not believe the transfer to have had any real consequences?

Mr. Bruce Manion: That is correct. The secretariat continues to operate as it did when it reported to the Privy Council Office. Adjustments have been made within the department. For example, the secretariat reports to me as the official responsible for the department's strategic policy, and not to my colleague who is responsible for Mr. Lussier's programs, in order to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest. This was a conscious decision made by our deputy minister. The secretariat however continues to fulfil the same role that it did before. It continues to work with the various departments and to coordinate committee meetings.

Particularly those of the ADM's committee and its working groups on evaluation, research, policy, etc.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thus far, it cannot really be said that the passage of Bill S-3 has had much of an effect. The act has not really been implemented. Do you think that anything has changed since Bill S-3 was adopted more than two years ago?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I would say that both my role and that of my colleagues at the secretariat have been hampered up. Nevertheless, I say that bearing in mind that there is a subtle difference between our roles. My colleagues at the secretariat coordinate all official languages activities, while a section of my team is responsible for supporting the minister and implementing measures relating to section 42 of the Official Languages Act, in other words coordinating the way in which federal institutions handle the new responsibilities conferred upon them by Bill S-3, the bill that you mentioned.

Our roles existed prior to the amendments to the act, but our responsibilities have increased due to far greater contact and dialogue with all federal institutions, including the Department of Justice, which acts in an advisory capacity on this front. There has been a change not so much in the nature as in the intensity of the education and coordination work that we carry out.

•(0920)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: How much time do I have left, please?

The Chair: Three minutes.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: How are your preparations for the new phase of the action plan progressing?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We have just completed our consultations and are in the process of summarizing the testimony that we heard so that we can prepare an opinion on the second phase.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: How did you decide who you would consult? In general terms, who did you consult?

Mr. Bruce Manion: I can assure you that we have a multi-pronged approach to consultation. We hold annual consultations with the communities and the major official languages stakeholders in the spring. We also rely on reports from parliamentary committees and the commissioner. Furthermore, we recently held a consultation with a view to seeking out the opinion of stakeholders who had not necessarily previously had an opportunity to contribute to the debate. It was really Mr. Bernard Lord who carried out this last phase of consultations. Our analysis involves looking at all of these elements, as well as recent census data, evaluations that are under way, and information concerning programs funded by the action plan. All of this is being studied to help us develop an opinion as to what direction the second phase should take.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: When is the second phase supposed to be launched? In two or three months?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We are expecting an announcement in the spring. The government plans on releasing something...

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: But the current action plan ends in March 2008, does it not?

Mr. Bruce Manion: Yes.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: One would therefore imagine that the new one would start at the beginning of April to avoid a gap between the two.

Mr. Bruce Manion: Indeed. The first action plan did however provide for repeat funding of certain activities and so there will not be a period of absolute non-activity. A large number of programs stemming from the plan have been awarded funding beyond the life of the plan.

The Chair: Thank you. We will now go to the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor.

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

I would like to begin by greeting my colleagues, Mr. Petit and Mr. Chong, as I did not have an opportunity to do so earlier.

Mr. Moisan, Mr. Manion and Mr. Lussier, good morning. Oversight powers exist to ensure that the official languages situation can be improved and that your work can be continued in order to meet the very laudable objectives that have been set out with regard to fostering both official languages.

That being said, I read with interest the document that our researcher prepared for us. I am also fairly familiar with official languages issues myself. I have some questions, relating more to results than money. The Official Languages Act was enacted in 1969 and has since undergone a number of changes and developments, etc. The public service is very important not only to the Outaouais region, but everywhere in Canada where there are federal public servants. I have an idea for you. You do not need to give me a detailed response if it is something upon which you have not cogitated, but I would nonetheless like you to take it on board and discuss it with the minister.

Should we not adopt a rule requiring all federal employees to be bilingual when they apply for a position, rather than trying to make them bilingual within a certain timeframe after they have been hired by having them participate in training courses and programs which, as we have seen with the Canadian Forces and elsewhere, lead us inevitably to situations of utter absurdity? We have unilingual employees in bilingual positions and in positions where a knowledge of French is very important. Have you considered the possibility of requiring employees to be bilingual, be it to your CCC or CBC standard, or whatever standard you choose to use, before being appointed to certain positions?

● (0925)

Mr. Bruce Manion: In answer to your question, I should firstly point out that this matter falls under the purview of the commission.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Which commission?

Mr. Bruce Manion: The Public Service Commission, the Canada Public Service Agency.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You are saying that your mandate does not extend to such matters.

Mr. Bruce Manion: That is correct.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So if a directive is issued, you make the appropriate adjustments, but if none is forthcoming, you do not necessarily act. Very well.

I will move on to another topic. There are many components to the program.

Let us talk about Montreal and the Pontiac. The *Journal de Montréal*, the *Office de la langue française*, and even Statistics Canada—I am not in the realm of the hypothetical here—have pointed out that French is becoming the minority language on Montreal island. The consensus is that French is the more vulnerable of our two official languages. It has unfortunately suffered the effects of assimilation, unlike English which, as we are in North America, enjoys a larger population and cultural base.

Would it be possible to include measures in the Action Plan for Official Languages to support francophone communities, such as those in Montreal island and the Pontiac, which are undergoing assimilation, and so attenuate the vulnerability of the French language?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: It is always somewhat perilous for an official to venture an opinion, Mr. Chairman. Nevertheless, I will attempt to address some of the issues raised by Mr. Nadeau.

With regard to French becoming the minority language on Montreal island, Statistics Canada reported—as the member well knows—that French-speakers with French as their mother tongue are becoming the minority group on Montreal island. Obviously, we could debate statistical definitions all day, but that is the category that is becoming a minority group. Nowadays, however, French is not the mother tongue of a significant number of French-speaking Quebecers. If you take that into consideration, you obviously get a different figure. If you look at it from that angle, French is not becoming the minority language on Montreal island.

Your question was theoretical.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Have you looked at the situation in the Pontiac?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Honestly, I have not looked at it specifically. We also get this question regarding certain anglophones in New Brunswick, from the Acadian Peninsula, who say they are in a minority situation. I don't want to compare the situations, but the phenomenon of minorization of a group that, at the provincial level, is the majority, does indeed exist in the Pontiac and in northeast New Brunswick. I believe those are the only two places where the problem you are raising might exist.

In terms of assistance programs for official languages, it is important to point out that the ability of anglophone students in Quebec to learn French properly is one of the aspects that receives support. That is one of the areas that the Government of Quebec has focused on recently. They realized that it was necessary to better equip these students in French.

● (0930)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The fact remains that this problem is unique and that it generates interest.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Nadeau.

You will have an opportunity to continue your questions on the next round.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Godin.

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

And thank you to the witnesses who are with us this morning.

Earlier, you talked about the commission led by Bernard Lord. Consultations took place in secret, behind closed doors. Did you learn anything from the Lord commission that had not been disclosed in all of the reports, studies and meetings—which were public, in this case—undertaken by this committee, which involved all political parties, throughout Canada? Has something changed as regards respect for bilingualism in Canada and in the public service? Did someone wave a magic wand during these meetings that will now help the government think about the issue of respect for official languages in Canada?

Mr. Bruce Manion: I think that Mr. Lord was able to complete the reflection and bring to the table additional complementary contributions. They were able to validate certain findings and certain comments from other groups, communities, and committees, and from the Commissioner. It was really a matter of obtaining the views of other stakeholders who, in the past, were not necessarily involved in this reflection.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Could we have the list of the stakeholders who have never been consulted?

Mr. Bruce Manion: Yes, the list will be available. Of course, we will provide the list of people who have authorized the disclosure of their names.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I thought the organizations were the same ones that we had met. I am eager to consult this list, to see if there are many groups on it, and to see if it was worthwhile paying for a contract to establish a new list of organizations that had reportedly been left out.

Mr. Jérôme Moisan (Senior Director, Official Languages Secretariat, Department of Canadian Heritage): Having accompanied Mr. Lord during all of the meetings, I can say that there were some groups that, at any rate, were unavoidable when we went to one place or another. So there was some overlap with groups that you had already met, and there were new groups. We can certainly give you the list of people who accepted to provide their names and who make up the vast majority of people whom we met with.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can you explain something on page 5 of the report? The Action Plan for Official Languages began in 2003, if I understand correctly, but I have some questions about the main findings. One hundred and eighty-seven million dollars out of \$751 million was spent. Will we get further explanations on that? We have also heard that one of the differences is that \$50 million in additional funding was granted. But I do not see why \$50 million was added when only \$187 million out of a possible total of \$751 million was spent. The money is there. It is fine and well to say that an additional \$50 million is being spent, but was it spent? Were these amounts spent in the communities or were the figures just put there for political purposes and for the media, when nothing was done? Perhaps I am misreading the document.

Mr. Bruce Manion: I want to draw your attention to page 8 of the document. It shows that actual expenditures during the first two years were lower and that there was subsequently a rather substantial increase, reaching approximately \$200 million per year.

During the first two years, total expenditures reached \$187 million, but during the next two years, at least \$200 million was spent annually.

Mr. Yvon Godin: How do you explain the \$187-million amount?

Mr. Bruce Manion: It was just for the first period. It was a mid-term evaluation for the years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. As I told you, it is a normal spending profile for this program, especially if we consider that we normally see that new programs are implemented somewhat slowly. After that, the spending curb goes up.

● (0935)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can you tell us where the blockage occurs? The money is there, the budgets have been adopted, and the communities are telling us that when the budgets run out, they have to get a line of credit to continue their operations. But the money is there, the budgets have been adopted. So who is blocking the communities? Is it the department? Is the government? This is one of the problems. Communities are expected to take charge and to have an action plan. But if the funding is provided late and the people are forced to turn to lines of credit or to proceed with lay-offs at the end of the program, in reality, the program is doomed to fail. We did not hold in camera meetings, but the people from the affected communities whom we met with publicly clearly told us, everywhere we went, that the money is coming in too late. So I ask the question: Who is holding up the money? Is it the department or is it the government itself that refuses to issue the cheque?

Mr. Bruce Manion: There are several causes for the situation you are describing. It is not unique to the Action Plan for Official Languages. The situation was noted in the report that was tabled last year on all of the federal government's grants and contributions processes. An independent panel prepared a report showing that our processes are quite cumbersome. They are slow-moving, and we are unable to guarantee multi-year agreements. There is recourse to project funding and not to operational funding. So the same criticism exists elsewhere in the machine of government. Yes the approval process is somewhat slow, and we see that especially with new programs. Of course we have our own internal approvals, Treasury Board approval, etc., but once launched, there is still some slowness, some inertia on the part of the federal machine and as a result operations are not at an optimal speed. We see that within—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I don't think that is—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin, you may continue on the next round.

We will now go to the government side. Mr. Lemieux, the parliamentary secretary, has the floor.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentation this morning. You have given us a good overview of the action plan.

Can you describe existing mechanisms that support communities in their consultation work and that allow for cooperation between the government and our official languages minority communities?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: All kinds of consultation mechanisms exist, and they vary by department. My colleagues will perhaps add some clarification. The mechanism at Health Canada is often recognized as one that is highly appreciated by communities. The department has created two committees that meet periodically, one for the anglophone community in Quebec and the other for francophones outside Quebec.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has created an equivalent one for francophones outside Quebec. Both officials and community representatives sit on the committee. Together, they define the objectives and sometimes determine program mechanisms.

At Heritage Canada, the mechanisms are somewhat similar. There is a coordination committee for anglophones from Quebec and a coordination committee for francophones outside Quebec. Beyond that, for a host of specific problems—that is the case for culture, for example—there are working groups made up of community members and departmental representatives, and sometimes several departments are involved at once.

Culture is an area where there is a lot of this kind of cooperation. For example, my colleagues from Heritage Canada sit on working groups with people from the Canada Council for the Arts and people from the communities, and the National Arts Centre, or Telefilm Canada, etc. There are countless models that vary from one to the other, but they have been set up over the past five or six years and continue to evolve.

• (0940)

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: I will add that at the secretariat, we manage an annual process, which takes place in the spring, involving consultations of officials from each department that has received funding from the action plan. A day of meetings is set aside for representatives from francophone communities outside Quebec, and a day of meetings is set aside for anglophones from Quebec. Last year, we were innovative. We held a day of meetings with groups interested especially in issues involving linguistic duality. That included groups like Canadian Parents for French, people from immersion, research institutes on bilingualism, and so on. The goal of these consultations is to see where they are at with the action plan, what the priorities are, what we can see from that and what we could improve. It is another mechanism for dialogue with the communities to get an update with them and their representatives on an annual basis.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You work with the communities. How do you find their general understanding of our action plan? Do they understand it well? I have noted an increase in spending each year. At the start, in 2003-2004, expenditures were \$55 or \$56 million, and in 2006-2007, expenditures are now approximately \$213 million. Based on your experience, is there a good understanding of the action plan and the initiatives?

Mr. Bruce Manion: In general, yes, even if it is not equal among all groups and communities. The representatives and organizations representing the communities, like the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) and the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), do have a very good understanding of the action plan and of programming that stems from it. During the discussions, they did, nevertheless, make several suggestions to improve these programs. We talk with them quite regularly. In areas

where programming is relatively new, there are some challenges. There were some challenges as regards the launching and awareness aspects, for example. I think that the communities' understanding is, nonetheless, on the high end.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Can you give us some concrete examples, tell us about some real success stories that would not have taken place in the official languages minority communities without the action plan? Can you give us details on some projects that have yielded concrete results?

Mr. Bruce Manion: I will leave it up to my colleague Hubert to talk about our programming. I will, however, say that in the area of health, we have noted some substantial progress, especially regarding the development and solidification of networks, in addition to capacity, within the communities, to use these networks to provide better health services. The communities themselves recognize that this is a highly significant result. Of course, that creates pressure for completing a second phase. Around the table, that accomplishment is often referred to as one of the best examples of significant and concrete results.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I will give you one or two very concrete examples. The action plan has created some leeway financially that has made it possible to fund projects in school community centres. Two of these centres are in New Brunswick, one in Fredericton and one in Saint John, and they have seen their funding increase. Some centres have been built in Saskatchewan. Quebec already has Community Learning Centres. A somewhat similar network is being created for the anglophone community in Quebec. In short, the action plan has allowed for the creation of seven or eight school community centres.

I would like to draw your attention to an aspect that has received very little visibility, but that has made it possible to help provinces go farther in terms of services offered to the community. For example, New Brunswick has adopted legislation dealing with services in French. We were in a position to help with the implementation of that legislation by developing a series of tools in French for the Acadian community in that province.

• (0945)

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

That completes our first round. We will now start the second round with Mr. D'Amours.

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

I want to thank you for joining us this morning.

You have talked about successes that have helped move things along. We have talked mainly about health, but I would also like to address the issue of education. I would like to know if, in your view, being able to offer schools to minority francophone communities is part of what we might call successes.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: It is both a success and an essential service for the future of the communities. Enabling these communities to have educational institutions of their own that offer quality programs for the entire time children are in school is key. In that regard, we can say that the plan has made a difference.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You said that offering services in the languages of the communities was something crucial. Actually, they cannot, in the area of education, defend themselves in court against provincial political authorities. They have been deprived of these tools that they used for building the foundations of their community.

Mr. Lussier, you commented that the Court Challenges Program should not have been cut, because it was helping certain minority francophone communities to build or to preserve the heart of their community and thus to avoid a heart... condition, shall we say. In any case, I appreciated your comments on this matter.

Earlier, we discussed the yearly spring meetings in which the communities take part. Are these communities and their various organizations being consulted? Are their needs evaluated in a global way, or in a more restricted sense?

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: Traditionally, every spring, we invite about 40 francophone community association representatives. Thus, we are in touch with the entire membership of the FCFA associations, which includes all the representatives of provincial or territorial organizations, besides the representatives of sectors, which include literacy federations, francophone parents' associations, etc. We are casting a fairly wide net. We are doing the same thing with the Quebec anglophones.

As I said earlier, last year we contacted a number of new stakeholders to discuss the issues of bilingualism with them. Thus, we can take the national pulse, because we have francophone representatives from every province, as well as representatives of the various sectors in the provinces.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: This is how the department is taking the pulse of the various communities. It is clear that we are casting a fairly wide net. Earlier, you also mentioned the new action plan which is to replace the former Dion plan.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages also travelled to the communities to meet with them and to assess the situation. Probably, you consulted them along with various organizations. You must also have found, generally, that we cast a fairly wide net because we visited locations all over Canada. Thus, we also cast a fairly wide net to be sure that we get a clear idea of what the communities need, what they are asking for.

Do you agree?

• (0950)

Mr. Bruce Manion: Yes.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We agree on both points. The department has the task of meeting these organizations every spring. Moreover, the Standing Committee on Official Languages is in charge of meeting with organizations even more directly in the field. I wonder how this will turn out. You usually do this in the spring. However, the issue of the Standing Committee on Official Languages is not a new one. But putting all these things together, we cast an even wider net.

This brings me to the following question: If we cast our nets wide as you also did, what was the purpose of asking the former premier of New Brunswick to travel all over the country right away and to do

everything all over again, while we could have drawn up an action plan today for the next fiscal year beginning on April 1?

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours, your time is up.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Already?

The Chair: I now give the floor to a member from the governing party.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Yvon Godin: As you know, the English versions of documents often say "The French will follow". In this case, we heard the question; the answer will follow.

Some members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We have seen what Mr. D'Amours holds close to his heart.

Mr. Michael Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you for your presentation.

[English]

I have a question about our programs that work in cooperation with the provinces with respect to education in the second language. Maybe you could tell the committee how many students benefit from this program and roughly what portion of the funds for the entire action plan have been allocated for education in the second language.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The numbers are approximately as follows. There are, roughly speaking, 2.4 million students presently in Canada learning a second official language. Of those, 300-plus are in French immersion. And although the federal funding that goes to the provinces—

Hon. Michael Chong: That is 300,000.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: It's 300,000. The portion of the federal funding that goes through the provinces towards second language instruction targets in particular, but not only, immersion. So you could say that we focus a lot on immersion, although we also spend money on the improvement of what we call basic French or intensive French. There are all fashions of teaching the second language.

The amount of funding that goes to second language instruction is, roughly speaking, 40% of the whole education support envelope.

Hon. Michael Chong: The vast majority of that 40% goes to the 300,000 students. Would that be fair to say?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I would say a majority probably goes to immersion.

Hon. Michael Chong: Do those transfers happen through the provinces, or do they go directly to the school boards?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: They go through the provinces. All of those moneys go through the provinces through bilateral agreements.

Hon. Michael Chong: Maybe you could tell the committee a little more generally about the bilateral agreements and how they work. For every student there's a per head allocation. Is that how it works? Or does the province remit to the federal government that this is how many students we have in French immersion, or English immersion, and this is what we're asking for? Is it a transfer?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: There's a mix of historical formulas, the subtleties of which probably go back to 30 years ago, and some targeted funding that is indeed more of a specific function of the numbers of students who do learn the second language in every province. That's how the allocation of the money that is in the action plan was devised.

At the beginning of the implementation of the action plan there was a lot of discussion between our department and the CMEC, which is the Council of Ministers of Education, and indeed between the provinces and territories that are members of the council, between themselves, to arrive specifically at the numbers you're asking about.

• (0955)

Hon. Michael Chong: I have one other quick question. Generally speaking, is enrolment in French immersion rising? Is it falling? Is it steady?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Overall in Canada it is rising, although in some provinces there have been some small decreases. Because it has increased in Ontario in particular, which is obviously the most populous province, as well as in the two western provinces, Alberta and B.C., the numbers have increased over the past few years.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you. *Merci*.

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup*. Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We will now move on to the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Gravel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for coming.

I am a new member of the Official Languages Committee and I wonder whether the number of francophones in Canada is increasing or decreasing?

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: According to the last census, the number of francophones in Canada has increased, but their proportion to the population as a whole has decreased. I can show you the figures if you want, but the overall number is going up and the proportion is going down.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: This is peculiar. The number of francophones is decreasing in Montreal and Quebec, while it is increasing in Canada as a whole.

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: Honourable member, this has to do with proportions. We take the absolute figure and divide the denominator by the global population in the same environment. Insofar as decreases and increases are concerned, we make a distinction between absolute numbers and numbers that reflect a proportion of the population. This is what the census shows.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Do you see any difference between the threat to English and the threat to French in different provinces? For instance, is English under threat in Quebec, in your opinion?

Mr. Bruce Manion: It is hard to tell. We study the census data and we investigate the observations and conclusions. In absolute numbers, there is no threat, but we must still look at the trends behind the figures. We have to study the birth rate as well as other things such as the immigration rate, arrivals from other provinces or other places. This figure is not easy to interpret. Naturally, it is difficult to conclude from these fluctuations in numbers whether the English or the French language is actually declining. Many other factors come into play.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Do you give more protection to French, because French is more vulnerable than English everywhere in Canada, even in Quebec?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: This might annoy my Quebec anglophone friends, but if we look at the figures, we can see that much more money is spent in support of francophones outside of Quebec than for the Quebec anglophones. This is blatantly obvious. To my colleague's answer, let me add that the problems that Quebec anglophones have have little to do with losing their language. They have more to do with the vitality of communities. Of course, I mean the communities outside Montreal whose living conditions are in many ways quite similar to those of many francophone communities outside Quebec. We hear about faltering institutions, an aging population, and the erosion of the economic foundations that had sustained these communities for a very long period of time. Besides, there is an increasing exchange of best practices going on between francophones outside Quebec and anglophones outside Montreal in Quebec.

• (1000)

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Very well. What do you think of the request made by the Bloc Québécois, whereby the federal public service should function in French on Quebec territory? Do you find this exaggerated, or do you think that this would protect the French language in Quebec?

Mr. Bruce Manion: A public servant should not make statements on such matters. People should do without our opinion.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Nonetheless, do you think that Quebec needs legislation to protect the French language, and fairly strict legislation, such as Bill 101? Do we need this to protect French culture in Quebec?

Mr. Bruce Manion: I must give you the same answer. We have no business making any statements about the way in which provinces will go about ensuring the vitality of their language communities. Of course, measures must be taken to that effect, but we, as federal public servants, have no mandate to express our opinions on the way in which the provinces go about it.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: I can ask for an opinion, since you are experts.

Mr. Bruce Manion: Nevertheless, we must observe certain restrictions.

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

Let us now conclude the second round with Mr. Godin from the NDP.

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

I would like to correct what my friend Mr. Gravel just said. Unless I am mistaken, Bill C-482 from the Bloc Québécois is aimed at private undertakings under federal jurisdiction and not at the public service. There is a difference.

With regard to Montreal, I do not know whether the study is finished. We heard on the news that Montreal was becoming more anglophone than francophone. We hear about the Island of Montreal, but has the entire Montreal region been fully studied? Many people have left Montreal to settle on the south shore, in the area around Taschereau Boulevard, in what is now called region 10-30.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We say 450. You can have region 10-30, if you want it.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am not talking about the telephone number.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: No, no.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It has to do with the highway, in the area where there is a large shopping centre, etc. Many people move there from Montreal. If we add up both factors, there is a big difference because many people are moving. Has this subject been studied?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I could not tell you. I imagine that you are referring to studies from the Conseil supérieur de la langue française du Québec. Perhaps there are studies going on. I know that the issue of people of francophone lineage who leave the Island of Montreal to settle on the south shore or on Laval island is frequently raised. This is no doubt actually reflected in the figures, but I cannot make any further comments.

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: As a matter of fact, sir, you are referring to two different sets of data from the census. The first set has to do with Montreal Island and shows a decrease. The second set has to do with the metropolitan region, which is geographically larger, where there is a different picture that reflects what you just mentioned. Moreover, some francophones left the island and settled in the suburban ring around the island, either to the north or to the south, and there, the situation is slightly different. In fact, the census clearly reflects this state of affairs.

No further studies have been done. Statistics Canada published the census in December and we are not aware of any more advanced studies.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Our researchers tell us, according to the data from the Public Accounts of Canada, that the funds spent on education in the minority language and on community life decreased by \$10 million in 2006-2007 as compared to 2005-2006, which means that they went down from \$231 to \$221 million.

Where was this cut made? Who was penalized?

• (1005)

Mr. Hubert Lussier: From what year to what year did you say?

Mr. Yvon Godin: In 2006-2007, the amount decreased by \$10 million. The amount spent decreased from \$231 to \$221 million.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I will try to find my figures quickly.

I am not familiar with these figures because the 2006-2007 figures, which are the ones I usually use and which will soon appear

in the annual report, show \$226 million in expenses. You were talking about total expenses for education.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I was talking about education in the minority language and about community life.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Now this is the total expenditure for communities. I see \$226 million. For the previous year, in the same category, I have \$232 million.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It went down from \$232 to \$226 million.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Yes. The 2006-2007 figures, as I said, have not yet been published. However, those are, more or less, the figures I am preparing to recommend to the minister for publication in the yearly report.

Why would there be a difference? These figures are not quite of the same magnitude as the figures you quoted, but fluctuations can occur from year to year due to a number of factors. For instance, there may be a year with three large infrastructure projects which will not recur in the following year. We can to some extent manage the funds, and I say this in the presence of my colleague who is not only in charge of official languages, but who is also the department's chief financial officer. Sometimes, it is done by using resources that come from outside the department and that are not spent on other programs, which could create a small peak in the expenses on official languages during a given year, followed by a small drop in the next year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lussier. Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We have finished the second round. Since three parties told me that they want to carry on with the question period, we will have a third turn.

Without any further ado, I give the floor to Mr. Rodriguez.

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

At the outset, I have two or three brief comments to make. The number of francophones also went up in Quebec. The increase may not have been proportional, but in absolute figures, their numbers also increased in Quebec.

I am specifically addressing my friends from the Bloc Québécois and Mr. Nadeau because Mr. Gravel is not present. We can be friends and get along well even though we do not belong to the same party.

Regarding the latest published study that refers to the language spoken at home, I would advise you to be very careful with this, because if we go by this study, I myself am not a francophone. Notwithstanding my great love for French and notwithstanding the fact that my father always insisted on my speaking French outside the home, we grew up speaking Spanish at home. Thus, I am totally excluded from this study.

I hope that we will pay close attention to these things because they can seriously divide a society.

Mr. Lussier, earlier you referred to the fact that more money was allocated to francophones. Do we have any percentages?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Yes, the percentages are published in the annual reports. The percentage spent by each province on the Development of Official Languages Communities program, would give us an approximate idea. In fact, by definition, whatever is spent in Quebec for developing the minority community goes to the anglophones. Conversely, everything spent outside Quebec goes to the francophones. You can consult, in the annual reports, the tables that explain the provincial figures, and you will see a distribution more or less like this one.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You do not know them by heart.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I will have to consult my notes.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You could do this shortly and come back to us.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: If you want, I will be glad to answer you in writing.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: All right, or else you can give me some idea before the end of the meeting. I do not want you to lose precious time.

In your opinion, was there anything that did not really work during the first phase, or that we should not repeat or that we should simply eliminate?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We are reviewing the evaluations. We do not see anything at first glance, but programs can always be improved and adjusted. As far as I am concerned, I do not see anything at first glance. No.

• (1010)

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: Sir, with your permission, I would say that in all our discussions with the communities, there is never any question of cutting anything but rather...

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Of adding things.

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: ...of adding things. As people always say, it worked well, but it could work even better, so let us add some more things.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: With more money and more...

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: That is what I mean.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: This brings me to another question. Do we have any idea yet of what could be included or added? For instance, we heard several times that the cultural part was not included and that no money was set aside for that. Can we presume that there will be something reserved for that?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We heard the same at every consultation. It was repeated again last week when we did our synthesis. Therefore, it will be on our radar screen. We are envisaging various possible ways to intervene in that area. Of course, we singled out the aspect that is of interest to the representatives and main stakeholders as a whole.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: At this time, no idea has been formulated, there is no general idea...

Mr. Bruce Manion: It would be premature.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: It would be a first. We have no right to... be polite, say it.

When will the next consultations take place? You mentioned the spring, but have you any more specific dates?

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: We have not yet set a date for our regular spring meeting. I presume that we will be having our yearly consultation with public servants in April, but we have not set a date so far.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Will there be any further consultations before proceeding with the second stage, or is it finished? Have we reached the stage of drafting and establishing budget priorities?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We can always try to validate certain thoughts and ideas of ours. That can be done. Of course, since many elements of the action plan are provided by other levels of government, there will have to be a final consultation on projects and programs. We are not saying no, nothing specific is being envisaged at this time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rodriguez. I would have liked to have told you in Spanish to stay tuned for further developments on the cultural plane.

I will give the floor to the representatives of the Bloc. Mr. Nadeau.

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

There are many things and many situations that I find somewhat bewildering but in some cases, as a colleague of mine said, when it hurts, it tears away at my insides. You can imagine the pain.

We are talking about reviving linguistic duality in the federal public service, as if it had already been alive and as if it was being born again. We're also talking about improving the bilingual capacity of the public service. We know that French-speaking citizens should be able to get service in French from the Canadian state apparatus. We know the theory, but there are some practical problems.

I noted that funds had been allocated to that end and I will give you a few examples.

At the Canada post office in Saskatoon—it was the only one and it was near the municipal library—, there was a little blue sign that said: *On vous sert en français*, or it would say in red letters: “We serve in English”. During six years, each time I went there, the clerk looked at me with a discouraged expression. I'd say to him: *Je veux des timbres*. He would open his little drawer, take out his card, show me that the word *timbres* was written on it and he would say “Oh, stamps, how many?” I would answer as I pointed with my finger: *J'en veux dix*. “Oh, ten”, he would reply.

This went on for six years. This post office was pretending that it offered a service in both official languages. Perhaps there was a lack of goodwill, and perhaps this person should have been replaced. After all, at the post office, we do not want to spend too long waiting.

I have another example for you from Air Canada. You must have heard about this. In *Le Droit*, there was an article about Mr. Jean Léger, an Acadian who is fed up, and who missed his plane because he insisted on being served in French. Some might say that Air Canada is a subcontractor of the state. I am sorry, but this company receives federal funds.

Another, very sad example, has to do with Justin Bell from Gravelbourg. I got to know his parents because they were fighting to open the Beauséjour school in Gravelbourg. Justin Bell attended this French school, where French was taught as a first language. The parents went so far as to mortgage their home so that teachers could be hired. Then came school governance. After 64 years without a French school, they finally got one. They sent their child there. Today he is 25 years old and a teacher in Saskatchewan. He is a charming young gentleman. He got a ticket from the RCMP and asked to be served in French. They answered him in German, which was just adding insult to injury. All the events I mentioned happened in 2007.

Do you remember the 1988 Mercure decision which gave rise to the signing of the very first agreement between Canada and the communities? Mr. Lussier, you know that very well.

I have nothing against virtue, but I rather like the idea of preaching by example. However, the federal government, even within its own organizations... And do not try to tell me that the RCMP does not answer to some department, or, with regard to Canada Post, that this company is an agency or a crown corporation.

How do you evaluate the progress made with the action plan for citizens who want services in French? We saw the same thing happen here at the municipal level, in Ottawa, Canada's capital, a capital that is not bilingual. A person wanted to be served in French by an Ottawa police officer, but I think that it all ended up at the police station and that it had nothing to do with getting services in French.

By what measure can we say that progress is being made? Justin Bell turned to the Court Challenges Program. I know that this is not your responsibility. It will be voted on sooner or later. This program was abolished by the government. I am not pointing an accusing finger. However, he cannot even go to court to challenge the government, namely the RCMP, after having requested services in French. What kind of message are we sending to this young person? Does it mean that after having studied in French, we have no right to be served in French in our society? I do not want to reprehend you. However, it makes me feel worried and torn up inside.

Earlier, I spoke of schools and education. In Saskatchewan, only 10% of those who are eligible attend schools where French is the first language. Ninety per cent do not go there. Will you tell the school boards that this is under provincial jurisdiction?

That being said, to what extent are things improving for francophones outside Quebec, for the francophone communities in Saskatchewan and Acadia and for those, of which I am one, who want to obtain services in French?

•(1015)

I would like to hear what you have to say.

The Chair: We listened to you carefully during your turn, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Okay, we will have time to see each other again.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You have no questions to ask?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You heard my last question.

The Chair: We will now go to the government side, to Mr. Harvey.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Earlier, one of my colleagues in the Liberal Party asked if there had been any problems. I would like to know whether any of the parts of the program that came under the former plan were difficult to implement. Did some of the points take more time than expected? Have these problems been noted so as to avoid any delay in implementing the new part of the new plan?

Mr. Jérôme Moisan: I can talk about francophone immigration, which was a new item at the time the action plan was introduced. We talked about it, but a great deal of analytical work had to be done. We had to start by deciding what we could do and what we should do. We did a great deal of intensive work with the communities to establish the priorities, decide where to invest the funds, and so on. That is one example of the new situation, and some communities said that we did not act quickly enough. Immigration was quite a new area and required that different things be done according to the location—Moncton, Saint-Boniface, St. John's, Newfoundland. I would say that relatively modest funding was used in this area and the progress over the first years was also rather modest. At the moment, our strategy on francophone immigration is working very well. This was a new area for us, and francophone immigration, and immigration generally is quite a complex field. What are the special needs facing francophone immigrants when they come to a community where French is not the majority language? What should be done? How should we go about establishing the necessary resources? This is an area where a considerable amount of work and discussion with the communities was required before we could really take any action.

That is what comes to mind in answer to your question.

•(1020)

Mr. Luc Harvey: Have you identified a number of challenges that have not yet been met? This is somewhat similar to the question that was asked before: Are there still some challenges? Of course we're talking about a declining number of people whose mother tongue is French, but this may also be a birth rate problem.

Have any problems and challenges been identified, and, more particularly, have any solutions been found?

Mr. Bruce Manion: Yes, there are a number of them. Of course, there is the issue regarding young people and language retention, the fact that young people are leaving the communities, particularly in rural areas, to go to urban centres or to parts of the country where the economy is strong, but where there is not necessarily much support for linguistic minorities, and the loss of economic drivers in small minority francophone and anglophone communities. Other issues include connectivity, cultural matters, and so on. There is quite a long list, and we update it based on our consultations.

I do not know whether my colleagues would like to add something. Perhaps Hubert would like to?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: It is true that there still are some challenges in education. Earlier, we were talking about the fact that we are still having trouble recruiting all the rights holders, that is the students whose parents are entitled to enrol them in the minority language school. The challenge is greater in certain areas. A great deal of work remains to be done at the post-secondary level. And we would like to be able to offer more varied programs in colleges and universities. We're talking about education in French here, because the post-secondary system in English in Quebec is very good. As regards French-speakers outside Quebec, there will soon be a major problem regarding teacher training at the college level, in professional and trade courses and at the university level for teaching the second language and for minority schools. The action plan did assign resources to these areas, but they remain a challenge.

To add to what my colleague said in response to your first question, there was some delay initially in setting up education support mechanisms through the provinces. This happened at the beginning of the action plan. That does not mean that the money was not spent where it was supposed to be spent and during the years that it was supposed to be spent, but there were a few years during which negotiations were underway with the Council of Ministers of Education (Canada), the CMEC. This resulted in some delay in targeting priorities properly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lussier.

We will now complete our third round with Mr. Godin.

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

The Lord Commission is supposed to be tabling its report by the end of January. It is now January 29. Will the report be tabled this week? Will it be made public?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We are expecting a report from Mr. Lord at the beginning of February. It will be up to the government to decide whether or not it will be made public. At the moment, a discussion between Mr. Lord and Minister Verner is planned for this week or the beginning of next week, and this will be followed by an official report in the weeks following.

•(1025)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you know whether the action plan will be implemented at the end of March, at the beginning of April, at the beginning of May or at the beginning of June?

Mr. Bruce Manion: It is difficult to predict the timing.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Will it be implemented in 2008 or in 2009? Will there be funding provided for it in the budget?

Mr. Bruce Manion: We are acting as quickly as possible. Tremendous efforts are being made at the moment to complete our consideration, summarize all the contributions and to take the economic context into account as well as the government's resources. We are quite familiar with the current economic context. All the recommendations we make must take the economic context into account.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The economic context is very good at the moment. The government has announced a \$14-billion tax cut for big corporations. So I think things are going very well here in Ottawa. The government brought forward a mini-budget in 2007.

There's talk about putting money into the community. There's also talk about the public service and all the difficulties it faces. There was a move from the Privy Council to a department. But I see no change in concrete terms. Is there a lack of political will? I do not understand when I hear that the department is being pushed and that it is starting to understand. People only understand once we tell them that this is the law, and they have to comply with it.

The government introduced a program to pay people \$1,500 if they buy a hybrid vehicle. In Alberta, anglophones who call in to take advantage of this program get served immediately, but francophones have to wait to get service in their language. It takes so long that they decide to switch over to English. And this is a new program: it looks like the government has not learned its lesson.

Services are better in more anglophone provinces. And then people ask whether there is a new generation of francophones. Come on! It all depends on the services available. Could it be that there is a complete lack of political will to show respect for the two official languages of this country?

We can have whatever action plan we like and whatever figures we like and spend billions of dollars, but if there is no political will on the part of this government, which, I would say respectfully, is still appointing unilingual deputy ministers, we cannot help but conclude that this government is simply carrying on the same way as the previous government.

Mr. Bruce Manion: My ability to comment on this is very limited.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We could hold an in camera meeting. Then you could tell us what you think. That might be helpful to us.

Mr. Bruce Manion: I am under tremendous pressure to complete the discussions and the work in order to get phase two of the action plan underway. As regards political will, I can tell you that I have orders to follow, and I am doing so. A huge amount of time has been devoted to the issue, and I am not referring just to our department, but also to the other departments involved. The Committee of Assistant Deputy Ministers on Official Languages is looking into this matter.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It also depends on economic considerations. Are plans being made to cut the budget for the official languages yet again?

Mr. Bruce Manion: Any programming must be implemented within the context of the government's priorities and budget capacity. That is simply how the system works.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So you are saying that we pass laws, and they are followed provided the economic conditions allow us to do so? Let's say I am stopped by a police officer and I tell him I cannot pay my fine because I have no money. Let's be serious, we're talking about the law.

Mr. Bruce Manion: Of course it depends on the government's ability to spend, in the context of strategy and the funds that can be allocated to it, as it does for every other government program.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Only the funds that are left over will go to official languages.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We have completed three rounds. I would like to thank our witnesses and wish them...

Did you want to speak, Mr. Petit?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

•(1030)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: There is also Mr. Petit and Mr. Gravel.

The Chair: They would like to have the floor again? All right.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I presume we can continue until 11 o'clock.

The Chair: We can take whatever time is necessary.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We like them very much, so we are having a fourth round.

The Chair: Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Is the time limit three minutes?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Good morning, gentlemen.

My question is primarily for Mr. Manion.

Through the action plan, you negotiate many agreements between the federal government and the provinces. A lot of work is done in provincial areas of jurisdiction: education, health and so on. These areas, given section 92 of the British North America Act, are very delicate subjects in Quebec. We do not want to be interfering in education or in health, but we nevertheless take the money.

Mr. Lussier answered correctly earlier on when he said that there was a transfer of funds. But how do you ensure that the provinces manage the funds that are sent to them for official languages well? Given that I am with the federal and not the provincial government, if we transfer \$15, \$20 or \$30 million, we do not even know where the money winds up. Official languages, which by the way are a federal area of jurisdiction, affect all federal organizations and employees. Mr. Manion, as a deputy minister, perhaps you could help us.

Mr. Bruce Manion: I am once again being given a promotion. Thank you very much.

It really depends on the area. Certain aspects are specific to agreements with the provinces, but the fact is that it is decided within the framework of bilateral agreements signed in areas of education and health, amongst others. It happens, in health for example, that the networking involves several stakeholders. As far as accountability provisions are concerned, they are found within these agreements. In some cases, we ask for an annual report. We can also ask provinces or other service providers to submit information. The important thing is that the parameters are set out in the agreements.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Before you answer, Mr. Lussier, I would like to emphasize a specific point. We transferred \$200 million to Quebec for the integration of immigrants. Of course, we discovered that the National Assembly did not necessarily allocate that sum, which

came from the federal government, to the integration of immigrants. Therefore, what do you do? I saw your documents on accountability. You do not work for the provincial government, they can tell you anything they like. They may tell you that they have done so. What do you do to verify if the funds coming from the federal government is being spent in the right area? Perhaps there is something I am unaware of, but it seems in fact that you do not control everything.

Mr. Bruce Manion: Are we in control? No, because the federal system, within which we must work, has limitations. However, we are always dealing with an agreement or an accord between the federal government and the provinces. If these agreements are not complied with, measures can be taken, but it would always be during the renegotiation of these agreements during subsequent years. Obviously, it is not a perfect world in that regard.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: A good part of what you are describing relies on a relationship of trust. Here is how agreements in education and in the services area work. First of all, the provinces accept the money that is transferred to them by the federal government because we all have shared objectives. There is therefore agreement on those objectives. The provinces provide us with an action plan in which they indicate where they will be allocating the federal funds, and they commit to producing an activity report at the end of their activities, which will be submitted to provincial accountants and authorities for auditing, an activities report that will describe how the money has been spent.

We cannot, of course, as the federal government, sit down and peer over the shoulders of the provincial auditors. The reports they submit to us are authenticated using proper procedures, and it is on that basis that we make the payments.

I would add one thing. There are a great many different mechanisms that exist, and those in immigration, of which I'm not well aware, are no doubt very different from those that I manage in education, but it has happened to me to get calls from colleagues from other federal departments who want to know how we are working in the area of education. One of those people said to me recently "you're a best practice at Canadian Heritage". It is rare to hear such a thing, which is why I am pleased to repeat it.

•(1035)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lussier and Mr. Petit.

We will continue with Mr. Gravel.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: I was listening to my colleague Mr. Nadeau, and I was touched by what he said about his inner suffering. I would like you to respond to what Mr. Nadeau was saying.

The Chair: We should perhaps put the official language minority communities question in context.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: He gave examples. Are the investments made in Canada for linguistic minorities currently producing results?

Mr. Bruce Manion: Over the course of our discussions with community representatives, we have found that they are seeing progress. They say that things are not perfect, and that we could always do better with more.

There will always be situations where the rights of the minority to be served in their language will not be respected. That will always exist. It is impossible and unthinkable that that would never happen again.

The communities believe that there has been progress made. I always give the example of health. They have found that there has been very significant progress and they are very proud because they invested a lot of themselves in it. There have been a great many partnerships. They find that the results are very positive. Is it perfect? Far from it, but is that going to lead us to make other investments, during a second phase of the action plan, and to eliminate all instances where individuals feel they are not being well served? Absolutely not. It would be irresponsible of me to say that such a thing is possible and that any program can settle everything, 100%, forever.

However, there is evidence of the results of the present action plan. Communities and other stakeholders are very interested in official languages issues and strongly support the idea that the action

plan should be renewed. They are ready to work with us in an ongoing partnership in order to improve the fate of communities and to support linguistic duality in this country.

I know that that does not necessarily answer the question that you raised, but it will however allow for improvements in the situation in the long term.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

In conclusion, I thank the witnesses for having come to meet with us this morning. As I was explaining to you, this was our first meeting on the committee's recommendations to the minister on the action plan. Your presence was useful and has given us an overview of what has been done over the last five years. I would like to reiterate that the committee supports the development of a second phase of the Action Plan for Official Languages.

Thank you for your attention.

The meeting is adjourned.

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