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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning and welcome to the thirteenth meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This morning, we resume our study of the Action Plan for Official Languages.

We are pleased to have with us the representatives of four organizations, to whom I wish the warmest of welcomes. Some of them are not visiting the committee for the first time, but it is a renewed pleasure for us to have them. Without further ado, I'm going to turn the floor over to our witnesses. First, I ask our guests to introduce themselves and briefly to introduce their organizations.

I now invite Messrs. Peralta and Chamsi to begin this series of presentations.

Mr. Gonzola Peralta (President, Language Industry Association): Thank you very much. We represent the Language Industry Association, the only national organization working at the industry level in the language field. We would like to start by giving you an overview of who we are and who our members are. Then we can answer some of your questions and offer some proposals.

The industry comprises three sectors. Canada is the only country in the world that has brought these three sectors together to form an industry. There is translation, language training—the language schools—and, lastly, language technology businesses.

These three sectors are essential for Canada. Without translation, without language training and, in our modern world, without language technologies, Canada would not exist. We think this is a very important industry.

We have been in existence for five years. We came together for the first time six years ago through the efforts of Industry Canada. The government subsequently recognized our importance and devoted a chapter to us, Chapter 6, in the Action Plan for Official Languages. Since then, and with some funding—less than \$3 million in five years—we have really worked hard and have made enormous advances. Canada is currently the only country that has brought together these three sectors which work together.

Today, some of the questions that were forwarded to us concerned the action plan: how are things going in that regard, and so on? I would especially like to emphasize the fact that we make a real, direct contribution to the action plan's objective, in the education sector, for example. Our work method is always comprehensive.

Our offices are located in the language technology research centre, in a building of the UQO, the Université du Québec en Outaouais. We are well located. We work very closely with the education and community development sectors. We are in direct and constant contact with groups from all countries. We do a great deal of work with the Government of Canada; that is an aspect that is really essential.

The Government of Canada is the biggest client for language products and services in the country. In fact, it is one of the biggest clients in the world in terms of language services. We have described some of our contributions in two documents. There is a presentation document entitled “The Canadian Language Industry: Creating a Linguistic Legacy” and a support document entitled “Canadian Language Industry: Cornerstone of Canadian Identity — Springboard for the Canadian Economy”. Those documents are of course available in both official languages. You may use them as reference works.

Now let's talk about our successes. Previously, there was no place where industry players could meet. Now there is: finally there is a place where we can meet. Why is this important? Because, otherwise, there would really be no way for the industry to work with government. The government of course awards contracts to businesses, but a business cannot represent an industry. We are here to do that.

Now, for the first time in history, an industry group is sitting down with the government to take part in changes to supply procedures.

• (0910)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): You mentioned two documents. Can you show them to us?

Mr. Alain Chamsi (Chairman of the Board of Directors, Language Industry Association): Yes. These are two similar documents. There's this one, and there is another one as well: “Canadian Language Industry: Cornerstone of Canadian Identity — Springboard for the Canadian Economy”.

The Chair: We'll ask the clerk to distribute the second document.

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: One of our strengths is that we forge alliances with many associations. We bring together representatives and associations. We are really the only ones doing this. For example, what is important for Canada, and for the government in particular, is the shortage of translation services. We don't have enough. If we continue down the road we're on now, in five years, there won't be enough translators in the country for our services.

The largest translation business in Canada is “importing” translators from Europe and North Africa because there aren't enough. The Language Industry Association is the only association really working to solve these problems. We represent stakeholders, and, after conducting studies and gathering data, we are working on a strategic plan to avoid these problems.

We currently see this as a problem, but it is in fact a great strength. The current trend in Europe is that two languages are not enough. All educated individuals speak at least three languages. Everyone who possesses any kind of privilege speaks at least three languages. That's the world of the future.

We have always worked on our history and heritage in a defensive manner, but today, given the situation in the world, this could be a major asset. Having two languages—some would say there are more than two languages because our society is becoming multicultural and multilingual—is an asset for Canada.

We can't deny the language industry its place. If we do, it will be impossible for us to occupy our rightful place in the world. It isn't going on just in Canada, but on the world scale as well. So we have to look at the future strategically. Our policies, our Constitution and bilingualism constitute an asset, a strength that we should exploit.

The list of our successes is so long that sometimes it occurs to me to say there are too many. We have reached a point where we are starting to bring stakeholders together and conduct research that will have a strong, direct impact. We are the only ones in our history to date to have managed to do this. I believe this is the answer.

Has our contribution to the action plan been a success? Yes, absolutely. The government has invested \$800 million in the past five years. There have been other very strong and very positive initiatives, but I can assure you that we have had incredible success. You can check with our partners.

We have participated directly in the consultations conducted by Mr. Bernard Lord. We strongly believe in the future of language in Canada. We strongly believe in bilingualism. We strongly believe that the language industry should occupy a privileged position and that the country should exploit this industry. This is an advantage for us.

Sometimes we don't realize certain things. In Great Britain, one study has clearly shown that businesses that export—

● (0915)

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Peralta.

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: — and that invest in translation and language training in the right way make more money. It's not just a social issue, a right that we have as a people; it's also an economic issue.

I would like to close by asking you to read the official proclamation of the Canadian Year of Languages, on page 6. We strongly believe that this is the time to start working strategically and to celebrate what we have here in Canada. We're proposing a project, which we have already submitted to Canadian Heritage, designed to establish the 2010 Canadian Year of Languages. The Year of Languages would be a year in which we could celebrate, conduct

research and raise the profile of our linguistic reality in a strategic manner.

This has been done in the United States, Europe and Great Britain. The year 2008 has been proclaimed the International Year of Languages. It would be truly sad if Canada, one of the countries recognized as a linguistic force at the global level, did not follow suit. We believe that it is these groups of representatives, which obviously have a direct interest in bilingualism and languages, that should propose this to the representatives in the House of Commons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peralta.

We'll now move on to the second group of witnesses, the Professional Institute of the Public Service.

Ms. Demers.

Ms. Michèle Demers (President, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Good afternoon, everyone.

On behalf of the Professional Institute of the Public Service, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to come and talk to you about the official languages challenge, more particularly the perspective of the federal public service.

First of all, allow me to reiterate to you the Professional Institute's unconditional commitment to the fundamental principle of official languages in Canada and bilingualism in the public service. That said, you will understand that this subject is extremely delicate for the members we represent. A large proportion of the members we represent are obviously bilingual and occupy bilingual positions. But we also represent a large percentage of unilingual Anglophone and unilingual Francophone members.

The expectations and implementation of official languages policies for all classes of employees have taken on very different proportions and dimensions. Those classes of employees expect their union to protect their right to apply for employment and to enjoy career advancement in the public service within the currently imposed official languages framework.

It should also be noted that there has been an apparent withdrawal by the machinery of government from the promotion of official languages and official language training, and from funding of the departments to which responsibility for language training has been delegated, because the School of Public Service no longer offers full-time training to public service employees.

I don't intend to read my brief. You have it before you, and I'm sure you'll be reading it with great interest, as bedside reading, before you go to bed at night. However, I'd like to talk to you about what is currently going on in the federal public service, from our point of view, and to share our recommendations, which appear in the brief.

We understand that the challenge of creating a fully bilingual public service is a difficult one. In the long run, the government-wide Action Plan launched in 2003 was a useful beginning. That plan was built on three pillars of development: education, support to communities in the official language and minority situations and bilingualism in the federal public service. However, in order for these objectives to be achieved, most of the responsibility lies with the public school system, which should ensure that Canadians have a good mastery of both official languages before they receive a high school diploma.

That was in 2003. What has happened since then with regard to the official languages in the schools? To my knowledge, we have not taken any major steps forward. That's the basis; that's the foundation. If we want to achieve a completely bilingual federal public service, that's where it starts. We can continue talking about it for another 10 years. The Official Languages Act was proclaimed in 1973—

• (0920)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): In 1969.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Pardon me. It was the policies that were established in the public service in 1973. Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

That said, we are still far from being a bilingual country and a bilingual public service. Much political will and many concrete actions are required to achieve a fully bilingual public service. Whatever the school system may or may not be doing now with regard to teaching official languages, it clearly isn't enough. According to a recent article in *The Citizen*, only one-sixth of all Canadians are bilingual. This is indeed a sorry state of affairs; it is also one that will take many years to fix.

You are probably familiar with section 39 of the Official Languages Act. I would nevertheless like to talk to you about it because, as I mentioned earlier, I'm talking about the perspective of the public service:

39.(1) The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that

(a) English-speaking Canadians and French-speaking Canadians, without regard to their ethnic origin or first language learned, have equal opportunities to obtain employment and advancement in federal institutions;

That's a government commitment in the act. As this committee stated in its 2005 report, a comprehensive, well-funded language training program is the key to achieving a fully bilingual public service. Despite some noble rhetoric, the federal government has actually cut back severely on the funds it makes available for language training.

The government has systematically cut back on language training funding for many years now. Through the early 1990s, the government was spending around \$70 million a year on language training. By 1999, this figure was down to less than \$50 million. The most recent data available to us indicate a commitment of just over \$36 million for the three-year period of 2003-2006. This amounts to a mere \$12 million a year, or well over 80% less than the government was spending 15 years earlier, even without taking into account the effects of inflation.

To make matters worse, most of the already severely limited language training available goes to members of the Executive group, who at an average age of about 50, will not in all likelihood be

around for a great many years to pay back the investment in their language skills.

[*English*]

Cuts of this magnitude make a mockery of the commitment to equal access enshrined in the Official Languages Act. It also flies in the face of the federal government's commitment to the public service when it introduced the revised official languages policy in 2003 with a promise of access to official language training for every new employee desiring such training for career development. If this commitment is to be more than a sham, the government must move immediately to restore adequate funding for language training.

Members of the Professional Institute feel strongly about this. At least one group—the engineering, architecture, and land survey group—has already raised the issue of language training as a demand at the bargaining table. Federal unions shouldn't have to raise this at the bargaining table. The government should be providing such funding as a matter of course to ensure that adequate levels of service are available to Canadians across the country, and to provide adequate career development opportunities for its employees.

As we suggested earlier in our brief, adequately funded language training is also necessary if the government is going to live up to its commitment to equal access and equality of linguistic communities under the Official Languages Act.

Finally, the system as currently constituted poses special problems for new Canadians, many members of ethnic minority groups, older government employees who entered the public service on a different basis, and those from regions in the country where one or the other official languages is not often used.

For those whose first language is neither French nor English, bilingual imperative staffing requirements mean they must know at least three languages in order to obtain a federal government job. This militates against the government's stated intention of increasing minority group representation in its labour force.

• (0925)

[*Translation*]

Having said that, the Professional Institute recommends the following.

The departments should review all criteria in positions designated as bilingual, with an eye to ensuring that the requirements it imposes are actually bona fide occupational requirements. The departments should establish an appropriate mix of bilingual and unilingual positions in bilingual regions, in order to strike an appropriate balance between Canadians' right to be served in the language of their choice and employees' right to work in the language of their choice. The government should provide appropriate funding for language training to meet the legal and policy requirements it created. The government should re-establish the role of the Canada School of Public Service to provide training to all employees who wish to require language proficiency in the second official language in the context of their overall developmental plan.

The Chair: You have one minute left, Ms. Demers.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Thank you.

No doubt many of you will have your own ideas as to how best to promote bilingualism within the federal public service. This is what it should be.

What matters most is that government provide both the tangible resources and the political willpower to make public service bilingualism a reality and promote it as a positive asset, not a barrier to advancement. Canadians who use public services and the government employees who provide them deserve no less.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Demers.

We'll now hand over to the representatives of the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Mr. Cashman.

Mr. Ed Cashman (Regional Executive Vice-President, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Mr. Chairman, members, allow me first to thank the committee for inviting us to appear before you today.

Our union firmly supports the principles and objectives of the Official Languages Act. Respect for and the promotion of the official languages regime in Canada are essential in ensuring that all Canadians have access to federal government services in the language of their choice. They are also essential so that workers in the designated bilingual regions can work in the language of their choice.

Unfortunately, some policies implemented by the federal government in recent years betray a lack of will to help workers acquire, practise and maintain language skills in either official language. In this area, the cancellation of funding for the Court Challenges Program, which played a vital role in the defence and promotion of minorities' official language rights across Canada, indicates to us that the government is not serious about its legal and constitutional obligations respecting language rights. We can only add our voice to those of the many organizations that have called for funding to be reinstated for this important federal program.

In this presentation, we would like to address three questions: the central role of training, staffing and the importance of consulting bargaining agents, and the leadership that is required to transform the language culture in the workplace within the federal public service.

In a society where the vast majority of the population does not have a solid knowledge of both official languages, the onus is on the federal government to shoulder its responsibility for ensuring adequate language training for those individuals who are called upon to work in the federal public service.

As the employer, the federal government has a duty to set the example with regard to bilingualism in the workplace. And yet, the offer of training programs and related budgets have been decentralized, thus weakening the government's ability to develop a coherent approach to language training. Each department must now decide on its own priorities, including in the area of language training. The result is an uneven approach, devoid of long-term planning, which is at times arbitrary.

In addition, the training itself is no longer provided by the federal government, but has been contracted out, the result of uneven approaches poorly suited to workplace requirements.

In a study conducted by the federal government in 2002, we know that 17% of Anglophone employees reported that, for lack of language training, they were unable to advance as far in their careers as they had expected. Francophone employees have the same problem, but it's accentuated. Only 5% of language training is given to Francophone employees. Furthermore, managers can generally take advantage of language training programs. On the other hand, lower-level workers, more often than not members of the equity groups, do not have the same opportunities. Many of those employees are members of our union.

Guidelines must be set on access to language training so that training is not unfairly denied. Workers in the federal public sector who are denied adequate training should have an appeal process available to them. Language training should also be offered so that language skills, once acquired, are maintained.

Lastly, a progressive bilingualism allowance should be paid and considered as salary for pension purposes in order to acknowledge the value of knowledge of the two official languages.

I'm now going to say a few words on staffing. The Public Service Alliance of Canada supports the bilingualism policy and does not question the bilingual designation of certain positions. However, it is our view that the designation of bilingual positions should be done in a transparent and fair manner. Bilingualism must be a genuine requirement for a position.

● (0930)

For the determination of language requirements, the linguistic profile must be transparent and fair, so that positions not requiring just limited exchanges in the second language have a different profile from those for which ease comparable to that in the mother tongue is required. Although the designation of a position as bilingual is the employer's responsibility, we feel the public interest would be well served if the employer consulted the bargaining agents. We feel that more creative solutions could be developed if the employer were open to this kind of discussion.

I would also like to talk about workplace culture. The best language training cannot produce tangible results if employees cannot practise their language skills in the workplace. Managers must show leadership in establishing a workplace culture that respects and fosters the use of both official languages. That's also important for individuals belonging to a minority language community. In general, it is Francophones who usually cannot work in their mother tongue because one or two colleagues are not bilingual.

The learning and retention of both official language are thus, in everyone's best interest, a guarantee of professional advancement for some, respect for the right to work in one's language for others and, in all cases, a guarantee of better service to the Canadian public.

In conclusion, these are our recommendations to the federal government: shoulder its responsibility to ensure adequate language training; ensure that funding for language training is held by the central agencies and sheltered from program reviews; provide language training to Anglophone and Francophone employees in all classes and occupational groups throughout their careers, in all regions, paid for by the employer and offered during working hours, in the workplace; develop guidelines on access to training and put in place an appeal process in case of rejection; the determination of language requirements must be transparent and fair following consultation with the bargaining agents; encourage managers to show leadership in establishing a culture in the workplace that respects and fosters the use of both official languages; lastly, provide significant financial support for interpretation and translation in order to promote participation in both official languages in the workplace and increase the number of documents available in both official languages.

Thank you.

• (0935)

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

We will now go to the last, but not least, of our witnesses, Mr. Jean Vaillancourt, rector of the Université du Québec en Outaouais, UQO.

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt (Rector, Université du Québec en Outaouais): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Members, thank you for this opportunity to address you today.

As rector of the university, I would like to discuss the work accomplished in the context of the action plan that will terminate in March of this year, and especially the planning for the new phase that is beginning. I will especially be a bearer of good news, but I will also address the considerable contribution of the official languages to the growth and development of the language industry sector in the Outaouais region, as well as in Canada as a whole and elsewhere in the world.

First, I will talk to you about the bill of health of Canada's language industry, then discuss the exemplary role that the Canadian government has played in that industry's creation and expansion in recent years. I will continue by describing the recent and excellent results achieved as a result of investment under the last Action Plan for Official Languages. I will also consider the language industry's essential function at the regional and national levels, but also in our globalized world. I will continue by describing the international issues in which the government, industry and universities are taking part, as well as the priorities that we will share in the coming years.

I have not prepared a brief, but I have a few notes in French for those who would like to follow them. Those notes include a list of references for the few figures I will be giving. Lastly, I will close by linking the universities to their social and economic priorities and to the broader question of the role of languages in the transmission of knowledge and the production of wealth on a global scale.

Last week, here before the standing committee, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Graham Fraser, recalled that the action plan had three main objectives: to advance linguistic duality in Canada, to improve the delivery of government services in both

official languages and the development and vitality of the official language minority communities.

I am recalling those objectives in turn today because by working as it has for Canadians and the maintenance of their linguistic wealth, the 2003-2008 action plan not only supported the country's linguistic duality, but also, for the first time in history, the Canadian language industry. This industry is a crucial lever in ensuring that action plans are effectively carried out. However, beyond its usefulness in meeting Canadians' needs in the official languages field, this industry enables Canada to position itself as a leader in this strongly growing international market of multilingual information management.

The name "language industry" is a recent one. In Canada, it embraces three industry sectors that have made considerable efforts in recent years to structure themselves and take full advantage of global growth. I'm talking about language instruction, language technologies and translation.

In this respect, we have collectively achieved progress with which we should be very pleased. It should not be forgotten that Canada represents only one-half of 1% of the earth's population. Despite that fact, Canada produces approximately 10% of the world's translation and 15% of language instruction. That's an absolutely extraordinary achievement. All other things being equal, we can only acknowledge the considerable value of just these components of the language industry, which is growing even more when you add in the figures on language technologies.

And as though this good news were not enough, you should also know that the language industry represents an economic contribution of \$3 billion in Canada. Globally, this industry is growing at a rate of 18%, which means that it doubles every five to seven years. For Canada, we're talking about an absolutely extraordinary economic opportunity and a competitive advantage that must not be lost.

Outside Canada, it must be acknowledged from the outset that, as a result of the work done to ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act, Canada has the best organized professional groups in the translation, terminology and interpretation industry. The language and translation training offered in Canada is cited as an example around the world. Our universities are constantly solicited by employers wishing to employ translators, revisers, terminologists, language teachers and computer specialists knowledgeable in language matters. The value of this industry and its contribution to achieving the government's mission were acknowledged in the last Action Plan for Official Languages.

• (0940)

In 2003, the federal government allocated \$20 million to support development of the language industry. Those efforts produced results, as Mr. Peralta told us. Supported by that \$20 million, a lot of people set to work. Meaningful results can moreover be observed in the industry's structuring, and the Language Industry Association deserves great praise in that regard. The amounts granted under the Action Plan were intended to meet four major challenges facing the language industry, two of which concerned the universities, first of all: human resources renewal and the response to the need for research and development.

The achievement we're proudest of is definitely the creation of the Language Technologies Research Centre, in Gatineau. It could not have been established as quickly without the express recommendation made in the last Action Plan for Official Languages. As a result of that project, carried out in cooperation with the Translation Bureau and the National Research Council of Canada, and with the support of the federal and provincial governments, a unique centre was established.

Teams from our partner organizations are already working on major research projects. Some are designed to push back the limits of technology, and others to generate knowledge that will help improve the quality and productivity of language activities. We've understood that, by helping break down language barriers, this research will support Canada's actions in all its spheres of activity.

Working with this in view, and bringing together under a single roof researchers, academics, entrepreneurs and government specialists, the research centre is bound to become a world leader in the establishment of language technology R&D standards. Since its inception, however, the LTRC has not had the necessary funding to ensure its full emergence. We must strategically act more quickly if we want to market and spread Canadian technologies developed there for a now highly competitive global market. I'll give you the example of an institute that was created in Indiana two years ago and that has four times our research centre's resources. So the competition is fierce.

Consequently, our lack of resources limits the Canadian industry's ability to meet the needs of the linguistic communities in and outside the country. The renewal of the Action Plan for Official Languages is an ideal opportunity to give the LTRC a new dose of vitality that will enable the Canadian government to meet its commitments to the country's Anglophone and Francophone communities and at the same time to contribute to the expansion of the language industry cluster.

Numerous challenges remain for all of us. We must constantly review and improve our teaching programs, train the language experts that the industry is seeking from us, train computer specialists to create the tools of the future, train managers who can orchestrate complex multilingual projects, train researchers for the advancement of knowledge, prepare for the future, increase the number of research projects with sectoral partners and players and, lastly, ensure that knowledge is transferred quickly to the industry.

The UQO is a Francophone university open to the world. We have partnership agreements with institutions in a number of countries where we are providing courses in French, Spanish and English, in particular. We have been training translators for more than 30 years. We can boast of having established one of the training programs that best integrates the language technologies and professions. And we can do even more. For us and for Canadian society, having more resources would mean more achievements, because the Canadian government has understood the role of languages in maintaining and spreading the Canadian model for respecting differences; because the Canadian government has understood that supporting official languages also means supporting a promising industry that has not yet achieved its full development potential; and because the Canadian government is especially aware that languages are vehicles

for both values and ideals that it strives to defend and that are universal.

In conclusion, as a representative of the university world, and thus of education and research, I can only invite the government to restate and enhance the support previously granted under the Action Plan for Official Languages.

● (0945)

We need more resources in order to train more language experts, language teachers, technolinguists and researchers. We need resources to achieve our ambitions, and the work done in recent years augurs well for what we could still achieve in the future with the support we are seeking today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We will now begin our first round.

Mr. Jean-Clause D'Amours.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing before us this morning.

Mr. Peralta, earlier you said that you had spoken with Mr. Lord about the work the federal government has asked him to do. I would like to ask the other witnesses whether they have spoken with Mr. Lord, whether Mr. Lord asked them to comment on the official languages situation and the work he has done for the federal government.

I would like to start with you, Mr. Vaillancourt.

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: No, I wasn't approached.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Perhaps I'm wrong, but I see the Language Industry Association and the University du Québec en Outaouais as organizations that support the official languages, whereas I get the impression the Professional Institute of the Public Service and the Public Service Alliance do business much more directly with the citizens.

Ms. Demers, did Mr. Lord approach your institute to gather its comments?

Ms. Michèle Demers: We didn't even see Mr. Lord's shadow pass in the context of those discussions.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: In other words, he simply didn't try to find out what you were thinking.

Ms. Michèle Demers: We didn't come close to being invited.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That was the case for many others as well, and that's appalling.

At the Public Service Alliance, you provide services directly to citizens. In that perspective, the official languages issue is very important, from what I was able to understand during your presentation. I'd like to know whether Mr. Lord sought your comments.

Mr. Ed Cashman: We didn't receive an invitation. We went looking for him, through his secretariat. We wanted an opportunity to talk to him. But we're still waiting for a call from him.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: So you didn't find him.

● (0950)

Mr. Ed Cashman: No.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: He'll probably say that the country is big and takes a long time to cover.

These situations are a bit appalling. I'd like to put the following question to the people from the Public Service Alliance and the Professional Institute of the Public Service.

Perhaps you would have liked to meet him, but I'd like to know what more could have been obtained by telling him about the situation of your organizations.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Listening to my colleagues around this table talk about the extent of the problems concerning official languages, whether it be in industry or in the universities, I see once again that the federal public service is the poor cousin of Canadian society. Not only does no one pay any attention to it, but also, when thoughts or projects are developed to renew the pan-Canadian official languages program or bilingualism in the country, the people who, as you say, are in the field, offering services to Canadians and responsible for developing the programs are completely disregarded. It's really a sad and, in fact, quite annoying situation.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: And as regards the Public Service Alliance?

Mr. Ed Cashman: If we clearly understand the mandate that the Prime Minister gave Mr. Lord concerning linguistic minorities, we find it hard to understand why we weren't consulted. The federal government has a very important role to play with regard to services offered to all Canadians, including those belonging to linguistic minorities.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Citizens' complaints are due to the fact that they haven't received certain services, but those service failures don't occur in another world: they occur directly in the field. They say to try and see how it's possible to improve official languages, but they forget to ask those who offer services to citizens directly in the field, which, in their view, could improve those services. That's quite contradictory. Ultimately, that enables these people to appear to be conducting a nice evaluation, whereas they don't even take the time to speak with stakeholders on the front line.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Ms. Demers, earlier you said that funding for training had declined and that it was now at approximately \$12 million a year. In the years following what you were able to determine, have those amounts declined further? Does the federal government appear to be less and less interested in finding ways to provide additional training?

Ms. Michèle Demers: The language training situation in the federal public service is declining so much that it appears to have fallen off the radar screen. We don't hear about it anymore. He heard a lot about it in 2003, 2004, 2005 and even 2006. Now we can only see the pure frustration in people who say there's no more language training at school.

Responsibility for providing language training has been delegated to the departments, but they haven't been given any budgets to carry out that function. They have to draw on their operating budgets,

which are already tight and are cut from year to year, and try to provide an hour here and there. That doesn't make people bilingual.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: So it's all fine words, but there's no concrete action.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Absolutely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

We'll now continue with Mr. Nadeau.

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

Good morning to you all, ladies and gentlemen.

Ms. Demers, you talked about the issue of children's education in both official languages. We know that this is a provincial responsibility. I lived in Saskatchewan in the 1990s. There they were starting to feel the impact of the cancellation of immersion programs in the English-language schools. It was found that they were no longer useful and they were replaced with something else.

That's somewhat the spirit in which people often find themselves in majority Anglophone areas far from Quebec. There's a deficiency in the area of education. I'll talk about training later. They say they're moving toward contracting out in order to train people, whereas Canada boasts of being a bilingual country. That's not right.

Mr. Vaillancourt, you talked about the Language Technologies Research Centre, which is controlled by the Université du Québec en Outaouais. That centre is extremely important for research and development. It's said that there are deficiencies in the field of education in civil society and that there is no apparent will to put French on an equal footing with English.

I've learned that the Language Technologies Research Centre was established by a conglomerate and that today it isn't even a federal government centre. It's more of a non-profit organization that has to seek funding each year in order to survive in an extremely important and expanding research field.

In the second phase of the Action Plan for Official Languages, would it be important to ensure that a centre such as yours and the universities are formally recognized as the trainers of the individuals who'll be working in the language field? There are no doubt other centres. I know there is one in New Brunswick.

● (0955)

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: All right. Perhaps I can provide a quick snapshot of the Language Technologies Research Centre. It's a non-profit organization that has three founding partners: two federal agencies, including the NRC and the Université du Québec en Outaouais.

It's an organization whose annual budget is currently approximately \$0.5 million a year, including all expenses. In addition to that are contributions from each of the three partners, totalling approximately \$6 million a year. The NRC contribution of \$2 million is stated in the 2003-2008 plan.

To achieve full impact and to secure a competitive advantage for Canadian researchers who work there—we're talking about some 30 researchers—the research centre would need a minimum of \$6 million a year in addition to its \$0.5 million budget. So its budget should be increased by at least 10 times.

Six million dollars would enable the centre to allocate approximately half of its budget each year to efforts to market the centre's inventions. Two research projects, one of which won an award, have been carried out in cooperation with the industry. These projects have commercial potential, but marketing efforts are obviously limited by the research centre's tight budget. In my opinion, this amount would make it possible to compete adequately with the large American centres that are currently doing the same type of research. I think \$6 million a year would be one factor that would enable Canada to have the necessary strike force in research and development at the LTRC. Obviously, it is also extremely important that funding for the Language Industry Association be renewed, because it is these industries, those currently emerging, that take the research centre's achievements and market them for Canada's benefit.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cashman, earlier you talked about contracting out. What does that mean? Does it mean that, at one point, all services were offered by the federal training school and that, suddenly, savings related to the government's lack of vision resulted in a decline in service? Could you explain that to us?

Mr. Ed Cashman: Yes. You may have observed that, here in the region in particular, private language schools, which, in our view, are not of the same quality, are spreading like wildfire. We can't guarantee the same quality as that previously offered by the School of Public Service.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So, if I understand correctly, the funding has been cut in this field, or at least the orientation has changed.

Mr. Ed Cashman: There was a time when a public servant could dream of enrolling in the School of Public Service to learn our language. Now, as Ms. Demers mentioned, they may be offered a few hours a week in the evening, in a local school. That's not the same thing.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Ms. Demers, still on the subject of training, in your organization, that's being done more with professional public servants.

There are deputy ministers who don't speak a word of French. The Department of National Defence is trying to lead us to believe that it has found a solution to a dreadful situation: 47% of its designated bilingual positions are occupied by unilingual Anglophones. How could we improve the situation in the next stage of the Action Plan?

• (1000)

Ms. Michèle Demers: You have to change the approach and dynamic regarding official languages. That has to become something we're proud of. I agree with Mr. Peralta, who said earlier that speaking two languages is an asset and a source of pride and that speaking three or four is even better.

What do we do to make people want to become bilingual rather than feel they have a sword of Damocles over their heads? They're

told now that they have to be bilingual or else they'll have to give up the position they want. That's what's currently happening. Bilingualism is perceived as a threat. It isn't considered a positive element. The departments and employees aren't being given the tools to become bilingual. They're given no reason to be proud of that.

The encouragement of the bilingualism bonus is completely ridiculous. When it was introduced, it was equal to 10% of an individual's salary. Now it's \$800 for a salary of \$50,000 or \$60,000. It's not a carrot; it's not an encouragement. How can we conceive of a way of thinking and mechanisms that will make people want to become bilingual and be proud of being bilingual?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Demers. You're one of the passionate people.

Now we'll go to another passionate person, Mr. Godin. That's a compliment, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I take that as a compliment, don't worry. Good talk or bad talk, as long as you talk about me, that's fine.

Thanks to our witnesses for being here today. I'm happy to be one of the well-educated people because I speak three languages: English, French and Chiac.

I know it may be only a commercial designation, but I find it hard to see language presented as an industry. It goes a bit further than that, I think. There are two founding peoples in Canada, and I wouldn't want language to represent an industry because French is having a hard time. You say we need an industry to teach us to speak or to teach Anglophones French. We aren't machines; we're human beings.

The industry idea troubles me a bit, but I don't want to offend you. I know you're in it to make money rather than for the real reason, which is human reality and the fact that there are now a number of peoples in Canada. In fact, there are English, French, Quebec, Acadian and Aboriginal peoples. We must speak in a manner respectful of those peoples. So presenting language as an industry troubles me a little this morning. Don't worry, I just wanted to get that off my mind.

Ms. Demers, don't be insulted because you didn't see Mr. Lord; he's just a walking shadow. It's because the Prime Minister wants an action plan; he wants it in his own way and not in the way people want it. So don't be angry. You can sleep peacefully. You're in good hands here with a parliamentary committee that represents the citizens and that will try to represent you as best it can.

What do you think is the difference between the language training school and the current evening courses that you mentioned? Do you think that's a step backwards?

Ms. Michèle Demers: There's been a reversal in accessibility. I tip my hat to certain departments. I know, for example, that Natural Resources Canada has hired language teachers out of its overall training budget to provide two hours of courses a week, I believe, to individuals who want to learn the second language. I find that praiseworthy, but of course it's not enough.

How many years will it take for a person to become bilingual at a rate of two hours a week? Why is language training offered solely to people who are in EX category positions? That's virtually how it goes. I don't want to make a startling and incorrect statement, but I don't think I'm far wrong in saying that 90% to 95% of full-time language training is offered to that class of employees. Are the other employees of the federal public service half-wits? Don't they have the same rights as senior managers to learn a second language in order to aspire to develop their career and fill positions?

There has to be a political will and a will on the part of the public service. There also has to be funding because nothing happens by magic. You need money to train people. There has to be a will for the money to be granted.

• (1005)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, we're talking about money. According to the research, the Action Plan is working very well. But it was said that the Action Plan would create additional regular minority language instruction programs. However, we realize that we're ultimately short \$132 million. It was promised that a total of \$209 million would be allocated to the Action Plan by March 2008, but the government allocated \$256 million. It could thump its chest and say that it had been kind because it gave nearly \$50 million more to provide minority language education.

However, you have to study the Action Plan. The government says it's not true. I challenge it to contradict those figures. In my opinion, those are the right figures. They were compiled and checked by the Library of Parliament.

From 2003 to 2007, the regular program suffered such cuts that, instead of \$724 million, it received \$544 million. So it's short \$132 million. I don't hear one province criticizing the loss suffered in the regular programs; I don't hear a single word. No university has said a word. In fact, we're talking about minority language education. No school in Canada is lamenting the fact.

Everywhere we go, people tell us they need that money. For example, the Francophone minorities want young people to learn English; they want child care in the schools so that youths can benefit from it. The Anglophone group Canadian Parents for French came to meet us a number of times and told us that there weren't enough immersion schools, that teachers were lacking and that parents wanted their children to learn French.

The bilingualism problem would be solved in 12 years if we went back to square one and started providing education at the beginning. I support Mr. Chong, who laments this fact all the time, saying that we should put the emphasis on education.

I agree with you, Mr. Chong.

In the meantime, the public service has a job to do to help its employees keep their jobs and learn both languages.

I believe I've said enough. I'm going to leave you some time. Then I'll have to leave because I have an important meeting. I don't mean by that that yours isn't important, but the other is as well.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds left to comment.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, is that 30 seconds each?

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Ed Cashman: Mr. Godin, you talked about figures, but it's also important to talk about people, about persons. In the public service, we see that there are two cultures, two generations affected. The money is allocated to managers. As Ms. Demers said, these are people in their fifties. As regards the reality of bilingualism requirements, the burden is now on the young people that we want so much to recruit in the public service. They're the ones who are penalized because they don't have access to language training. If you want to build a public service for the future, you have to invest in our young people. That's what's lacking right now.

The Chair: Thank you for being concise, Mr. Cashman.

Now it's the turn of Mr. Lemieux of the government party.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to share my time with Mr. Harvey.

I would like to talk about Mr. Lord's work. He was appointed by the government to conduct major consultations on the Action Plan. He is highly respected, and his appointment was well received by our official language minority communities. He travelled across Canada and met a lot of different organizations in every region of our country.

[*English*]

In addition to that, the process he put in place allowed groups to make submissions to him and his committee.

Madame Demers, you have a strong position and an important message. I'd like to know if you made a written submission to Mr. Lord's commission.

• (1010)

Ms. Michèle Demers: No, I didn't.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Cashman, did you make one for the Public Service Alliance?

Mr. Ed Cashman: No.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you.

Monsieur Harvey.

[*Translation*]

I wanted to know whether or not you had prepared a brief.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'm listening to you, Mr. Godin.

[*English*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have to go, so I used a point of order.

I just think it's through respect that they want to meet them face-to-face and not be second-class citizens.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, do you wish to speak?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's not a point of order.

[Translation]

The Chair: I agree.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's an abuse of a point of order, Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. I'll take note of your point of order, but I'm nevertheless going to allow parliamentarians to continue talking to our guests.

Mr. Harvey, go ahead, please.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): I believe almost all of you are bilingual. Mr. Cashman, you speak very good French. I suppose your mother tongue is English. Ms. Demers, you speak very good French. I see that from your name. I suppose you speak very good English as well. Mr. Peralta, you speak very good French. I suppose you speak very good English, and perhaps you even speak a third language.

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: I speak four languages.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Chamsi, you speak very good French. How many languages do you speak?

Mr. Alain Chamsi: Five.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Five languages. And you, Mr. Vaillancourt?

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: I speak two fairly well.

Mr. Luc Harvey: How many of you have taken courses at the School of Public Service to become bilingual? Was it the school that made you bilingual, or were you already bilingual when you started working for the public service?

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: I'd like to clarify certain points regarding the School of Public Service.

In 1999, the School of Public Service conducted a pilot project with the private sector for the first time in its history. The success rate of that pilot project raised the pass rate of the School of Public Service by 20%. Currently, the pass rate under contracts that go through the School of Public Service is virtually double what it was when training was given internally. So this is team work. It isn't a question of knowing what is better for me or for you. It isn't a question of division.

I'm sure that the public service's problems are also industry dilemmas. Today, an article will be published in Halifax on a language school that has invested a great deal and has been giving courses to government employees for 20 years. And yet no one is attending that school right now. There's a picture of an empty room.

I don't agree with Mr. Godin. It isn't just a question of money. The people working in the language industry are former teachers, translators, people who believe in what they do. That's why we're here. It's true that there are bilingualism problems in the public service.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Peralta, I'm married to an Anglophone, and my children are all bilingual. I have a daughter who is arriving from Spain, where she has learned Spanish; she speaks three languages. My second daughter is going to Germany to learn German. So the idea of "two plus one" is something I sincerely believe in.

Wouldn't it be preferable to hire a bilingual public servant at the outset, rather than try to teach that person a second language for 10 years? I saw my children learn a second language from birth; at four years of age, my children spoke two languages fluently without accents. I come from Chicoutimi, and, even today, I find it hard to learn English properly and to speak it well. That's one of my regrets. Even though I'm virtually in immersion here, it isn't easy for me. I often can't find the word that would really convey my meaning.

Wouldn't it be better to pay special attention to this at the time of hiring? Do you give mathematics courses to public servants who want a promotion and who have to pass Mathematics 536? Does the government give public servants mathematics or history courses? I don't believe so. On the other hand, with regard to the official languages, we know from the outset that the position is bilingual. If someone applies for a bilingual position without being bilingual, I don't see why the union would try to protect that person who doesn't have the skill; I don't understand why it would be up to the government to enable that person to acquire that skill.

I'm trying to understand why it's the government's responsibility to teach that person a second language, whereas it isn't responsible for teaching courses in history, mathematics, chemistry or physics. I'm sincerely trying to understand why, when a bilingual position is opened and a unilingual person hired, the government is responsible for teaching that person the second language.

Mr. Vaillancourt has a university degree and has teaching skills; that's his primary mission. It isn't the government's role to teach languages. It provides money to institutions like Mr. Vaillancourt's to teach English, French and all the other languages. I'm trying to see in what respect it is the government's responsibility to teach that second language, since we can all go to Mr. Vaillancourt to learn another language.

Can someone enlighten me on that subject?

● (1015)

Mr. Alain Chamsi: In fact, we should go back to basics. It's important to value the fact that we have two languages in this country, and that's occurs at a very young age. As a Francophone immigrant, I learned English in the street at six years of age, when I came to Canada. People spoke English, and I saw an advantage in speaking both languages as a young boy; otherwise I couldn't speak with the people I was playing with.

We have to find a solution to the mandatory learning of languages, rather than voluntary learning. The education system has to give people a reason to want to speak the two languages of this country and to be proud of them. That's what we're doing in the industry, with the assistance of the universities. We want to show people that bilingualism brings pride and a significant financial advantage in Canada and in the world.

I don't really want to talk about this point in particular, but I would especially like to say that we have to go back and look at children three, four or five years of age. How can we interest them in language? How can we encourage them to want to be bilingual?

We have to work with older youths to show them the opportunities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chamsi.

Mr. Harvey raised a very interesting question, but I must unfortunately stick to the time that was allotted to him.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, if you ask committee members to allow a minute or two—

The Chair: It's your turn, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Let me state my point of view, please.

I think that, if you asked committee members to allow a minute or two more for the union representatives to answer Mr. Harvey's question, you would definitely have my consent and that of the members on this side.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: We could pursue the matter.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I don't want to have answers to questions that you ask.

The Chair: We don't have unanimous consent, so I'm going to give—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Ms. Demers, I would like you to answer Mr. Harvey's question. I'm going to sacrifice my speaking time, because I think it's important to get your perspective.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Harvey, I consider myself privileged to have learned this country's second official language in the street when I was very young, as the gentleman here did. I had that privilege. Many people elsewhere in the country don't have that privilege. They live in a unilingual environment, either Anglophone or Francophone, and their education system or immediate environment doesn't facilitate the learning of a second language.

Until that's possible through the school system, the federal government has a responsibility, under its own act, that is section 39 which I read to you earlier, to ensure that no one is adversely affected in the area of employment or advancement within federal institutions. There follows an obligation for the government to provide language training.

That said, our institute feels that the responsibility is shared and that the government must do its share. Individuals must also accept responsibility for maintaining and preserving the linguistic profile they have acquired and that they need to work in the public service.

However, we can't tell people to learn the language on their own if they want to work, because that's not possible for everyone. It's a bit superficial to simply say to ourselves that we're going to hire bilingual people. Those who aren't bilingual are adversely affected, according to your way of thinking.

• (1020)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's my turn, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: We're going to hand over to Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There is another aspect to that. The public service existed when the act was proclaimed in force. We can't institute another legislative framework without there being an adjustment period to ensure that everyone has fair advancement opportunities.

Ms. Demers, I agree with some of your comments. First, as long as we continue providing language training, that should be done at the start of a career. I absolutely agree with you on that. Second, I'm interested—although I'm not saying I would draw the same conclusion as you—in studying the bilingualism bonus issue, and the government would be a good tool for doing that. Would there be a better use to be made of that money? I believe that represents approximately \$50 million a year. That would interest me. I'm going to see whether we have the time to study that, if an election isn't called soon.

I want to get to your first comment, your first suggestion, that we have to start at square one, with training. I agree with Mr. Chong in that respect. As regards training and teachers, there is something to be done. I know this is a priority for the Language Industry Association. I recently had the honour of being invited to give a talk to their assembly. I really emphasized this. Since then, I've met teachers and I've inquired. In the federal government, language teachers now work in absolutely astounding conditions. Training has been privatized. They are asked to go teach in the cafeteria or in the library. Imagine giving courses in the library while others study. They're invited to go into small storerooms. The decision to privatize all language training was a mistake, as was the decision to transfer the Official Languages Secretariat from the Privy Council Office to the Department of Canadian Heritage. Those are two steps backward. We will really have to study that, to go back and start training over.

Remember that we passed an act when Ms. Robillard was President of the Treasury Board. People had to meet the requirements and they had two years to do it. However, the deadline was postponed two, three or four times. We decided to stop postponing it. That had an absolutely astounding impact, and five times as many people wanted to receive training. The waiting list got very long. At that point, \$36 million was added over two years to cut it back. A change of government subsequently occurred, and that's when everything was privatized. I think that was a mistake that must be corrected.

This is also terrible for teachers outside the public service. They don't have classrooms at their disposal and teaching material is obsolete.

The Chair: If you could—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'd like to know, from both the industry and your association, madam, whether you could study this aspect and make recommendations so that we can communicate them to the provinces. This is where we have to promote the profession of language teacher.

The Chair: Thank, Mr. Bélanger. I ask the witnesses to take note of the question.

We'll continue, and it's Mr. Chong's turn.

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

I agree with you, Mr. Peralta, with regard to your testimony. My mother was European and all my cousins can speak three or four languages. It's not by chance; in Europe, the education system is very different from ours. After World War II, no one in Europe could speak a second language. Now, in countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany, all citizens can speak three or four languages. In my opinion, we can do the same thing in our country. If our country wants to engage in international trade, be diversified and meet the definitions of the modern world, it will have to have an education system that produces students who can speak three or four languages. It's good for the economy, national unity and diversity; it's good for everything.

• (1025)

[English]

I'm in complete agreement with you. I think your presentation was very interesting and the work you're doing is very interesting. It's encouraging to see that you're starting out and building this case to be made.

The only other point I want to make is to the representatives from the groups that represent the public service. I strongly encourage you to take another approach to promoting bilingualism in the public service. I think a lot of what you're doing is good, but in some ways you're forgetting the other part of what we need to do.

Sometimes we do too much defending of the linguistic rights of francophones and anglophones in the public service without actually doing the proactive work we need to promote bilingualism in Canada. I think in particular of the need for universities to graduate bilingual students. We need more interaction with the university community to get them to produce the students we need for the public service.

There are complaints that if you're anglophone or unilingual it's more difficult to enter the EX stream. In some ways I'm empathetic about that, but in other respects I'm not. If you're working for an investment bank you need an MBA to move up to the level of vice-president. It's rare today, if you're working for one of the banks and you don't have an MBA, to be promoted beyond that or to that level. If you're not an engineer, it's difficult to get promoted in an engineering group. If you are working for Microsoft, it's difficult to get promoted if you don't have a computer science background.

In some ways I think we need to push back on the university community and say, if you work for the Government of Canada and want to go into the management stream, you need to be bilingual. This is not an afterthought; this is something you should prepare for as part of your training before you apply for the public service.

[Translation]

The Chair: There is about one minute left.

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: Since the universities are involved, would you allow me to speak, Mr. Chairman?

When I left my native city, Quebec City, at the age of 21, I was a unilingual Francophone. I chose to do my studies at a unilingual Anglophone university. So, from the outset, I had to meet the challenge, for an adult, of learning English in a unilingual environment, but that was also an advantage.

Immersion in a unilingual environment over an extended period of time is the ideal situation for mastering a second language without losing mastery of one's mother tongue. This type of environment should be promoted as a host environment for further developing second language skills in Canada. It's true for basic training, and it's also true for the occupational development of both government employees and the employees of other businesses. We have to rethink the training model in which you make daily visits to a person in an environment where they speak your mother tongue and they teach you the second language for an hour, whereas you won't use it the rest of the day. We really have to think about that. The universities, whether they are Francophone in a bilingual or Anglophone environment, or Anglophone in a Francophone environment, can offer this kind of environment, which would foster more intense and more rapid training and make it possible to master the language. It's a bit like learning—

• (1030)

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

We'll go over to the opposition. For the Bloc québécois, it will be Mr. Nadeau.

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

We've just heard a discussion and some very interesting remarks. I'm of Franco-Ontarian origin, and I remember a sentence by Jeannine Séguin, who is no longer with us today, but who was President of the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario. I worked closely with her at the time when she was President of the Fédération des francophone hors Québec. She said that we Francophones learn French, but we catch English.

In a society that wants to be bilingual, at least in accordance with the Constitution of Canada, we're still living that reality. When my children were at the Coopérative d'habitation Villa Bonheur in Saskatoon, they caught English very quickly. They were five and eight years old when they started there, and they learned it. That's a reality because English is the majority language there. I'm blaming no one; that's a reality. The Anglophone children didn't catch or learn French. There are those circumstances.

Perhaps we caught English, but we had to develop and improve our French as best we could. It's frustrating to see federal government colleagues who don't master both languages at all, whereas they should since they occupy so-called bilingual positions. I use the word "colleagues" as though I were a public servant.

There's also the letter that Ms. Kenny sent us yesterday or Tuesday. She is a woman who works with minority Francophones and who told an important story. The supervisor doesn't speak French, or doesn't understand it very well. Francophones may be numerous or less numerous; they will always speak English regardless, because, if you speak to the supervisor in French, the message won't be transmitted or won't be clear. You risk being misunderstood and you also don't want to undermine the job that has to be done.

In the public service, the further you get from the communities where there is a majority of Francophones, the more Francophones themselves work in the other language.

The public service is experiencing a problem in this regard. I know that it isn't the public servants' fault. It's a matter of will on the government's part. Will it step forward or not? Will it provide the tools or not?

The Action Plan for Official Languages has to be given an orientation. Let's see what Francophones... French is the language that is being lost and that is in difficulty across Canada, even in certain regions of Quebec. Let's make sure that the work can be done, that is to say that comprehension and learning can be done.

I would ask Mr. Cashman and Ms. Demers to answer that question. Are there things that the federal government has done well in the past, that have been cancelled and that should be reinstated?

The Action Plan for Official Languages is a good opportunity, even if it means establishing partnerships or restoring elements that were cancelled and that shouldn't have been, because they provided solutions.

I'm thinking of certain examples. Last year, the government cancelled the Canada Summer Jobs Program for youths and reinstated it this year, because it had completely missed the boat. We have a difficult situation here. I'd like to have your viewpoint on this aspect because you're inside the public service.

Ms. Michèle Demers: One thing has been removed, and I never thought I would hear myself say that the matter should be reconsidered. However, I see that, under the system put in place in the public service in 2003, a good balance should be struck between unilingual and bilingual positions in order to give people the time to acquire the second language. To achieve that, the level of imperative bilingual positions staffed in the public service should be reviewed.

Mr. Chong, you mentioned that candidates should, in principle, be bilingual in order to enter the EX category, and that that made sense. I don't disagree with you, but the fact remains that bilingualism is required at much lower levels. From the moment there is direct interaction with the public in designated bilingual regions, candidates must meet the linguistic requirements in both languages. Couldn't we strike a better balance between bilingual and unilingual positions in order to enable people to acquire the second official language?

Coming from us, who represent the employees of the federal public service, this initiative would be interpreted as a good will gesture. That would open a door. However, it should be accompanied by a training program and funding. I repeat what I said earlier: responsibility is shared between employee and government, but it is there for both.

•(1035)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Demers.

We'll now go to Mr. Brent St. Denis.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I very much appreciate what's been said, first by Luc, then by Mauril. I'm a good example of what's at the bottom of this issue. I have a French name, but I'm Anglophone. When I was young, we had no opportunity to learn Canada's other official language through immersion.

The boundary of my riding was changed four years ago. The riding was slightly expanded to include the Highway 11 corridor in northern Ontario, that is Smooth Rock Falls, Moonbeam, Kapuskasing, Hearst, Val Rita, Mattice, and so on. That's a very Francophone region, but also a very bilingual one. Someone explained to me one day that a person who could switch from one language to the other without an accent, as many members do here, was a gem in Canada, a very special phenomenon. It's a challenge for me to become that. I think it's impossible.

The Chair: It's coming; it's coming.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Does everybody understand what I'm saying? Yes?

Let's go back to the subject of the debate. The objective of the Government of Canada is to make the public service very bilingual, but we have to accept the fact that, for the future of Canada, the government now needs a new generation of public servants. Is an effort being made to find candidates from that next generation of public servants in highly bilingual places like the Highway 11 corridor, in Ontario, Mattawa, the birthplace of my friend Mauril, or New Brunswick? There are a lot of bilingual young people in these big and small areas.

•(1040)

The Chair: Perhaps Mr. Cashman can answer.

[English]

Mr. Ed Cashman: I'd like to answer that in English.

I have a problem with deciding that for entry into the public service we're going to limit the candidates to those who are bilingual. By doing so you will exclude large chunks of this country, and that's not fair.

We should be aiming for the best and the brightest to enter the public service over the next couple of years. By simply saying that these regions are bilingual and we're only going to take candidates from those regions is not building the country we are intending to build.

[Translation]

Mr. Brent St. Denis: I agree, but are we trying to establish a balance by trying to find both young people from bilingual regions and youths who want to learn the other language, regardless of whether they come from Quebec or outside that province?

[English]

Mr. Ed Cashman: I think there is also a balance between the carrot and the stick. Right now, if the government were to say...and Madame Adam, the Commissioner of Official Languages, did say it. She felt there were enough bilingual people in the public service now that we didn't need to put as much money into language training.

That's dangerous, because we haven't achieved that critical mass within the public service and, truthfully, among young Canadians who want jobs in the public service.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Peralta.

[English]

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: We have participated in many consultations across the country, and many of the questions and issues raised here today have been voiced right across this country.

In some ways, some of us are saying the same thing. I appreciate very much *député* Bélanger's suggestion to actually sit down together and propose something. It's evident to us from an industry perspective that no one group has the complete answer. That's very evident.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have very little time left, Mr. Peralta.

[English]

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: I'd also like to point out that when I went to university here, I had to pass a bilingualism test to get my diploma. Not a single university in Canada demands that any more. Shame on us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peralta. I think you have raised an interesting issue here about our educational system and language learning and requirements.

We'll now move on to Mr. Nadeau.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Vaillancourt, Mr. Peralta and you have spoken about the language industry and its development. From the documents I read before the meeting, the language industry is growing at a rate of approximately 18%. So that means that, at that rate, if my calculations are correct, that industry will double in size within approximately six or seven years. The program is for a term of five years; at least that was the case of the one that has just terminated. However, I would like you to talk to me about your organizations' needs for assistance from the federal government, which is responsible for the program. Mr. Vaillancourt and Mr. Peralta, I'd like to hear your comments on that subject.

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: Indeed, this \$3 billion market for Canada alone is doubling every five to seven years. The global market is even bigger. So we're talking about extremely significant potential economic development for Canada in order to position itself.

Currently, Canada clearly has a serious shortage of translators and terminologists to meet its needs. We know that Ireland and Australia have seized a significant share of the Canadian translation market. The primary interest should potentially be to train more translators in Canada. It is very important to support the development of training activities in both the private sector and the universities. It is extremely important to train more people so that, collectively, Canadians can benefit from the extraordinary growth in this market.

Second, it is essential to train translators so that they can work efficiently and produce more. The only way to increase translators' productivity is to put tools at their disposal, whether it be software, software packages or simply physical instruments that facilitate and accelerate translation. These products can only be developed in Canada if we invest in research and development.

The Language Technology Research Centre is the first and currently the only research centre specialized in language technologies in Canada. Earlier I mentioned that, for us to be competitive, we would need \$6 million a year more than the current funding shared by LTRC's partners. Beyond that, it would be extremely important to arm the Canadian industry so that it can put these inventions on the market so that it can benefit fully from them, whether it be the business marketing market or the translation market itself.

• (1045)

Mr. Alain Chamsi: Remember that the industry is here to meet the country's needs, whether it be government imperatives or the needs of a bilingual country. When we say translation, we're talking about terminologists and language training. That's why we're here, but we're also here to help extend Canada's international reach. Other countries often ask us to share our linguistic experience with them. Countries like Chile, Serbia and other countries that have the same kind of people come to see us to ask us what we do, because Canada is viewed as a beacon in this regard. So we are a significant presence in the world and we must continue to be that.

However, as you said, we need people. We don't have the necessary personnel or resources. They must be trained. One way to overcome this kind of problem is to develop technologies. We are a world leader. I've previously been asked why the Canadian language technology sector is so well developed. There are a lot of businesses, even in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, working in the language technology sector. We need that. That's one way to facilitate the development of translation, terminology and language training at lower cost, because we don't have the essential financial or human resources to meet the needs in this country, without even looking to the outside.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: May I share some figures?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: You may draw your own conclusions. The annual growth rate is 18% per year for everyone. It takes four to seven years for the industry to double. The maximum Canadian growth rate in the number of translation graduates is 6% per year. Soon our translations may be done in Morocco.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peralta.

By the way, people say very good things about the simultaneous interpretation done on the Hill.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, that was very interesting and very instructive. I'm a new Conservative member, having been in office for two years. Indeed, things were done before I arrived here, and I'm learning because a new program has to be prepared. As Mr. Godin said, we have English and French. Personally, I'm an immigrant and I have another language that no one here could speak, and that's Walloon. So I represent a problem for you because my mother tongue is Walloon.

When I arrived in Quebec City—I'm originally from Quebec City and I live in the lower town, like all immigrants—I learned jòal. That was special. Having studied classics, I had learned good French with the Eudist Fathers. I learned Latin, which formed the basis of French. I also learned Greek.

When I arrived here, I was faced with only two languages, and people were trying to stake out their territory. I can't get over it, but people really are territorial here on the Hill. Everyone wants his own little kingdom.

I'm trying to find out one single thing. This issue must move forward, and my question is very basic. I heard Ms. Demers say earlier—but I don't want to put words in her mouth—that she was part of the private system. But in fact, the Government of Canada subcontracts to the Université du Québec. Mr. Vaillancourt, the rector, seemed to be speaking on behalf of a Quebec entity.

So there's apparently a school at your university, Mr. Vaillancourt, but I don't know how that works.

• (1050)

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: I'll explain that to you simply.

The university owns a building that is financed jointly by the federal and provincial governments. That building houses a research centre which is a non-profit organization and which receives funding in cash and in kind from the federal government, the provincial government and the City of Gatineau, in addition to co-funding from the university.

Mr. Daniel Petit: I want to be sure I've clearly understood. The federal government has entered into an agreement with the Université du Québec en Outaouais. Is that correct?

Mr. Jean Vaillancourt: In fact, the National Research Council of Canada, a federal agency that is one of the partners, has a team that is housed in the university's building. The NRC researchers collaborate with those of the university. There they do work to develop new technologies to expedite and improve translation and develop techniques for language training and second-language training.

Mr. Daniel Petit: I'm going to ask you a brief question, but I don't know who can answer it.

This week, in the committee, we met with the representatives of the Canada School of Public Service and the Canada Public Service Agency. There seem to be a lot of titles in the federal government. I can't get over that.

The subject was language training for public servants. I'm really talking about the public service. I'm not talking about members who have another system.

I understood that a transfer was currently being made to you. We know there is a shortage of funds, but, whether you are unionized or subcontractors, there's always a shortage of money somewhere and we're the ones who will ultimately be paying. So I want to hear what you have to say about that.

Could you tell me how you work with the public service? Ms. Demers seems a bit reluctant. There seems to be a conflict between you because you aren't offering the desired services. On the

other hand, they're saying that, if they offered those services, they would be better than yours.

I'd like to know what we're talking about.

Mr. Alain Chamsi: We work with the Canada School of Public Service. That school's functions have changed. It used to provide training, but it now subcontracts with the industry, the private language schools that we represent here.

We're sitting down at the table together to find a supply method that would work for the public service, which is represented by the school, and which would also work for the private schools, to enable them to participate and respond to this need, and also to validate the quality of services provided by the schools.

We are currently working with the Canada School of Public Service and the industry to define quality standards that public servants can rely on. So the subcontracting isn't done with just any school that hangs out a sign and claims to provide language training. That's not the goal. The goal is to have schools that provide approved language training the quality of which can be validated. That's what we're doing in the industry. We're trying to establish a partnership with the Canada School of Public Service.

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

That completes our three rounds.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, we have a few minutes left.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, if you could let me finish, please.

It will be difficult to start another round of questions since witnesses are already arriving for the next meeting at 11 o'clock.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, we have five minutes left. We could certainly make good use of it.

The Chair: I just wanted to make a comment.

First, I would like to thank our witnesses, who have expressed the respective views of their organizations.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes, I'm listening.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you. Could you check to see whether a majority of the members would like to use the next five minutes or not?

• (1055)

Mr. Luc Harvey: The Chairman doesn't have the right to make a comment at the end?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm asking the question.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, I just have a question to put to the witnesses.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Go ahead.

The Chair: Let me finish my remarks, or we'll run out of time and I won't be able to ask my question.

I also wanted to say that I found Mr. Harvey's testimony interesting. I was also a public servant, an engineer at the institute. Ms. Demers, I may even have voted for you in a previous life.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I hope so.

The Chair: I was to be an engineer and had to meet the language requirements.

I feel there have been constructive discussions this morning. The federal public service is the biggest employer in Canada. How is it that it isn't able to tell the training institutions its needs regarding scientific, technical and language training? I think this is an option that the committee will definitely have to monitor.

With a view to promoting linguistic diversity, Mr. Peralta, you discussed an International Year of Languages in 2010, but, on page 13 of your document, you mention 2009. However, I would perhaps like to hear from Mr. Cashman or Ms. Demers on that subject. Do you think it's a good idea for Canada to have its Year of... You call it the International Year of Languages, don't you?

Mr. Gonzola Peralta: The Year of Languages.

The Chair: The Year of Languages. Do you think that's a good idea?

Mr. Ed Cashman: It's an excellent initiative. We should promote the use of both official languages.

The Chair: Mr. Cashman, you believe that.

Ms. Demers.

Ms. Michèle Demers: It's a start, but that initiative has to be accompanied by much more concrete actions to promote language, rather than merely proclaim a year. That's fine, but it's not enough.

The Chair: You have to walk the talk.

Ms. Michèle Demers: That's it.

The Chair: Thank you very much to our witnesses. I would also like to take this moment to provide some information.

I would like to remind committee members that the next meeting will be held as scheduled at nine o'clock on Tuesday morning and that the Public Service Commissioner will be with us during the first part of the meeting. Then we'll be able to begin the study of the draft report.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You mean the President.

The Chair: Yes, the President of the Commission. Pardon me.

The meeting is adjourned.

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