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Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning. Welcome to the 24th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This morning it is our pleasure to welcome the Special Advisor on the reshaping of the Official Languages Action Plan, the Honourable Bernard Lord. Allow me to welcome him on behalf of the committee members.

Before going any further, I would like to mention that I was struck by your report's first recommendation on the importance of education for minority-community development. That is an opinion shared by our committee members and it was one of our recommendations.

Without any further delay, I will turn the floor over to our guest. I would like to remind you that you have 10 minutes for your opening remarks, which will be followed by a round of seven-minute questions for each party, followed by five-minute-question rounds.

Mr. Lord, you have the floor.

Hon. Bernard Lord (Special Advisor for the Consultations on Linguistic Duality and Official Languages, Government of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It gives me great pleasure to be here today. I am here on your invitation to speak to you about my work as special advisor to the government on official languages.

The bulk of this work began in December. We held consultations throughout the country. We went to Vancouver, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Moncton and Halifax. At the same, consultations took place on-line. I also met with certain groups and individuals on an individual basis, including the official languages commissioners of Canada, New Brunswick and Ontario. These were very productive and constructive meetings. The individuals who participated were pleased to be there and had good ideas.

A considerable amount of work had already been accomplished. My mandate did not involve repeating that work. On the contrary, the purpose was to build on the work already accomplished, including your own. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for having sent me a copy of this committee's report and for the conversations that we had on this topic. You also kept me up to date on the work that you were doing, which I greatly appreciated.

Many people are interested in the status of official languages in our country and they want to participate. They're confident, determined and they want to help our country move forward.

[*English*]

It was a great opportunity for me to travel coast to coast and to meet Canadians who care deeply about their country and care deeply about official languages. I met people who wanted to continue to work to advance both official languages from coast to coast.

Mr. Chair, since I'm here this morning at your invitation, I'm here really to help you in your work. I'll be happy to answer questions, and I've decided to keep my remarks very brief this morning.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I must say, Mr. Lord, that you are one of the witnesses who have used the least amount of time for their opening remarks. We will therefore immediately move into a round of questions beginning with the official opposition, Mr. Rodriguez.

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

Mr. Lord, good morning and welcome.

Were you given a clear and specific mandate when you were asked to undertake this work?

Hon. Bernard Lord: Absolutely. I had a very clear and specific mandate. You can read the contract I signed with the department, that I have with me here, and that clearly defines my mandate. I can read it to you if you wish.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You can just give me a general outline.

Hon. Bernard Lord: It's quite short. I'll give you the general outline:

The contractor agrees to undertake the following work: first, to chair and moderate consultations with stakeholders invited by the department to regional events and to report on their results to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages. If necessary, and with the approval of the project agent, the contractor will also hold consultations with other key stakeholders in the official languages sector. The contractor will chair and moderate seven regional events that will take place in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Moncton and Halifax. The outcome of those consultations shall be presented in early January as a written report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, and this will be completed before the wrap-up event in Ottawa. The contractor will speak at the wrap-up event that will take place in Ottawa at the end of January 2008, on the main conclusions drawn from these regional consultations.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: With your permission, the mandate deals mainly with means of action. It refers to meeting, consulting, travelling, presenting a report, but I would like to know if there were clear components and goals, goals that were set with respect to communities? Were you asked to focus on specific aspects or to avoid, for example, referring to certain aspects?

Hon. Bernard Lord: Questions were recommended within the consultation framework for the purposes of engaging individuals in a dialogue. There was also an open session that gave all invited stakeholders and all those participating in the consultations over the Internet an opportunity to speak to us on topics of their choice. No limit was set on the number of issues that could be discussed.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: There was no limit. You weren't asked to focus on certain topics or to avoid others.

• (0910)

Hon. Bernard Lord: No, on the contrary.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: The committee—as you know, because you mentioned this—undertook a rather extensive trip as well not long ago. We prepared well for this and we travelled throughout the country. Do you think that another series of consultations, the ones you undertook, were necessary after so many had taken place? Our impression when we listened to the communities was that they wanted us to stop consulting them, because they had told us what they wanted, and to act.

Hon. Bernard Lord: I believe that the consultations were very productive and constructive. All the groups, organizations and individuals who participated in these consultations were very happy to do so. It should be pointed out that Minister Verner had made a commitment to undertaking further consultations before drawing up the next stage of the action plan. Furthermore, the government made a clear commitment in its Speech from the Throne to establish the next stage of the action plan. Therefore, the consultations were valuable and constructive.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: But in what way were they different from the committee's consultations? You read the report. Why was it necessary to consult even further? What was different? Did you meet other organizations? I have the impression that you met the same people we did.

Hon. Bernard Lord: We met many of the same people. At the same time, there were parallel consultations happening over the Internet that gave all Canadians an opportunity to participate and to share with the minister, the department and myself their perspectives on official languages. It was another opportunity, and specific questions were raised with respect to changes in immigration, demographic changes, the economy and government modernization. The minister wanted to provide another opportunity for committees and organizations, to share their perspectives before proceeding with her action plan. That was my mandate and I was happy to fulfill it.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Why did you not meet with us; we missed you. Why did you not meet with the official languages committee?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Why? But I am so pleased to meet with you today.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: No, I mean during the process. We had a lot to say, we had travelled and met with people.

Mr. Bernard Lord: I could have easily done this, actually, but I was given such a precise mandate in terms of time and I had been asked to meet primarily with organizations throughout the country. I am assuming that the minister was fully aware of the good work that you do and that she had also received your report. My objective and the mandate that I was given were to meet with other organizations.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: All right. We would have really liked to have met with you. During our travels, one aspect in particular kept coming up from one end of the country to the other. You know that I am referring to the Court Challenges Program. People talked about this program wherever we went. I'm assuming that this was the same thing for you?

Mr. Bernard Lord: People talked about this to me everywhere I went. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Why doesn't that figure in your report as such?

Mr. Bernard Lord: If I may say so, people spoke about this issue everywhere, but that was not the dominating issue at every location. This was an aspect that was discussed, there is no doubt about that, but people were also pleased to talk about other things. There is no doubt that many people told me and repeated that they would like the Court Challenges Program to be restored. Many people made other comments.

If you turn to page 19 of the report, I mention, when we talk about... I'm going to find the line.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: If I may, Mr. Lord, since you have said that many people mentioned this and that these people were hoping that...

Why isn't this subject dealt with as such in the report? It seems so obvious to us that this is a topic that should have been covered given that you even had to go so far as to hold work sessions on the issue. I am wondering why this was not...

Mr. Bernard Lord: I am convinced that you did this. If you take a look at page 19 of the report...

The Chair: We will conclude on this point.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Pardon me, it's on page 18 of the report. It states very clearly:

To build capacity, community organizations would like more support from the government. Some participants suggested that a program be put in place to address the need for conflict mediation and resolution with regard to language rights with a component providing for the defence and promotion of language rights before the courts under exceptional circumstances.

I mentioned programs like that one. It's true, I did not mention it by name in the report. This is something that was heard many times. I talked about it in my interviews and I made recommendations pertaining to something else. Given that there was a case which was—and still is—before the courts, I chose at that time not to make any specific recommendations on this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

We will now turn to the Bloc Québécois, and to Mr. Richard Nadeau.

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Lord.

Mr. Lord, in your opinion, what is endangered in Canada: bilingualism or the French language?

Hon. Bernard Lord: Your question would indicate that you are assuming that one or the other is in danger in Canada. I do not share this opinion, and therefore I cannot choose between the two. I think that the French language is doing well in Canada. Bilingualism is doing well also. There are challenges for the French language, there are challenges for bilingualism and there are challenges for the official language communities in Canada. It is for this reason, I believe, that the government of Canada has a role to play, as do the other governments in Canada. Governments need to support linguistic communities in minority situations. This is why I accepted the mandate that was given to me; this issue is dear to my heart. Official languages are part of my Canadian identity. I accepted this mandate in order to be able to make a contribution.

● (0915)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You were the premier of an officially bilingual province. You come from a province where there is a very significant French speaking community, an Acadian community and a Brayon community. Statistics show that since 1951, the French language has been losing ground in an alarming manner. Nowhere in your report does it indicate something specific about the efforts required to ensure the vitality of the French fact in the various provinces and in the Quebec nation.

The Standing Committee on official languages did this, for instance, when it visited the various communities in the fall of 2006. We discussed all of the required mechanisms, not to ensure that the children whose first language is French learn English and become bilingual, but to ensure that francophones are able to fight against assimilation which is a very serious problem once you move away from Quebec.

Did this aspect come out during your consultations? Did you go to the trouble of meeting with organizations that defend the French language in Quebec, as you did moreover in the other provinces in order to understand the needs of these communities and organizations, and to ensure that the French fact continues in North America, Canada, Quebec just as it does in each of the provinces?

Hon. Bernard Lord: Thank you for your question. I met with people throughout the country who are working, on a daily basis, to help linguistic communities in minority situations develop and grow, socially, economically and culturally, and build institutions that will assist and support these communities in the future. I met with individuals from British Columbia to Nova Scotia. When I went to Quebec, we met primarily with representatives from the minority anglophone communities in Quebec.

To answer your question specifically, I did not meet with people whose mission must to defend the French language in Quebec. I did not do so because that was not part of my mandate. These people were ??? however, invited to participate in the consultation through the Internet.

That said, I met with people who, as I already mentioned, are dedicated and work ardently to ensure that their children are able to develop in the language of their choice. These people acknowledge the existence of challenges for linguistic minorities in many places in Canada.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: On another issue, but still on the same topic, within the government and the public service we have so called French or bilingual positions that are staffed by unilingual anglophones. This is a problem.

Did you take time to meet with civil servants, public service agencies and the Public Service Commission? We know that the purpose of the first official language plan was to ensure that every individual who wanted to be served in French by the federal government would be able to do so, but these positions that were created to provide French services are not staffed by individuals who speak French. Did you meet with these people and did you see how you could help them resolve this problem?

Mr. Bernard Lord: The short answer to your question is no, simply because I didn't have the mandate to meet with everyone. I had been given time in order to allow me to meet specifically with community organizations throughout the country.

In my opinion, the government is fully aware of its obligations. This committee among others, has done work in this area. The Commissioner of Official Languages, with whom I met, has also done so. I am meeting with you today. I appreciate the fact that you wanted to meet with me before.

My job was to chair consultations with individuals and community groups through the country. That was the mandate I was given, the mandate I accepted and fulfilled.

● (0920)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You referred to the Court Challenges Program. Last week, I met with representatives of the Quebec Community Groups Network. They told me that when they met with you they also told you about the importance of restoring this program.

I am not asking you to take a position on the current situation. However, how can you say that it wasn't appropriate to put in your report something that is mentioned in the last three reports published by the Standing Committee on Official Languages, with communities and advocacy groups for visible minorities and the handicapped? Why not at least take the time to mention it?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I am pleased to respond again to this question because I feel like I'm being asked again. I heard those comments and I shared them during a number of interviews. When we were in Montreal, representatives of the anglophone community also said that they liked the old program. That's why I wrote, on page 18 of my report, that groups wanted a similar program. In it, I mentioned that there were other solutions than simply restoring the old program, which was not part of the action plan but rather an additional tool used in some circumstances.

Mr. Chair, I want to add to this. We must understand that the former Court Challenges Program is the only way to have access to the courts to defend one's rights. It is possible to defend one's rights without that program. We must distinguish between the two.

I understand that some groups clearly indicated that this program was an important tool to help them defend their rights before the courts.

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We will now go to Mr. Yvon Godin.

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

Mr. Lord, welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

In accordance with your mandate, did you submit a preliminary report to the minister before the final report?

Mr. Bernard Lord: My work comprised various stages. A summary of the consultations on the website was published and a draft report was written.

Mr. Yvon Godin: To whom did you have to submit a summary? To the minister, the department?

Mr. Bernard Lord: There were several summaries. According to my contract, the minister was to get a summary, which was done.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Prior to submitting the final report when did you submit a summary?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I don't remember the date, but the final report was completed before the end of February. I worked on the report with the assistance that I had been provided throughout January and February. Consultations were held in early December. The consultations on the website ended on December 22 or 23. Then, we prepared a summary.

I will give you the details, if you will allow me to do so, Mr. Godin. We submitted the summary of the website consultations during the wrap-up event held in Ottawa at the end of January. We also submitted a summary of the discussions that had taken place. Then, I agreed to meet with people who were not listed in the initial contract. That is why the summary was completed at the end of February rather than earlier.

• (0925)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay. You submitted reports not only of the Web consultations, but also of the meetings that you held in Toronto and in Vancouver. The *Telegraph Journal* of February 15 is right when it states:

[*English*]

Lord said Thursday he's handed his draft report in to Heritage Minister Josée Verner's office and had a chance to speak to the minister about his recommendation.

Those are the facts, right?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bernard Lord: No, the paper was referring to the final report. There was no draft of the final report.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, I could table the article with the clerk. The *Telegraph Journal* refers to a draft report.

Then you continue, stating:

[*English*]

"We've talked about some of the funding issues and they know what I think about them," said Lord.

"They have an idea what I think should be included in the budget, but it's their decision."

They were talking about the draft report,

[*Translation*]

a draft. Do you agree?

Hon. Bernard Lord: I didn't write the article in the *Telegraph Journal*.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm not asking the person who wrote the article, I'm asking you whether you submitted a draft report to the minister.

Hon. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, earlier, I told you that the final report was submitted to the minister in late February. Throughout the process, people from the department were present at the consultations. They supported me in my work and they were fully aware of the information.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, that is not my question. Is there a report? According to your contract—

The Chair: Mr. Godin, if you would please allow the witness to answer.

Mr. Yvon Godin: He stated that the people working with him could recount what happened. I am speaking specifically of a report.

According to your contract, the results of the consultations were to be presented in early January in the form of a written report. That is not the final report. According to your contract, for which you received payments, did you hand in a written report to the minister, yes or no?

Hon. Bernard Lord: To tell you the truth, Mr. Godin, I have not yet been paid.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I didn't ask you if you had been paid. You may have a payment problem, and the conservative government may not want to pay you, but that is not my question. My question is clear. Was a draft report submitted to the minister?

Hon. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, I am very happy to answer your questions, but I don't understand why you are so aggressive this morning. I am here—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it because you were not paid, Mr. Lord?

Hon. Bernard Lord: I appreciate the fact that you are worrying on my behalf, Mr. Godin, and I appreciate your point of view. However, seriously, the mandate that I accepted was to act as Chair. There were changes made to the contract, because I agreed to meet with people who were not part of my original mandate. I agreed to do so without asking for any change in pay, given that you referred to payment. As the process unfolded, drafts were prepared. I submitted the final report at the end of February. Did the department already have draft reports in hand? Yes, I told you that earlier.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay. How do you explain the fact that Ms. Verner's spokesperson says that there was no preliminary report or any interference on the part of the minister. You held the discussions after the draft reports. You may find that I am a bit agitated this morning, but I just want to get answers to my questions to understand the process.

Hon. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, I did not say agitated, I said aggressive. I am telling you clearly that both can co-exist. There was no interference. You referred to interference, but there was none at all. I was the one who signed the final report, I am the one who takes responsibility for it, according to the mandate that I received. I had discussions with the minister throughout the process. When we were in Ottawa, on January 24, during the wrap-up event, I was sitting right beside the minister, Mr. Godin. If I told you that I did not speak to the minister during the process, you would reply that I was sitting right beside her and that I must have spoken to her. Absolutely, I was sitting beside her and I did speak to her about the consultations. I informed her of what people had told me.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I just want to get a clear idea, Mr. Lord. A preliminary report was submitted to the minister. The minister is aware of this preliminary report. A final report was published. That's what I want to see in the minutes, not what the department said to the effect that there was no preliminary report.

Hon. Bernard Lord: What I told you...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Earlier, you told me that there was a preliminary report.

Hon. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, I want to help you. That's why I accepted your invitation to testify today before this committee. Consultations were held at the beginning of December. Web consultations were held as well. We reported on these Web consultations in January. At the meeting held on January 24, we provided a summary here in Ottawa. I think it was on the 24th or 25th. Everyone present received a very preliminary report of what happened during the consultations. Drafts were prepared, and I submitted the signed final report in late February.

• (0930)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now go to the government side with Mr. Lebel. I would like to welcome him to the committee.

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, it is a first for me to be sitting on the official languages committee today. It is perhaps also a first for the city of Roberval—isn't that right, Mr. Lord?—to have two of its native sons testifying and representing the government, especially since our guest witness was a provincial premier and I had the honour of being the mayor of your hometown. Please give my regards to Ms. Bouchard. In fact, in Roberval, the name Bouchard is associated with government. I had the honour of taking over from Benoît Bouchard as the Conservative representative in the riding of Roberval. It's a great honour for me to be here today and to take part in this debate with my colleagues.

Mr. Lord, I would like to commend you on the work that you have done. There is no doubt that your excellent knowledge of official languages in a Canadian context has brought about the results that we have sought after. Our government is proud to be able to continue working thanks to your recommendations. Accountability and clear decisions are important for the government. You talked about establishing a process that would ensure measurable objectives and accountability.

I would like to hear more about that.

Mr. Bernard Lord: It is a pleasure for me to take questions from the honourable member from the city in which I was born, a very important place for my mother, who is always proud of her home in the Lac-Saint-Jean region, and who wanted all of her children to be born somewhere close to the lake. So I would like to thank the honourable member and former mayor of Roberval for his introduction.

When plans of this type are drawn up, in my opinion, it is essential that they include accountability provisions and set clear, measurable objectives. I asked this question of the people who took part in our consultations. Most, if not all, agreed that it was important to set measurable targets so that we can determine what progress has been made after three, four or five years, depending on the duration of the next phase of the action plan—I expect it will be five years. This will also enable us to check whether the taxpayers' money invested by the government has produced the results we were expecting.

Mr. Denis Lebel: I'm sure you are aware of the measures in place at the moment. What do you think of them?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Some of the measures are good. Throughout the process, I tried to avoid becoming partisan. I did not want my report to destroy what had already been done, because the objective is to build on what already exists. That is why in the report I refer to the new strategy and to the next phase of the action plan, rather than to a new action plan or to getting rid of everything that has been done. Throughout the country, we want to build on what has been done so far.

We all agree that it is desirable to build in ways of measuring progress, to see where we invested funds and to set objectives that can be measured so that the official language minority communities and our partners, the federal government, other governments and community groups, can measure the impact of the strategy and the action plan. In this regard, the discussions I have had with the minister confirm that it would certainly be advisable for her and the government to be accountable for the plan to taxpayers, to ensure that their money is well spent.

Mr. Denis Lebel: I understand that we do not want to start over from square one. There are some good things being done, but there are definitely some more specific areas where correction should be made so that the action plan meets current needs.

Do you have any specific comments to make with regard to certain areas?

• (0935)

Mr. Bernard Lord: Some points did emerge from the consultations both as regards the strategy and the implementation. In respect to strategy, people across the country told us that they wanted the next phase of the action plan to include a specific focus on the arts and culture. This is an important issue for me as well, and I hope we will have an opportunity to talk more about it. The arts and culture help minority communities flourish, become stronger, try and get to know each other. The arts and culture are a way for Canadians to get in touch each other and to set up a dialogue.

As regards the implementation, something that came out at all the meetings was that some organizations felt a little like they were begging, to use their own words. They said that because the funding was provided from one year to the next, they never had the certainty they required to do more long-term planning. A number of organizations and stakeholders said they would like to see a longer term funding mechanism, so that they could spend more time doing the work they wanted to do, rather than filling in forms or meeting the government's requirements.

It is important to strike a balance here. Taxpayers, who provide the money to the government, must be sure that their money is being spent for the purposes set out, but we must also ensure that things are done efficiently enough so that individuals and community groups can do the work they want to do in their area of endeavour. These comments were also made at the wrap-up event that was held here in Ottawa.

I think there is this desire to find other ways of implementing the action plan's strategies. The idea is to make it simpler and more effective administratively. This is one way of clearly improving what was done before both strategically, with emphasis on the arts and culture, and tactically, with the implementation of the plan and the strategy.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That completes our first, seven-minute round. We will now move to the second round, and I will give the floor to Denis Coderre, representing the official opposition.

Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Good morning, Mr. Lord.

I imagine you would have had a hard time describing the former plan as flawed, given the number of agreements we signed together when you were the Premier of New Brunswick. I think this was very helpful to your province.

I want to come back to your mandate. I understand from what you said that you did not meet with representatives from the Public Service Alliance. When you spoke to my colleague, Mr. Rodriguez, your mandate was quite broad. In my opinion, the fact that you did not consult with representatives of the public service, who are a key component as regards linguistic duality, shows that this is not an action plan, but rather a public relations exercise on your part. If that was not part of the action plan, that means that Ms. Verner has already written her report and that ultimately, you will not necessarily have any influence regarding your proposals.

That said, I want to come back to the preliminary report and to the report Mr. Godin was referring to earlier. If there was a draft, to use the term that appeared in *The Chronicle*, that means that there was a written text. Is there a difference between the preliminary report and the final report?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you very much, Mr. Coderre. If I might, I will come back to the points you raised, and then I will respond to your question.

Hon. Denis Coderre: No, I would like you to answer my question.

Hon. Bernard Lord: Yes, but I do want to take the time, Mr. Coderre...

Hon. Denis Coderre: I only have five minutes. My time is precious, Mr. Lord, and you are here to answer my questions.

Hon. Bernard Lord: Absolutely.

Hon. Denis Coderre: So, is there any difference between the preliminary report and the final report?

Hon. Bernard Lord: Mr. Coderre, I think it is important that I present all the information. If the premise of your question includes some things with which I disagree, I hope the committee will allow me to make some corrections...

Hon. Denis Coderre: I understand that you are saying you disagree with my premise. Are the preliminary report and the final report the same?

Mr. Bernard Lord: But I think it is important to say why. That is part of the answer. Your premise puts a spin on your question. Mr. Coderre, if you will allow me to answer, we will have more time for discussion.

Hon. Denis Coderre: The problem is that my time is precious and I only have five minutes. As a witness, you have to answer my questions.

• (0940)

Mr. Bernard Lord: I am aware that your time is precious...

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chairman, I would ask that the witness answer my question, please.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, I would ask you to give the witness time to answer.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Very well. My question is as follows: what is the difference between the preliminary report and the final report?

Mr. Bernard Lord: To begin with, Mr. Coderre, I'm glad you mentioned that under the previous plan, agreements were signed and that had a good impact. With respect to my final report and the one that you have here, and between the first draft and the final report, there are differences. Absolutely. I think it is quite normal, when you prepare a report, whether it be the final draft that you sign, the final report. That is just normal practice.

Hon. Denis Coderre: All right. Regarding the \$1 billion from nowhere, does this mean that Minister Verner told you, when you met with her, to include it in the report, that it would be a good thing to do?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Once again, Mr. Coderre, you are including false elements in your questions and you are asking very leading questions. I find that unfortunate, since I am here at your invitation to help you in your work. The \$1 billion did not come out of nowhere. It was not recommended by the minister. You are trying to create a perception that is not there. The minister and the government gave me a mandate that I was pleased to carry out and I did so. The people who participated were pleased to do so and there are a lot... I know that your time is precious.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Lord, I am happy that...

Mr. Bernard Lord: One moment, Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: No, that has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Yes, it has everything to do with it, Mr. Coderre, because there are a lot of people who are very happy with the report.

Hon. Denis Coderre: No, I'm sorry. When someone presents a report, everyone is happy to meet with him; we are very happy to see you. When there is a \$1 billion involved and you write in your report that it is important to have cheques and balances, that means that the \$1 billion has to come from somewhere. You have a 37-page report—you used the word “I” a lot, so I imagine you are the one who wrote it, even if you had help from the people at Canadian Heritage—and the last action plan had funding of between \$810 and \$850 million; it was called the Dion Plan at the time. A \$1 billion is a lot of money. You want to protect taxpayers and we do not see anything in this report to justify the \$1 billion.

So where did this \$1 billion come from? If it does not come from Minister Verner, it comes from somewhere. Where does it come from?

Mr. Bernard Lord: It comes from me. I am the one who made the recommendation, Mr. Coderre. Perhaps you think that \$1 billion is too much money. That is your choice, Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Where did you get it from?

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

Mr. Bernard Lord: What I'm saying is, as I've indicated in the report, that I took the liberty of making a number of recommendations. Those are my recommendations and that is why I used the first person singular. I did the work and drafted the recommendations. So, if you are wondering why I used the first person singular, it is because I wrote the text, and the \$1 billion ...

The Chair: Thank you to the witness.

I would simply point out to committee members that I am finding it a bit difficult to hear our witness's answers because he is constantly being interrupted, so we could perhaps strike a balance... I remind you that you can manage your time as you so wish. However, when the witness is speaking, I would invite you to listen to what he has to say.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair. You know the rules of the committee. When a question is put to a witness and we are looking for a precise answer given the limited amount of time, it is up to the witness to answer our question directly. That prevents any to-and-from rhetoric between the witness and members of the committee.

The Chair: Very well. That is why it is important that not everyone talk at the same time.

Mr. Lebel.

Mr. Denis Lebel: If the question is partisan and contains remarks that upset the witness and twist the meaning of the question, I would hope that we could hear the witness clarify the matter. Otherwise, we should simply be asking questions.

The Chair: Very well. Thank you very much. I find that the point of order has been heard. We will now move on and I will yield the floor to Daniel Petit from the government side.

Mr. Petit.

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

Good morning, Mr. Lord. I would first like to thank you for having accepted the committee's invitation. Secondly, even though nobody is aware of this, you were our neighbours in Quebec City, because you lived in L'Ancienne-Lorette for quite some time. I note that you rose so far as to become the Premier of New Brunswick. That is a great honour.

After receiving your mandate, you read what had already been done. In your opening statement, you said that you had been given all the recommendations. Those recommendations were made by our government. For 25 years, this committee had never visited francophone communities. But our government made that happen. The committee toured Canada from East to West and tried to see exactly what was going on. I only took part in the eastern leg, ie, Mr. Godin's region. We met with about 20 people who only talked to us about the Court Challenges Program. We also received a very warm welcome in Newfoundland.

We were asked a number of questions, and the issue of federal funding was brought up repeatedly. Many organizations told us that they received funding not only from the federal government, but also from the provinces and private companies, in order to support their communities.

What I am getting at is the issue of responsibility. There are several orders of government. I come from Quebec, so you will understand that I am very wary of encroachments in the area of education. I am very sensitive to such programs as the Court Challenges Program, which can be used to attack Bill 101. I am also concerned about encroachments on health care.

When you were Premier of New Brunswick, you managed those issues differently. I don't necessarily want you to talk about your province, but could you share with me how you think the various stakeholders should cooperate? How could responsibilities be shared?

It is all well and good to earmark \$1 billion—and perhaps another \$500 million from another source—but if I don't know where to invest it... You made a number of recommendations in various sectors. I would like you to give us an overall view of the people who will be working towards common objectives.

●(0945)

Hon. Bernard Lord: Thank you very much, sir, for your question.

You wish to protect areas of provincial jurisdiction, and as a former premier of New Brunswick, I agree with you. All too often in the past, the federal government tried to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction unrequested. That led to all kinds of situations in Canada, and I would like to congratulate the current Government of Canada for wanting to respect provincial jurisdictions. It is demonstrating a renewed federalism by wanting to work in partnership with the provinces, while respecting our Constitution and the fact that we live in a federation. In my view, that is key to the success of programs dealing with official languages, as well as our country's social and economic issues.

That is why recommendation 10, on page 22, states the following:

I recommend that the new strategy for the next phase of the Action Plan be implemented in close collaboration with the provinces and territories and that these partnerships respect jurisdictions and reflect the constitutional and legal responsibilities of each level of government.

My report also deals with health issues, which were raised in the course of the consultations. It is an area where minority language communities would like to see other improvements. I would like to name one success story: the achievements of the Société Santé en français.

All the recommendations must respect the Canadian Constitution and the jurisdictions of the federal and provincial governments. By respecting the jurisdictions and responsibilities of all levels of government, you can create partnerships that are more solid and sustainable in the long term. That is what the current government appears to be doing, and I congratulate it for that.

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

We will now move back to the opposition side, with Raymond Gravel of the Bloc Québécois.

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

Thank you for being here with us, Mr. Lord.

I will not beat around the bush because I only have five minutes. I would like to come back to a question that my colleague asked you earlier. He asked you whether the French language or bilingualism was under threat in Canada. You answered that neither were, that both were doing well. And yet, we all know that Quebeckers have to pass legislation to protect the French language, even if they live in the only majority French province. I wonder how we can conclude that the French language is not under threat in the other provinces, where francophones are in the minority.

I would like to hear your comments on that.

● (0950)

Hon. Bernard Lord: Thank you very much, Mr. Gravel. The question was which of the two was in greater danger. That was the question I was asked earlier. I said that there were challenges. I clearly realize that. My report reflects the comments that I heard as to the challenges to the French language in minority language communities in western Canada and in some provinces out east. I also heard about the challenges to the anglophone minority community in some regions of Quebec. In other areas of the country, bilingualism itself poses a number of challenges, as when governments decide to eliminate immersion programs, for example.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Now I will change the subject and I will talk about senior citizens. I am involved with this file. In your report, I saw that you have met with organizations that represent francophone senior citizens in Canada, francophone senior citizens in Ontario and Franco-Albertans. There is no mention of this anywhere in your report.

Can senior citizens who live in homes, or in other environments, live in French in those provinces where French is a minority language?

Mr. Bernard Lord: In some provinces, that is the case. I met people who had worked and built senior citizen homes, or

specialized care centres for senior citizens, so that they could live in their own language. This has also been done in western Canada. Of course, there are also such homes in eastern Canada.

In New Brunswick, the situation is special because it is a bilingual province, but there are homes for senior citizens. I met senior citizens and I listened to them. This is one of the subjects regarding which I was wondering whether or not I should make another recommendation. I chose to cut down on the number of recommendations. The term health care can be taken as a very general term. I think that it is important to make sure that senior citizens can live and grow old in the official language of their choice. This will require more work.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: I think that being old and often ill causes insecurity, all the more so as senior citizens often live below the poverty threshold. We asked for an adjustment of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, because they are living below the low-income level. No doubt, if they cannot live and grow old in their own language, it causes so much insecurity that it can even lead to depression or premature demise.

Mr. Bernard Lord: I agree with you, Mr. Gravel, that old age and illness can cause insecurity, at any age. Things are even more difficult and complicated if you cannot receive care in your own language. This can make a person feel even more insecure. I am aware of this fact, I have heard about it. This is why we must get to work on this. I made recommendations that are rather general in scope, because this is my mandate. However, I heard about these things and I mentioned them in the report. I am glad to expand on this subject today.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: The numbers of senior citizens are growing. At the other extreme, regarding early childhood, you know that the Conservatives got rid of the child care programs. Nevertheless, we know very well that funds are needed. You also made a vague reference to this in your report.

What do you think of the fact that early childhood must get the best possible care?

Mr. Bernard Lord: The Canadian government has launched a program to help all Canadian children by paying \$100 per month for each child under the age of six. If I remember correctly, this is done all over Canada. It is a direct way to help parents and families to pay childcare costs and other costs. This was decided by the government.

The issues of early childhood and education were raised during the consultations. Various suggestions were made. There are things that can be done for pre-schooling, but provincial jurisdictions must be respected. Mr. Gravel, I am sure that you are not saying that I should have advised the federal government to set up an early childhood program that would infringe on provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Certainly not.

Mr. Bernard Lord: We can come back to this at some other time.

● (0955)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have five minutes.

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

Mr. Lord, who decided that your meetings would be held in camera?

Mr. Bernard Lord: The department which had prepared the meetings and the consultations. It was done in that way.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It was done in that way.

Mr. Bernard Lord: You asked me who did it; I answered you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I like a straightforward answer.

Mr. Bernard Lord: And I like straightforward questions.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What are the differences between the 14 recommendations in your report and those in the report from the Standing Committee on Official Languages?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, you can identify these differences just as well as I can. I do not remember exactly how many recommendations there were in the committee report, but I think that there were more than that. Some elements were included because...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Could you name one that is of major importance?

Mr. Bernard Lord: In fact, I am talking about injecting \$1 billion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Your telephone is ringing, no doubt, Ms. Verner is calling you.

Mr. Bernard Lord: No, even better, it's my wife.

The Chair: We will deduct this from the time allotted to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Another specific and different recommendation is the one with regard to the \$1 billion, and this is clearly stated in my report. However, it was not stated in the committee's report. Nevertheless, I understand that the mandates were not the same.

Many things are similar to each other. You heard people who told you the same thing. I think that it is important to be able to consult with people, to listen to them and to hear them out as they express their thoughts. I have done my part of the work, which consisted in reporting what the people told me, and I freely chose to make 14 recommendations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You have not answered my questions, except for the one about your \$1 billion. With all due respect, you have not found much more than we did.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, my mandate did not say that I had to find different things. I do not have your report in hand, but we could look at it together.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Just now, you said that you were very glad to have produced a report on arts and culture. This was one of your recommendations. You knew that it was also a part of our recommendations. Thus, there is nothing new. We were telling the minister...

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, you put a question to me, and I would like to be able to answer it.

You're telling me that is nothing new. However, there are new things as compared to the previous plan. My mandate did not consist in doing your work over again or in being different; it consisted in chairing meetings and consultations as I did in various parts of

Canada. Therefore, I have carried out my mandate and I am glad to have done so.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, let us look at the figures. I think that about \$810 million were invested in the action plan. One hundred thirty five million dollars are missing, and we could discuss this later. Then, there is a new recommendation on arts and culture.

Would the amounts be calculated in the same way? Does the addition of arts and culture raise the figure to \$1 billion? It is easy to calculate.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, I think that we will have to...

Mr. Yvon Godin: If we add arts and culture, it will become expensive.

Mr. Bernard Lord: You ask me a question, but you prevent me from answering it.

The minister has to be given the opportunity to unveil her plan. My job was to conduct consultations. I consulted people who told me all sorts of things, and some of them had told you the same thing. I think it is a good thing that we have an opportunity to hear specific recommendations on important things more than once, particularly on arts and culture.

I allowed myself one recommendation. I said that the billion dollars was a minimum and that afterwards, the government should accept your recommendations...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it the addition of arts and culture to the action plan that existed previously that meant that the figure is \$1 billion? Where does that \$1 billion figure come from?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I decided to specify that a minimum of \$1 billion was needed after noting that past investments were about \$810 million. The initial plan called for \$751 million, and the government invested about \$810 million.

Without having taken the time to account for every single item, I thought it was important to indicate an amount. I determined that \$1 billion would be the minimum. If the government were to decide that it must invest \$1.1 billion, so much the better, if it needed that amount to achieve the objectives defined in the action plan.

However, to support the activities and to achieve the objectives that I heard about, that I mentioned and I think are good ones, \$1 billion is a minimum.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now continue with Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you for being here with us, Mr. Lord.

You stated that your work was consultative in nature. I therefore will not ask you that question since you have just answered it. Did you have a team of people that helped you quantify the dollar amounts?

Mr. Bernard Lord: The...

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Simply answer yes or no. Did you have a team to quantify the dollars?

Mr. Bernard Lord: The people from the department supported me and accompanied me during the consultations.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: All right. In responding to a question put by my colleague Mr. Godin, you stated that you based yourself on past amounts to establish the amount of \$1 billion. That is exactly what you said.

Mr. Lord, before I put my questions, I consulted our analyst. He confirmed that right now, we are not in a position to know the amounts that were invested or spent as part of the Official Languages Action Plan over each of the past two years. If we were not able to identify that amount, how are you able to do so?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I am pleased to answer that.

I examined the investments and expenditures that have been made under the previous plan over the past five years as well as other items that had been added. I concluded that \$1 billion would be the minimum amount required to achieve those objectives. I requested this information from the department staff who worked with me.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That's fine.

Mr. Lord, you state that your analysis is based on the last five years of the action plan. This was the dollar amount. What is the amount per year, over the past two years? When you conducted your analysis, you surely examined how much money had been spent over these past two fiscal years.

What amounts were spent over the past two years as part of the action plan?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. D'Amours, I don't have those numbers with me. I did ask to be informed by the people who were working with me. I learned that, at the outset of the program, \$751 million had been allocated over five years and that \$810 million had been invested in total. I do not have the exact figures for the last two years.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Lord, you are referring to a projected figure; that was the amount in the overall envelope. That does not necessarily mean that the money was spent or invested. Your analysis was based on the money that was spent and invested over the past few years. You said that you might have those figures. Our analyst is unable to come up with the budgeted amounts, but he has identified the sums invested in communities under the Action Plan for Official Languages.

We do not have to start with the first year of the action plan. We can take years four and five, and extrapolate from there. If that is where you looked to establish the \$1 billion amount, how can you figure out those amounts when you cannot even determine what was spent or invested during the last two years? Do not talk to me about budgets. I want to know how much money was spent and how you came up with your \$1 billion.

Finally, if the analysis was so wide-ranging, why were you unable to find \$2.5 million for the Court Challenges Program?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. D'Amours, your questions are completely unrelated. Those are two totally different questions.

As I told you, with regard to the information that I received, my report was tabled before the end of the fiscal year. You will have to wait for the Auditor General's report to know exactly how much

money was invested this past year. I take it that Parliament has a Public Accounts Committee. That should give you the opportunity to find out exactly where the money was spent.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: The year preceding this one...

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. D'Amours, you asked me two questions. Please allow me to respond.

I used the information that was given to me. Can I determine precisely how much money was spent this year before all the numbers are in? You will agree with me that the answer is no because the fiscal year had not yet ended. I therefore relied on the information at my disposal, i.e., the projections of what had been invested and spent, to use your terms, over a five-year period.

• (1005)

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours, you have 30 seconds remaining.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. D'Amours, you asked me two questions.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I will come back to the Court Challenges Program later.

We have the figures for fiscal year 2006-2007. How much was invested through the Action Plan for Official Languages? You say that the figures were not established because your report had not been completed, and so on and so forth. But as for fiscal 2006-2007, the year ending March 31, 2007, what is the amount invested as part of the Action Plan for official Languages?

The Chair: Mr. Lord, I would ask you to be brief.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Yes.

Mr. D'Amours, what I said was that my report was completed before the end of this fiscal year. I do not have with me the figures for 2006-2007.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I forgot to indicate that we are on the third round of questions. Mr. D'Amours was the only member on my list. If others wish to speak, please let me know.

I will give the floor to Mr. Nadeau from the Bloc Québécois.

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

Mr. Lord, your mandate was to meet with the communities, but we know that you also met with the language industry, which is a sector that is separate from the communities targeted by the action plan.

Was the meeting with the language industry held on your own initiative or was it suggested to you based on a list of groups that could be heard from?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I met with the language industry on a number of occasions, given that some of their representatives sit on various consultation committees. The department prepared the list of groups and sent out invitations. Subsequently, some individuals and groups contacted me directly and asked to be heard. I agreed to their requests. Language industry representatives, among others, asked to meet me and I accepted. I decided to meet with certain individuals or groups, whether it was during the meetings that I had to chair or at another time.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I know that some of those people, at least those in the group that you met, are from the area, from the Quebec side of the Ottawa river. At that time, was there any particular reason why you decided not to meet with federal government officials or not to include the public service in your list of people to consult on the issue of official languages?

Mr. Bernard Lord: As I indicated, the list of participants at the consultation meetings held from Vancouver to Halifax was prepared by the department. My mandate was to chair and moderate those meetings and to produce a report, which I did. I received a number of requests for meetings, some of which I accepted. I accepted some and turned others down. I do not recall if the union or public service groups asked to meet with me.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Your report—and I say this with all due respect for your qualifications to carry out such a mandate—adds nothing new to the three reports that we have published since our tour in the fall of 2006. Earlier, in response to my Liberal and NDP colleagues, you mentioned that there was some overlap. In fact, it is a duplication of work. The only thing new is the issue of funding.

At the time when I worked for the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne française, a study by Roger Bernard indicated that it would take several billions of dollars to achieve equality between French and English in Canada, that is, if we wanted to come back to the time when assimilation had less of a negative impact or had not yet become this appalling process by which many French-speakers have lost their language and culture.

In your report, you proposed a \$1 billion amount. I read that \$802 million, or \$810 million, had been invested over the past five years. You suggest the \$1 billion dollar figure. How will that money be spent, and based on what criteria? How are the funds to be channelled? You say that that is a bare minimum. Perhaps the sky is the limit, but how did you come to that number? You have lived in the Francophonie, in Acadia, where every day... I was born in Ontario and I lived many years in Saskatchewan. I was also an activist in the Franco-Saskatchewanian community. There is so much work to be done.

Why put forward the \$1 billion dollar amount? Why not more? How did you settle on that amount?

• (1010)

Mr. Bernard Lord: As I indicated earlier, when I prepared the report on the consultations and the elements gathered from the questions that we asked—significant elements, in my mind, including education, the arts, culture and health—I assessed the investments that had been made, the expenditures that the government had made and planned for as part of the five-year action plan for official languages. I believed that the report had to put forward a minimum amount. In other forums and interviews, I also said that in addition to the billion dollars there would also need to be... If the government chooses to invest \$1 billion over five years, it will still have to establish priorities and make choices. In any case, that is the role of government leaders. That is their responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

[English]

We'll now turn to the government, with Michael Chong.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, Mr. Lord, for your testimony.

You indicated in your report that the education system is crucial and the previous government indicated the same thing in 2003 when they created the Action Plan for Official Languages.

[English]

The previous government indicated the same thing in 2003 when they created the action plan on official languages: that the education system was critical in it. At the time, they set a ten-year goal of doubling the number of bilingual graduates, bilingual students in Canada. At the time, in 2003, approximately one-quarter or 25% of all students were functionally bilingual. They set a goal of doubling the number of students to about 50% by 2013.

As the first action plan on official languages provided investments to meet these targets, how effective was it in getting to that goal by 2013?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you very much for the question.

The data we saw in the last census seems to indicate that the government—and the country, frankly—is not close to that target. The support for learning languages is important. There's a partnership that is essential with provincial governments, because education is, as you know, primarily a provincial responsibility. As well, the partnership must extend to parents.

What I heard across the country is that in many situations you have parents who will wait in line, sometimes for days, to make sure that their children or their child, son or daughter, can enrol in an immersion program. What we see across the country is that there are a lot of parents who understand that languages are great tools for the development of their children.

Setting goals is noble, but the goals must be realistic as well. I could say today that I want to play golf like Tiger Woods in five years, but I don't think it's going to happen. I wish it would, but it's not going to happen. So just setting goals by itself is not enough. They need to be realistic goals.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

If we were at 25% or 24% in 2003, do you have any idea where we are today?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I don't have the exact number with me, but I know it came up in the consultations, and we're not close to 50% or 70%.

I must say, Mr. Chong, that when I was premier of New Brunswick, we had set a goal of 70% in the province of New Brunswick, and the province of New Brunswick is not yet reaching that goal either. I actually think it will be more difficult now than it was before, because the Government of New Brunswick has decided to eliminate the early immersion program. I think it will go contrary to that objective.

What we see is that parents want to make sure that their children learn, of course, the first language properly, but also more and more parents realize the benefits of learning a second language. And I think more and more parents realize that a third or fourth language, in this world in the 21st century, is an asset for the child; it's an asset for us all.

• (1015)

Hon. Michael Chong: Could you tell us how the recommendations in your report will help us increase the number of bilingual graduates?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Recommendation 1 precisely deals with education of the first language, but as well the education of the other official language. I think it's important to ensure that we have programs that work in collaboration with provinces, with school districts, to support learning of the other official language and languages overall.

Canada is great with two official languages, but with the wealth of knowledge that we have coming from immigrants who come from around the world, the opportunities we have for more Canadians to learn even more languages is an opportunity that I think we need to seize as a country. That will help us, as I say, for the individuals who speak more than one or two or three languages, but as well for the country to have individuals who speak more than one, two, or three languages.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong, for raising the important issue of education. You convinced the whole committee that it's an important issue for linguistic duality.

[Translation]

We will now turn to Mr. Godin who has five minutes for questions and comments.

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

You said a little earlier that you had decided to modify your contract. Did you decide by yourself to meet with other people and amend the contract, the contract for which you have not been paid? You are not asking for any money, that is your problem not mine. Did you decide that?

Mr. Bernard Lord: A contract may only be modified when both parties are in agreement.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So the minister agreed to your contract being modified.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You indicated that you met with people from the language industry. Who informed you that those individuals wanted to meet you?

Mr. Bernard Lord: They wrote to me.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We met with representatives from the Public Service School of Canada who wanted to meet with you, and you refused. Did you not think that it was important?

Mr. Bernard Lord: As I said earlier, Mr. Godin, I did not accept every invitation extended to me.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Did the minister decide who you would meet?

Mr. Bernard Lord: No, I decided that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So, you decided not to meet with the people from the Public Service School of Canada. It wasn't important enough.

Mr. Bernard Lord: I decided to meet with some of them. It was my choice, as I said earlier. I did decide, in certain cases, to not meet with some individuals.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why did you think it unimportant to meet with representatives from the Public Service School of Canada?

Mr. Bernard Lord: I did not say that it was not important, Mr. Godin. I decided to meet with certain groups because I wanted to meet with them. I decided not to meet with other groups because I believed that some fit in better with the consultation process I was heading up, while others did not fit in as well.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you disappointed by the current government, which was elected on January 23, 2006, and which saw the former action plan and received the Standing Committee on Official Languages reports? There was nothing in the March budget, unless money is going to come later.

Under your terms of reference, were you not supposed to conclude your hearings early so as to give the minister a chance? You should be able to give us some figures. You said earlier that the community was very happy with your tour. Do you really think that they are very happy that the government has not made a decision?

Mr. Bernard Lord: You are asking me the question. As far as I am concerned, I am very happy with the current government.

• (1020)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I do not doubt it.

Mr. Bernard Lord: And I am happy to be able to say that because the government keeps its promises and takes its commitments seriously. It undertook, in the Speech from the Throne, to conduct additional consultations, and that is what it has done.

Mr. Flaherty's budget indicates that there will be further initiatives. It is up to the ministers to provide these details. It is not my job to do so. I am here today as an individual, Mr. Godin. I am not representing the government.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This government abolished the Court Challenges Program. Everywhere we went in Canada, from Newfoundland to Vancouver, people spoke of this. One of the most important things you said, Mr. Lord, is that if these people want to go to court, it's up to them to do so. This is a government that went to defend itself in a Fredericton court against minority communities and which indicated that if it won, it wanted those communities to pay for the cost of the trial. Could Ms. Paulin from Tracadie-Sheila have gone to court without the Court Challenges Program and won her case against the RCMP in New Brunswick?

Do you think that this is a good government when it took away from these minorities the main tool they had to get the law enforced? Moreover, the Department of Justice attorney even said that it wasn't up to the court to decide if the government had broken the law, and that the onus was on voters to overturn the government if they weren't happy with what it was doing. Do you agree with everything your government, a government that you like, said to the minority community?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, your statement is so full of things that aren't completely accurate or that are incomplete...

Mr. Yvon Godin: What I said was accurate.

Mr. Bernard Lord: ...that it would take me a long time to give you an answer.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What I said was accurate, and you know it.

Mr. Bernard Lord: That is absolutely not the case. I don't know that what you're saying is accurate. On the contrary, I know that many of your remarks are inaccurate or incomplete.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Which ones?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, let the witness speak, please.

Mr. Yvon Godin: He's saying that some of my remarks are inaccurate, so I'd like to know which ones.

The Chair: That's why you need to let the witness speak, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Bernard Lord: You've made so many remarks!

Mr. Yvon Godin: [*Editor's Note: Inaudible*] 10 minutes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

In your preamble, you said a whole lot of things. If you want to talk about the situation with the RCMP in New Brunswick, I'd be pleased to do so. Under the Official Languages Act that the government I was premier of passed, it is quite clear that the New Brunswick police services must be offered across the board in both official languages, without exception. Even the municipalities which don't have to provide services in both official languages are nevertheless obligated to provide police services in both official languages. That came as a result of the new 2002 Official Languages Act. Now, the RCMP case is another story altogether. Nowadays, people who want to access the courts can do so with our without the Court Challenges Program.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but they don't have the money to do so. Would you agree?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your time has...

Mr. Bernard Lord: There are people that do have the money...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Who?

Mr. Bernard Lord: Many communities do have the money or they get their hands on it. Mr. Godin, I've already said in the past that the Court Challenges Program was helpful to some people, but that the cases funded under the program were not won. It's normal, just as it is normal in many court cases, for one party to ask that its legal costs be paid by the other party.

I don't want to give any legal opinion today, because that's not my role, but I do believe that under the current act one can disregard the costs. The court can even order the government to pay the other party's costs. In such circumstances, it is up to the court to decide.

The Chair: Thank you to our witness, Mr. Lord, and to Mr. Godin.

We're now up to our fourth and final round of questions. Mr. Murphy, of the official opposition, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Lord, thank you for coming here to testify. I used to be a regular member of this committee, but today I am just here as a tourist. I am happy to hear that you maintain close ties with the city in which you were born. I need to promote that for your future. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome you to your new home in Moncton. I hope you will remain there a long time, as a citizen, lawyer and businessman.

On a more serious note, when we were both politicians in New Brunswick, you represented us as a diplomat, as leader of the party for the province, during Francophonie week in 1999. I was there too. You were the champion of language rights for our province, something that I deeply appreciated. I have no reservations about the position you have taken with respect to official languages in New Brunswick over the past nine years. I congratulate you on it.

However, I am somewhat concerned to see that your report says nothing about the elimination of the Court Challenges Program. In March, Luc Desjardins wrote in *Acadie Nouvelle*:

The report says nothing about the principal demand made by minority language communities—the Court Challenges Program, which has been abolished. Bernard Lord heard the complaints about that at all meetings in every part of the country, and promised to make recommendations on the issue.

I know that journalists do occasionally make mistakes, but I would like to know if you really did hear complaints about the CCP's elimination at all meetings, and if you did indeed promise to make recommendations on this issue.

• (1025)

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you, Mr. Murphy. It is a pleasure to see you here. We have worked well on a number of issues together, and I'm eager to go back to the city of my birth, which is in your riding. The building of our house will be starting very soon, and it will be a pleasure to move in and get to work.

As I said earlier, during the main hearings—here, I will not be talking about the additional hearings that I held on a case-by-case basis—the issue of the Court Challenges Program or a similar mechanism was indeed raised at each hearing. I have already said so.

Mr. Desjardins mentions promises, but I made no promises. What I did do is make a commitment to fulfil my terms of reference. I said that I would be making recommendations. When I realized that a case pertaining to this issue in particular was before the courts—and the government's position on it is clear—I decided to mention it on page 20 of the French version of the report. This is probably equivalent to page 19 in the English version. I chose to make no recommendations on the issue.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I understand. Your report contains a number of reassuring statements. In the English version, you state, and I quote:

[*English*]

Some participants suggested that a program be put in place to address the need for conflict mediation and resolution with regard to language rights with a component providing for the defence and promotion of language rights before the courts under exceptional circumstances.

You put it in your suggested solutions. Does it mean, Mr. Lord, that you see, as I think some of the members of the government do, that there might be a *tranche*, a slice, that promotes mediation of disputes and that is short of the restoration of the court challenges program? Do you envisage that?

Mr. Bernard Lord: In fact there was a recommendation that was made when we were in Moncton, when we had one of the consultation sessions in Moncton, where one of the participants—who I will not name, but I know exactly who it was—suggested something very similar to what is here. I felt it was a good idea, and that's why I wanted it to be in the report, because I also wanted to reflect the fact that across the country people mentioned the need to have a program, whether it was the same program or a similar program, but it was a different approach that was being suggested, an approach that I'd heard in other places as well and that could be a way to deal with conflicts without always going to court. Going to court may not be the first step but there may be other steps to take.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

We now turn to the parliamentary secretary, Mr. Pierre Lemieux.

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

Mr. Lord, welcome to the committee. I would like to congratulate you for your excellent work during the hearings. I have listened carefully to my colleagues and I would like to make some comments on their statements.

First of all, I would like to point out that it is quite normal for the government to receive draft reports. When the Official Languages Commissioner prepares the report, he sends a copy of it to the government. The Auditor General does the same. There is nothing odd in that—it is normal procedure.

Mr. Nadeau and Mr. Godin asked you a number of questions on the usefulness of your report. In my opinion, if there are similarities between your report and the committee's, that is a good thing. It means that our work is moving in the right direction. Moreover, the report states that organizations in our minority language communities are professional and well organized, because they focus on the same messages. That is also a good thing. Basically, the government is receiving the same message. That means the messages are converging, something we consider a good thing. There is nothing odd in that.

As for your report, I would like you to talk to us about immigration, which is a very important issue, particularly in minority official language communities. I would like you to tell us what you prefer during your hearings, and what specific recommendations the communities made to you. I would also like to know what you recommend to improve the situation.

• (1030)

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lemieux. If I may, I will comment briefly on your preamble.

I do not want to make assumptions as to what some committee members might have said, but if my report—my take on things—had been completely opposite to your report, they would have asked me

why. Had there been no hearings, I believe some would have asked why the government had not held any. That is how things are. Debate is useful. We are fortunate to be living in a country like Canada, where we have rights, liberties, and a strong democratic system in which people can ask questions. I am very happy to be a participant in the process. I believe that is why so many people want to immigrate to Canada.

The issue of immigration was raised a number of times during our discussions, and it became fairly clear there were two sides to the issue. There was the immigration dimension, but a migration dimension as well. Migration is when Canadians move from one region of Canada to another. When we talked about francophone migration and immigration, it became fairly clear that people wanted communities in which immigrants will feel comfortable and be well received. We also wanted them to be informed, aware and cognizant of the choices they would have, for example the choice of sending their children to a francophone or to an anglophone school. In many communities, I was told that many immigrants came to Canada and settled here, but only learned six months or one year or eighteen months after they came that there were many choices they could have made when they first arrived. Perhaps if they had known about the choices available, they would have made different decisions when they arrived. So many communities made it clear was important to ensure that immigrants are well informed of the opportunities and choices available to them.

The issue of promoting francophone immigration, even in minority language regions, was also mentioned. For example, people talked about Manitoba's immigration program. If I remember the figures correctly, Manitoba's goal is for 7% of immigrants to be francophones, even if Manitoba's French-speaking population is below 5%. Manitoba was cited as an example, as a good immigration model.

Then there is the issue of welcoming immigrants, and of ensuring they have the information they need, the information that makes it possible for them to choose to live in the language of their choice.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux. You had only five seconds left.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

Mr. Lord, I was there when your contract was announced by Minister Verner in June, during the Francophonie Summit at the University of Ottawa. I would like to remind you that on the very next day, many organizations—this is something you can verify with the witnesses we heard here—did not believe their ears because they said there had just been a round of consultations and they had said everything they had to say. What is the government trying to do? It is trying to clear its conscience by trying to gain time and avoid having to present a second version of the plan. When we now see the results of your labours, and I said it very frankly earlier, we see nothing that could undermine the first report tabled. The report tabled after the autumn 2006 tour among the communities was much more comprehensive. In fact, if we compare that report to yours, calling it comprehensive does not even cover it. I would like you to be aware of this, because it is a very important factor.

Communities are waiting for answers. They do not want the government to lose or buy time. In March, the budget had nothing for them, despite the promises the federal government had made them. This is a completely useless exercise that demonstrates the Conservative ideology, and shows how little respect they have for the French language, for minorities outside Quebec, and for the people of Quebec.

That said, with regard to immigration and migration among communities in primarily anglophone provinces, the figures show that francophones outside Quebec tend to be assimilated. They are assimilated by the dominant English-language culture around them. In very little time, they end up speaking English, the common language, even in the home, with their children. In too many communities, we are seeing a repeated lack of respect towards francophones minorities. Unfortunately, that is what makes up the fabric of Canada's history. We send people to other regions and tell them that they will be able to live in French there, while the social fabric is simply no longer there. Assimilation is a fact.

You live in New Brunswick, and know that in some regions, even in your own province, assimilation happens. So how can you tell us today that one can immigrate to Canada and settle in regions where French is the minority language, and where newcomers orientation and education in French are not available? How can you tell us that immersion can replace French as a mother tongue, and that it is a way of promoting French language and culture? The government would do better to give the funding to existing communities, and to inject large amounts to ensure that their institutions survive and that their young people can stay in the region, so that they can genuinely flourish.

• (1035)

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

That was a long preamble. I disagree with a number of the statements you made, but I do respect your views. I also do not share your vision of Canada but that is not an issue. One of the strengths of this country is that it brings together people whose visions and perceptions differ.

That said, you have levelled some charges against Conservatives that I cannot accept at all, because they are wrong. Conservatives have passed very good measures for official languages in all parts of the country. In New Brunswick, the new Official Languages Act was passed by a Conservative government. Here in Ottawa, it is the Conservative government that enshrined Bill 88 on the protection of linguistic duality in New Brunswick. It is a Conservative government that in its throne speech included a clear and specific commitment to do more for official languages. I have confidence in the work that will be done in the wake of the report I have submitted, in the wake of your work, and in the wake of efforts made by communities and individuals. Minister Verner will unveil the second phase of the action plan, which will be very positive for minority official language communities across Canada.

This does not mean the government will be able to put an end to all the challenges communities have to face. There are indeed challenges. You talked about assimilation. I am well aware that assimilation exists in Canada, and I make no claim that the government can solve all the problems. But I do not agree that there

should be no francophone immigration to Manitoba, for instance. Even the Manitoban government, which is neither Conservative nor Liberal but NDP, has established a goal and is working towards it. So far, we have to recognize that the Government of Manitoba has achieved its immigration objectives, and I hope we can help it continue on that path.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Godin, to complete the fourth round.

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

As part of your terms of reference, the minister said that the government wanted to tour Canada. The official languages committee includes members of all political parties. The government felt it was incumbent on it to travel around the country. You were selected as a special consultant to hold those hearings around the country.

In fact, were you charged with reporting to the department on comments made by the communities?

• (1040)

Mr. Bernard Lord: As you said, my task was to chair consultation sessions which had been scheduled, and to report the comments made by participants. I was also charged with looking at some specific issues like demographics, modernization of the state, and the new economy of the 21st century. There was an open discussion session.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Knowing the government's position on the Court Challenges Program, and given that you had to report to the minister, could you not have said—without making recommendations—that every community you visited spoke to you about the program? Would that not have been the right thing to do?

I agree with Mr. Lemieux. You said what we had already said. He simply forgot to add that you did not directly mention the Court Challenges Program.

Mr. Bernard Lord: I explained this earlier. I did mention having heard comments on the Court Challenges Program elsewhere, and the minister knows it. When the minister sat beside me in Ottawa, we spoke of it, and I have also spoken with her on other occasions. On page 19 or 20, depending on whether you have the French or English version of the report, I indicate that this is something that emerged during the consultations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Did talking about the Court Challenges Program make you uncomfortable?

Mr. Bernard Lord: No, not at all.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It did not make you uncomfortable?

Mr. Bernard Lord: No, I am not easily made uncomfortable.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I know that you are not easily made uncomfortable. Generally, we do not tell you what to do. Here, it gives the wrong impression because we know the minister did not want to talk about the Court Challenges Program. That is one of the charges I would level against her. She talked about it in camera because she did not want the newspapers to talk about it. The main reason for abolishing the Court Challenges Program is not really one that relates to official languages. It is because the government did not like the fact the program was used to defend the rights of gays, lesbians and minorities, as well as the status of women. That may be one of the reasons behind criticisms of the minister.

Mr. Bernard Lord: You can make any assumptions you like. That was not part of my mandate. I do not feel uncomfortable, nor do you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No.

Mr. Bernard Lord: You have a very good imagination, Mr. Godin, just as I do.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Francophones in Canada have achieved some gains. I am sure you have been told that today, there are French-language schools in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia because of the Court Challenges Program. Montfort Hospital survived because it received help under the Court Challenges Program. Good cases have been won by francophone minorities before the courts, not only because of the government's goodwill.

I would charge the Liberals with being just as responsible, since they were in power longer than the Conservatives have been.

Mr. Bernard Lord: There is no doubt of that. I have already said this, and I am happy to say it again: some cases that came before the courts confirmed rights established under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and under existing provincial statutes, enabling individuals to exercise their rights.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The courts confirmed their rights, but the creation of schools is something that has to be imposed.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Those cases allowed the courts to tell some governments what to do with regard to the rights of specific groups. However, claiming that all these cases would not have been possible without the Court Challenges Program is something else altogether.

• (1045)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have never claimed that this program was the only means. I asked whether this program, in some cases, enabled people to win their case.

Mr. Bernard Lord: It can assist some people.

Mr. Yvon Godin: For example, the colleges and universities asked the government to get involved with regard to language. I think this is part of your second recommendation. It refers to culture and universities.

Is any of the \$1 billion set aside for universities in order to enable the creation of classes and hiring of professors?

Mr. Bernard Lord: There are two aspects. First, we need to support those institutions that already provide programs for minority communities. Some people told me, for example, that the anglophone universities in western Canada were providing courses or programs to francophones. There has to be some clarity here.

Some francophone institutions are concerned. If other anglophone institutions are offering programs, this could undermine the ability of francophone institutions to survive, as well as their vitality, because they would be losing some of their clientele. If the government decides to implement that recommendation, it will have to determine in which programs it will invest. Will it invest in a francophone program at the University of New Brunswick if the University of Moncton is only 180 kilometres away? Is it the same to invest in a program at the University of British Columbia or Simon Fraser University, where there are no francophone institutions close by? Those issues have to be resolved during the implementation of this recommendation.

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

We have now completed four rounds of questions.

M. Coderre and Mr. Chong would like to ask a final question. We have a few minutes left, so we will allow them to ask very brief questions. So, Mr. Coderre, Mr. Chong and Mr. Godin, please be very quick, because we have to vacate the room.

Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: In light of what my colleague and friend Mr. Lord has said, I would recommend him as a Conservative candidate. One thing is certain, contrary to what Mr. Godin has said, when the Conservatives cut the Court Challenges Program, we were prepared to restore it.

You more or less said that you agreed to hear certain witnesses, within the framework of your mandate. You said that it was the government who had organized things, and that this was okay with you. However, on the other hand, you had the flexibility of deciding who could take part in your events, and you allowed some witnesses to appear.

However, you know that bilingualism in the public service is important and in fact essential. I recently undertook a disturbing trip to the Magdalen Islands to attend the funerals of the four sealers. The mother of one of the young missing men was not able to obtain services in her language and it took many hours to deal with this because she couldn't speak English. I think that when we're talking about bilingualism throughout Canada, if Minister Verner has given you a mandate, it would be important to know what is happening within her own government.

Why did you refuse to meet with the Public Service Alliance of Canada? In fact, if it was so important to make your recommendations, why not include the issue of language in the public service?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

My view is that the Government of Canada should provide services in the language of choice of citizens. It has a constitutional and legal responsibility to do so and it must do so. There is no doubt about that. In the same way, other governments in Canada have similar obligations and even, in some cases, greater obligations than the Government of Canada. New Brunswick, for example, has greater obligations than the Government of Canada.

It was not within my mandate at the beginning to focus particularly on the training situation of federal government employees or the way they offered or provided service to the public. It is clear, and I mentioned this in several places, that providing service in the language of citizens' choice is one of the government's responsibilities, and the government needs to assume that responsibility.

As I mentioned earlier, I agreed to meet with certain individuals and groups because it seemed to me that they were more in line with the mandate I had been given. I refused to meet with others because they were not as good a fit with my mandate and because my time was limited.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chong.

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

[*English*]

Just as a point of information, I think that somebody asked before whether or not the public sector unions had been consulted. My understanding is that they weren't, but at the same time they also never requested to be consulted. They never submitted anything and they did not ask to be part of the consultations. I just want to put that on the record.

Monsieur Lord, you referred to one of the challenges I think we will be facing as a society, and that is the increasing diversity of the country. Statistics Canada last week published a study indicating that one in six Canadians now is what they term not just a minority but a visible minority. So we're going to have a challenge and work to do in reconciling this increasing diversity—what some call this galloping heterogeneity—with the country's most cherished institutions, such as bilingualism, the need to have two official languages.

I've always thought that one potential solution is for the governments to work with provinces and territories to create a system where we graduate students who are not just bilingual but trilingual. Two of the three languages would be our official languages and the third language would be one of the student's choice. This would be a way to preserve our institutions like bilingualism, the need to know both official languages, while acknowledging the country's increasing diversity. As a first-generation Canadian whose father was Chinese and whose mother was European, I can tell you from first-hand experience that we're not inventing the wheel here. In Europe most students have knowledge of three languages, if not four, and in many parts of Asia, such as Hong Kong or Singapore, most people know at least two languages, if not three.

I would like your thoughts on an idea like that.

• (1050)

Mr. Bernard Lord: Thank you.

As I said earlier to one question on something else, I don't have all the invitations of people who have asked to meet with me, and I cannot, but some I said yes to and some I said no to.

With regard to the diversity of our country, the face of Canada is changing. I think the government and citizens must understand those

changes and see what opportunities come from these changes and how this will allow our country to grow even more. People want to live in Canada because we're a country of prosperity. We're a country of rights, freedoms, the rule of law, and we have a strong democratic system. Those are the reasons we're so proud to be Canadian and so many people want to be here. I think in terms of official languages, we should limit ourselves to two, but in terms of learning languages, we should not.

Two weeks ago I was in Amsterdam on business, and the two individuals working at the hotel where I was staying—they were young, in their twenties—both spoke four languages. I didn't sense there was a crisis of their identity, of who they were and what they stood for. They knew who they were, and they were very happy to serve people in the language of their choice. And they could do it in four languages. The two combined spoke five languages. There were three languages they shared, but each had a different language. It fascinated me. In Canada we feel good when we speak two languages, but frankly it's not that many.

When I was Premier of New Brunswick we put a program in place to encourage learning a third language, and at the time we selected Spanish, because of volume. But I think we should favour and encourage teaching and learning of the two official languages across the country, and other languages as well. I think the native population in our country needs support in preserving their languages as well.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I would just like to mention that the committee will also be looking at the issue of young people and post-secondary education this spring. It is part of our work plan.

Mr. Godin, please.

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

You say that it is important to learn a third and fourth language; there are countries where people learn four languages. Would it not be important for people in our country, after 400 years—more than 400 years, since we Acadians celebrated that anniversary four years ago and are ahead of everyone else—to be able to master both official languages? Governments have failed, and I can tell you that where they have failed is in education. There are groups like Canadian Parents for French who say that not enough money is going into immersion programs. We see what is happening in New Brunswick, and it is scandalous. Anglophone parents in New Brunswick want their children to learn French, but they are being prevented from doing so. I never thought that a government might one day prevent children from learning French. It is unfortunate, and I hope that Shawn Graham can hear me this morning.

Do you not agree that before becoming fluent in three or four languages, we really need to master our two official languages? That is where we need to put our efforts.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Bernard Lord: Mr. Godin, I was not sure that we were going to find something that we could agree on this morning, but we can at least agree on this: it is deplorable that the Government of New Brunswick is taking away parents' choice to be able to put their children in French immersion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This is provincial jurisdiction. I did not want to get you too mixed up in that.

Mr. Bernard Lord: No. However, we at least agree on one thing.

We need to help young children learn Canada's two official languages, and that is part of my report. It is important. What I also say is that we need to help our children learn other languages as well.

●(1055)

The Chair: Mr. Lord, I would like to thank you, on behalf of the members of the committee, for your frank and direct answers. I also want to thank committee members for their questions. We will be eagerly following the next steps in the action plan.

Our next meeting is scheduled for Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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