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Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0910)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning to everyone and welcome to this 37th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Today, we will be interrupting our study on the Collaboration Accords to welcome the Commissioner of Official Languages and deal with two topics of interest, of course. First, there is the report on official languages and, at the request of the committee members, the Olympic Games.

This morning, we will be dividing our meeting into two sessions. Mr. Fraser, in his presentation, will be dealing with two topics. We will thus hear Mr. Fraser's presentation as the first topic, followed by a round of questions, and then we will go on to the second topic.

Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): I am not against dealing with these two topics, but rather than dividing the meeting into two sessions, given that Mr. Fraser is here, he could present his testimony on both topics. Afterwards, in any case, we will have a round of questions. Instead of devoting one hour to each topic, we could hold a single two-hour meeting and each of us can choose which topic we want to discuss, or discuss them both.

In any case, if we prefer to talk more about the Olympic Games or if we have questions on both topics, there is no problem. I just want to understand why we would schedule one hour to discuss one topic and the other hour to discuss the other topic. If we want to save time, Mr. Fraser could present his testimony on both topics. Then, we can ask questions. I'm sure that there will be many excellent questions to ask on both topics.

The Chair: Are there other comments? In any case, we have time.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): You prepared the agenda, and you divided the meeting into two sessions. You allocated one hour to one topic and one hour to the other topic.

In my opinion, I think that is the way to proceed, because it gives us the opportunity, when writing our reports, to target each subject individually, because these are two separate topics.

If we study the two topics together, how will we sort them out afterwards, if we have a report to write on the Olympic Games, for example? Whereas if we proceed this way, by devoting one hour to the Olympic Games, we will really be able to focus on that, and then we will concentrate on the other topic.

The Chair: Okay. So without further ado, we will get started. I do think that we can follow the agenda. The committee members are free, when asking their questions, to address the topics they wish.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): I accept the decision, but I am very surprised to hear from Mr. Godin, who generally says, like the other committee members, that the committee is free to decide as it wishes. So I accept the decision, but I have a great deal of difficulty accepting his argument.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I would like to say that I support Mr. Godin's argument. It is well organized in its current form. Both of these topics are important and we must leave enough time for each of them.

The Chair: Okay. In any case, both topics will be discussed on an equal footing.

So Mr. Fraser, I see in your presentation that you address the report on official languages first and then the Olympic Games. You can start with whichever one you wish, according to the will of the members of the committee.

Mr. Graham Fraser (Commissioner of Official Languages, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Mr. Chair, I will do as you wish. I can begin with the Olympic Games, if you prefer, or with the annual report. It is up to the committee. I am at your disposal. It is very easy to divide up my presentation.

The Chair: Well, we have the Olympic Games on the agenda. If you don't mind, perhaps we could start with that topic. I see that your presentation on the Olympics is slightly shorter, Mr. Fraser. Your text deals more with the report.

If the committee members agree, I suggest that we spend the first hour discussing the report. Then, at 10 o'clock, we will go on to the Olympic Games. Do you agree? Yes.

Welcome, then, to all committee members.

I will complete the introduction of our guests. We are welcoming Mr. Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages; Ms. Scott, Director General; Mr. Dusseault, Assistant Commissioner; and Ms. Tremblay, General Counsel and Director of Legal Services, who is also familiar with our committee.

Thanks to you all.

Let us begin.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of Parliament, and of the Standing Committee on Official Languages,

[English]

I would like to start by thanking you for inviting me to present my annual report, and to comment on the preparations for the 2010 Olympic Games, which I will do later.

When I tabled my first annual report last year, I drew attention to the fact that the government's actions did not reflect its words. I asked the government to show strong political leadership and take concrete measures to reinforce the progress that had been made.

In my evaluation this year, I've made a number of observations on the government's position on official languages. I've continued my reflection on leadership and official languages, and I reaffirm that to be a leader in the public service it's necessary to be able to inform, evaluate, explain, give advice, and inspire in both English and French.

● (0915)

[Translation]

This definition of leadership must encompass all federal institutions, including the Supreme Court. It seems clear to me that Canadians have the right to be heard and judged in the official language of their choice. As I recently stated before this committee, judges in Canada's highest court should understand both versions of the laws, arguments made in court and all discussions with their colleagues regardless of which official language is used.

The government reiterated its support for Canada's linguistic duality in its October 2007 Throne Speech. Yet, it did not set aside any funding for this area in the February 26 budget.

The tentativeness and the lack of leadership are now evident. Despite the government's many statements in support of Canada's linguistic duality, there is no global vision in terms of government policies and the public service. This lack of leadership has resulted in a plateau being reached and, in some cases, a deterioration in the application of the official languages policy.

I have noted, yet again this year, that very little progress has been made in several areas of activity, and the situation has even worsened in some institutions. The initiative that will replace the Action Plan for Official Languages is an example of a commitment that is slow in being honoured and an example of tentative and uncertain leadership. And yet, the deadline of March 31, 2008, is set out in the action plan.

Nevertheless, the government has not had the foresight to create a new initiative or a replacement initiative before this deadline, and Canadians are still waiting for new developments. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages has had the report on the latest consultations undertaken on this subject for several months, but has still not announced any concrete measures.

[English]

In fact, it almost feels like a Samuel Beckett play, which could be called "Waiting for the Action Plan". I sincerely hope I'll not have to spend another year watching a drama in suspended animation, as the government bides its time. However, I'd also like to add that I was

very happy to hear Minister Verner say in the House that the new plan will be made public, and I quote, "very soon". The government must establish a clear direction and implement initiatives that will lead to concrete results. Some of the partners involved are concerned, since they do not know what the objectives of the future initiative will be or how much funding will be granted.

Over the past year I've closely examined official languages coordination. A clear, strong, and ongoing commitment from the Prime Minister remains an essential condition for good governance. I therefore make seven recommendations in my annual report to encourage the government to show stronger leadership. In particular, I recommend that the Prime Minister create an ad hoc committee of ministers to oversee the full implementation of the new action plan and language requirements in federal institutions. Similarly, I recommend that cabinet review official languages matters at least once a year.

In order to translate political commitment into action at the administrative level, I recommend that the Official Languages Secretariat be given the authority it needs to fulfill a horizontal coordination role in order to implement the Official Languages Act in its entirety. The goal of these recommendations is tangible results for Canadians. We need a better coordinated effort to effectively resolve the language-of-work problems that have plagued the federal government for 40 years.

I recommend that by December 31, 2008, deputy heads of all federal institutions report on the actions they've taken to create a work environment that makes it possible for employees in regions designated by the act to use the official language of their choice. These regions are New Brunswick, the national capital region, and several parts of Quebec and Ontario. Linguistic duality is a fundamental component of Canada's public service.

In an environment where anglophones and francophones work side by side, bilingualism is an essential part of leadership in a modern and efficient public service that reflects our country's values. However, over the years, the number of positions designated bilingual has not changed. These positions include mainly those that involve providing service to the public and, in some cases, supervisory positions. Public service renewal must make it possible to better anchor Canada's linguistic duality at the heart of the values and priorities of federal institutions.

As 15,000 people are expected to join the public service every year, Canada's linguistic duality must be a consideration in the recruitment, training, and upgrading of skills. Successful implementation of policies on communications with and service to the public, language of work, and human resources management hinges on employees having access to high-quality language training from the beginning of their careers in the federal government. We must stop the practice of sending an employee on language training only after they've been appointed to a supervisory position.

I call on the government to show greater coherence and put its good intentions into practice. In short, I ask the government to show leadership instead of simply managing the file. Through stronger leadership, the government will also have an influence on the changes that may affect Canada's linguistic duality. Studies published over the last few months by Statistics Canada describe how vibrant the official language communities are, but also describe the many challenges that must be met in a changing social context.

I want to underscore that some federal institutions are providing significant support for linguistic duality and are making a concerted effort to ensure that both official languages can be used in the workplace, provide services in both languages, and implement positive measures to enhance the vitality of official language minority communities. Their work deserves to be recognized. I give several examples in my annual report, and I invite all deputy heads to draw inspiration from them.

Federal institutions obtain better and longer-lasting results for Canadians when the government, senior management, and public servants show strong leadership by recognizing the rights and values related to official languages and linguistic duality and by ensuring those rights and values are respected.

The 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, which will be celebrated in 2009, seems to me to be an ideal time to turn this vision into action.

• (0920)

[Translation]

I'm going to close here, Mr. Chair, and continue my presentation on the Olympic Games later.

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

We will now begin our first round of questions with a member from the official opposition, Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Commissioner. I would like you to know how proud I am of your report. I understand that people want to divide today's meeting into two sessions and schedule one hour for the Olympic Games and one hour for your report. Given how the government is behaving with regard to official languages, I can see why they want to talk about something else. But I will have other things to say in any case.

I just want you to know, Mr. Fraser, that I am very happy...

The Chair: Wait a minute, Mr. Coderre, Mr. Lemieux has a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I have a point of order. I just want to correct Mr. Coderre.

As a committee, we determine what our agenda is and we determine what our subject matter is. The government had no more influence over the setting of the *ordre du jour* than did the opposition.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your argument is in order, Mr. Lemieux, and it has been sustained. Thank you.

Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, this report could have been entitled: "The number you have dialed is not in service". We have a minister who dodges the media when they try to ask her questions. She is responsible for official languages in Canada, but refuses to say whether justices of the Supreme Court, Canada's highest court, should be bilingual. The Supreme Court is supposed to represent our legal system, as you say, but it should also represent Canada's intrinsic values. That response is pathetic and deplorable. It is true that there is no vision. There are enough horror stories to build a museum here.

Given the conduct we see within the public service and the lack of leadership shown by the government, could you tell us, in addition to your report, whether the fact of bringing the Official Languages Secretariat into the Privy Council rather than leaving it under Canadian Heritage is a means of ensuring that bilingualism will have greater respect within the public service?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, the Standing Committee on Official Languages in the other place asked us to examine this issue closely, as you have done here in the House. They have commissioned a study on the impact of horizontality on the decision to transfer the secretariat. After an open competition, the contract was awarded to Professor Donald Savoie, who will be conducting the study. The study, which is to be quite detailed, will be published late in June, but we have made use of it to write the chapter on this issue. Our recommendations to strengthen the secretariat and ask the Prime Minister to establish a committee of ministers to strengthen the ties between the centre and the secretariat were based on the observation and remarks in that report. The secretariat is responsible for coordinating official languages within the public service.

We made no recommendations bearing solely on bringing the secretariat back under the aegis of the Privy Council, but we noted that some elements could be strengthened for it to function more effectively.

• (0925)

Hon. Denis Coderre: That could at least stop the problem from getting any worse. We can never solve the bilingualism problem within government, but the fact that the issue is being reconsidered will make it possible to be more effective and to protect that value.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, indeed. What is important—and this is one of the guidelines in the report—is leadership. We have therefore asked the Prime Minister to establish a special ministers' committee and to strengthen the administration of mechanisms through which the issue is coordinated, so that the committee can report to cabinet each year. While recognizing the trend towards more horizontal management within the public service, you can still provide for stronger links among the centre, the secretariat, and the management of official languages.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Our problem is a lack of vision. They will show us a lot of figures, saying they have put in more money and are extremely fond of both communities. However, the reality is quite different. I agree with you—there is neither vision nor leadership. That is the difference between being an executive, and being the arm that executes. If you are an executive and you genuinely show leadership, you set the tone. At present, what we seem to see is that the government is simply trying to stop things from getting any worse.

Have you also considered how the government could award contracts and take established criteria into account? For example, if Public Works were to request to deal with trade shows as project manager, is there any risk that bilingualism criteria could be eliminated? Do you have a sense that the government would like to extend the privatization of government contracts so that the official languages issue would perhaps no longer be a priority?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't think we studied that issue closely. However, the commissioner has been expressing some concern about contractors for a long time now. I remember a study on restaurants, where the operators leased the premises. There's also the issue of decentralizing some responsibilities, and that is an issue we raise in our study on changes within the federation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

We will continue with Mr. Gravel.

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

Mr. Fraser, thank you for being here.

I read this yesterday evening. It's very interesting, but there is something that bothers me. I have not been on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for very long. The policy applies to Canada as a whole, and that is how it should be, but Quebec's particular situation is not taken into account. For example, on the issue of English schools in Quebec, on page 19, the survey shows that only 49% of students who have at least one anglophone parent attend an English-language minority school. That percentage increases to 70% when both parents are anglophone. This is something the English school boards are very worried about.

I'm wondering whether English is genuinely threatened in Quebec.

• (0930)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have to make a distinction between the status of English, and the vulnerability of anglophone communities. We can suppose that the situation in Montreal, which has 600,000 anglophone residents, is quite stable. In fact, for the very first time, censuses are showing that the situation is stable. However, anglophone communities in Quebec City, Sherbrooke, Granby or other parts of Quebec outside the Island of Montreal are facing the same problems of vulnerability, access to services and access to institutions—their schools are threatened with closure—that francophone communities face in the rest of Canada.

I have always believed that it's not fair to compare the francophone community in Sudbury and the anglophone community in Montreal. A comparison between the anglophone community in

Quebec City and the francophone community in St. Boniface or Sudbury would be much more realistic and fair.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: If we applied the bilingualism policy in Quebec as it is applied in Ontario and elsewhere, isn't there a risk that French would lose ground in Quebec? Sometimes, in Montreal, I am unable to get service in French. It's unbelievable. If the opposite were to happen in Toronto, if an anglophone could not get service in English, people would be appalled. But that is what happens to us regularly in Quebec.

Mr. Graham Fraser: It depends on the place, and you have to make those distinctions. I don't think we can really draw a link between the strength or vulnerability of anglophone institutions and the issue of whether or not we can get service in French. That is an observation the late Gérard Godin made when he chaired a parliamentary committee at the National Assembly on the very first amendments made to Bill 101, 25 years ago. He noted that the threat to French did not come from the anglophone minority but from English as a global language. At the time, no one was talking about globalization, but rather about americanization. That made a great impression on me at the time. He made a distinction between the status of the anglophone community in Quebec and the status of English on the continent. I believe that this distinction should always be maintained.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: In your report, you say that the situation of francophone minorities in other provinces is declining in many ways. If we don't do anything, will those communities inevitably disappear some day?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't think they will disappear, and I sincerely hope they don't. One of the things that struck me since I have been commissioner is how vital those communities are. Let's compare the current situation with the situation we would have seen 30 years ago. We have established French-language schools and school boards, French-speaking provincial lawyers' and law associations, as well as economic associations in communities. We can see that the action plan has yielded positive results for these communities in the area of health care, for example. In fact, health care networks have been established across Canada.

Have we achieved Utopia? No, we have not. Are there tremendous challenges ahead? Yes, there are. Do we see progress, and vitality? I am convinced we do.

• (0935)

Mr. Raymond Gravel: You also talked about the report tabled by Mr. Lord in March. You criticized it rather severely. In your view, it failed to touch on a number of important issues.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I said some positive things about his report. I was very happy to see that he stressed the importance of including arts and culture in the second action plan. He made 14 recommendations, and I challenged none of them. However, I did note that some aspects he did not mention could have been included in his recommendations. For example, he could have included early childhood support in the education component, while access to justice could have been included in the services in the minority official language component. Moreover, the public service, which Mr. Lord did not mention, could have been included in the effective governance component.

I would not say that I criticized the report severely. I did point out aspects that could have been included by the government, which took care to say that those were not the only recommendations, because there were also recommendations made by your committee.

The Chair: Indeed, they were in the excellent report produced by our committee, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with you, Mr. Chairman. In Mr. Lord's 14 recommendations, there is nothing that could not be found in our 38 recommendations, if we think back to them.

I would like to come back to Mr. Lord's mandate. He was not working with independents, but with Canadian people, or with the department itself. Thus, these are the department's recommendations, rather than Mr. Lord's. I saw nothing new in any part of his report.

I am critical of Mr. Lord's report because it contains nothing more than what we have already seen. That is why I have some difficulty understanding how you could find things to be happy about. Our 32nd recommendation was on arts and culture. In any case, you had made the same recommendation yourself.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't want to enter into a debate on the Lord report. I think that the Prime Minister has every right to receive advice from someone of Mr. Lord's experience. I said so when Mr. Lord was appointed.

I responded to Mr. Lord's recommendations. I believe that...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Aside from arts and culture, Mr. Chairman, there is nothing much there, according to what you're saying.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, in response to all recommendations for action by the government, including the Speech from the Throne, I have always been consistent—I have always said that I am waiting for results. At the time the Speech from the Throne was read, I said that a Speech from the Throne was a menu, not a meal. All reports and all recommendations to the government are in fact a sort of menu. What I'm waiting for is the meal.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I was happy with your report. You are frustrated, and you don't plan to sit and wait. But when the train goes by and it is not carrying any goods, what will you do then as commissioner? You have the power to go to court. The act is being breached, and something is going on.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I very much hope that I will not be forced to make that kind of decision. I am still waiting here. I'm somewhat frustrated to be still waiting, but as I said in my statement, I was happy to hear the minister say that the plan will soon be tabled. I have always thought that...

● (0940)

Mr. Yvon Godin: In your report it was quite clear, you set a date: December 2008.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are frustrated. You are not happy.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed, Mr. Chairman, I am not referring to the action plan in relation to December 31. It is a recommendation we made pursuant to our request that heads of agencies, deputy heads, deputy ministers report on the progress that has been made

regarding language of work. I want to be clear about the recommendations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, absolutely. I was not referring to the action plan, I was referring to your recommendations. I'm no longer talking about the action plan.

Your report states:

This vision of a central agency's role may explain the decision to transfer the Official Languages Secretariat from the Privy Council Office to Canadian Heritage.

And later on, you state: "[...] the government sent the message that official languages were no longer a priority".

That is in your report. Why do you not recommend having the Secretariat transferred back to the Privy Council Office?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, what we did is that we realized that the issue of governance in a context where the horizontal issue is an important aspect... We believed the best approach would be to retain an expert, to do an analysis, which we did. We called on Professor Donald Savoie to carry out a study, and based on his observations, on current governance trends, we made our recommendations.

The Chair: You still have one minute, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I thought you were interrupting me.

Your report has harsh things to say about the government. What I'm hearing is the government saying that no, it is a good report, that things are going well, that it is quite satisfied. It is saying good things about us. But the message I'm getting from you is that things are not going that well at all.

For instance—and we may get back to this if I have an opportunity to ask another question—when communities come before us to say they have to resort to lines of credit so their organizations can survive, what do you think of that? What do you do on the ground to try to support them?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, when I travel throughout the country, I meet people from the various communities. They tell me about their funding problems and delays in receiving the funding. These are the types of comments which have led me to express some frustration about the delays in announcements regarding the action plan.

For small groups or organizations in sometimes remote communities, delays in receiving funding, together with an obligation to spend the money within the fiscal year even if the cheque only arrives in December makes the situation very difficult to manage. This problem does not strictly revolve around the action plan: it is a generalized administration problem which has worsened over the last few years.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now move to Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Commissioner, we have taken note of the analysis contained in your report and thank you for your work. However, it seems to me that there's sometimes a discrepancy between your appreciation of the government's leadership and the concrete results we find in the report. Take for instance the assessment of results for report cards over the last three years, on table 4 of page 110.

● (0945)

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, you had a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes. I would like to know whether he's saying what he thinks or reading a text given to him by the minister.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, that is not a point of order. Therefore your request is denied. We will proceed.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I apologize for my colleague's interruption.

Table 4 on page 110 indicates that overall report card ratings for federal institutions have been improving steadily. A little further, on table 5, which appears on page 113, you will also note that the number of complaints related to service to the public dropped by 5 per cent over the same period. I believe these are encouraging trends that should be highlighted.

You are asking the government to demonstrate leadership rather than just manage the issue, but it seems to me that the government's management is leading to good results that indicate progress is being made. Moreover, we should also say when it comes to supporting the minority official language communities that the government has provided \$30 million in additional funding in order to provide more effective support.

Don't you feel that these are more qualified and less negative findings than the ones in your report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, I have always believed that the report provided both good and bad details, and one of the reasons I was careful to mention leadership and the importance of overall leadership is that sometimes we find things that are inconsistent. There are some departments where we are indeed careful to say there has been progress. What I have noted is that in the departments where leadership is clearly demonstrated, where the minister and deputy minister work together in saying that official languages are a priority and that they want the department to do better, we see results.

Take the Department of Public Works. Three years ago, we gave it a low rating. Last year, we gave it a medium rating. This year, we gave it a good rating. I congratulate the minister on that, because it is an indication of the minister's work and commitment.

In my remarks, I took care to say that I do see progress, and throughout the annual report there are examples of success. That is why I think the report provides details on the good and the bad, but the distinction—the difference—between some departments that have succeeded, others that are performing at the medium rating, and others that still get a poor rating is, in my opinion, due to leadership.

In making that observation, I call on the Prime Minister to take interest in the issue, and to ensure that leadership is demonstrated broadly throughout government. I completely agree, however, that we can see examples of progress and examples of leadership.

Take the Canadian Tourism Commission, for example. When the Canadian Tourism Commission moved from Ottawa to Vancouver, I expressed my fears in my annual report last year that it would be more difficult for the commission to serve Canadians in both official languages because it was transferring out of the National Capital Region, a bilingual region, to a region where employees do not have the right to work in French. In our analysis, however, we found that they have demonstrated exemplary performance, and that is due to the institution's determination and leadership. On the whole, we are seeing many institutions plateau, and in my view the successes prove that it is possible for the entire system to succeed, and to meet the obligations of the legislation, as long as the leadership that we are now seeing scattered in various departments is manifested at the highest level of government.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: As you said, your report does mention progress, but unfortunately I have to say that the progress you talk about in your report is not clearly reflected in the press release you sent out everywhere. Unfortunately, most people read the press release, not the full report. That is why it is a good idea for you to be here today, because it gives us an opportunity to talk about the report and to highlight progress.

The same thing applies to immigration, which is a critical issue. It is certainly an issue that we take very seriously, but it must be understood that, in immigration, long-term results take time. In March, I myself announced that the Cité collégiale would receive \$7 million to support new francophone students who would be settling in Ontario.

So, do you recognize the work that is being done on this critical issue?

● (0950)

The Chair: A very brief answer, please, Commissioner.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

In the report—and this is what I stress in the report—I say that success in the area of immigration is much more likely when there is cooperation among the federal government, the provincial government and communities. When we have that kind of cooperation, where the two levels of government work with the communities, everything works much better. But there are genuine problems. Those are not issues we can deal with overnight, as you say, but when everyone pulls together towards a common goal, we can achieve results.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

The meeting began a little late this morning, though that was at the commissioner's request. He wanted to come to one meeting and combine both issues. We could continue with a rapid three-minute round, and then move on to the next issue.

Mr. Rodriguez, from the official opposition.

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

I see that Mr. Lemieux does not have enough to do, because he takes the time to put himself in the commissioner's place and have him say what he would like to see in his report, and even rewrite his press release. The commissioner and his team do excellent work, and I have great confidence in them. In fact, I will quote some excerpts from the first three pages of the commissioner's remarks:

The tentativeness and the lack of leadership are now evident. [...] This lack of leadership has resulted in a plateau being reached and, in some cases, a deterioration in the application of the official languages policy. [...] tentative and uncertain leadership. [...] In short, I ask the government to show leadership [...]

It's very difficult. Leadership is absolutely essential in changing things. It seems as if the government is saying two things—it tells us to do what it says, not what it does. On one hand, it says that official languages and linguistic duality are important, yet on the other hand, it abolishes the Court Challenges Program. It intends to continue with consultations, when in fact the time has come to take action. And as the first phase of the action plan is coming to an end and the time has come to renew it, it does not renew it.

I have two questions on the report. You say that some areas are not affected. Areas like illiteracy, early childhood and access to justice are crucial to my mind. Take early childhood, for example. If you don't have access to day care in French and need to put your child into a facility where a different language is spoken, that is where assimilation begins, as far as I am concerned. That area should be among the highest priorities, because assimilation begins at that very early age.

My second question is on part VII of the Official Languages Act. Do you see any change since the implementation of Bill S-3? I put the question to communities, and they don't perceive any changes.

Mr. Graham Fraser: In communities, there is no doubt that daycare facilities are the door to French-language schools. If the door is no longer open, it becomes more difficult for communities to maintain their language. In a number of provinces, there have been very positive experiences, where French-language daycare facilities have had a substantial impact.

With regard to part VII, I have always said it was not a bad thing there were still neither regulations nor a definition. That opens the door to grassroots cooperation. However, we have noted that government departments, agencies and institutions are better at preparing processes than generating products. As a result, in reports on the results of applying part VII, we often tend to talk about establishing committees, or providing information that then circulates within the department. What's important is to promote cooperation among those institutions and minority communities so that potential positive measures can be discussed.

• (0955)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Chong.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some questions for the commissioner on education and post-secondary education.

[English]

I wanted to ask you about a number of your observations and recommendations in the report.

First, with respect to post-secondary education, I note that you observed that Canadian universities and colleges are not graduating bilingual students to the degree that the Government of Canada requires. On page 42 of your report you state:

The federal government must work closely with Canada's post-secondary institutions to encourage students to learn both official languages. Universities must be made aware of the language requirements of the federal public service in order to help the government recruit graduates with adequate language skills.

I was surprised that this wasn't a little more categorical in your report, and I'm wondering if that's because you're undertaking a study of the issue. Later in the report you indicate that you're undertaking a study of how second language training is done in Canadian universities. Is that why you're not as categorical about it in the report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, we have embarked on this process. It was one of the things that I felt very strongly about when I started in this job. From the outset, I engaged in conversations with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the president Claire Morris. What has emerged is a study that we have now started. We sent out a questionnaire this month. We are doing a repertory of the programs currently available in Canadian universities. We are looking at courses designed to maintain or improve the level of French of students who have been in immersion, as well as French courses for students who have not been in immersion and who arrive at university and want to learn it. I am using French as an example, but the survey also applies to what's available in English in French language universities.

This is the very first step in finding out what's being done. One of the things I realized is that a number of universities are doing some quite interesting things that people aren't aware of, that I wasn't aware of. I think the first step towards progress is for everybody to be aware of what's being done now.

The Chair: You talk about this in your report. The next big study the committee will do is on post-secondary education.

Monsieur Malo.

[Translation]

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

Commissioner, I have five very short questions for you. You can then have the remainder of the time to answer them.

How do you explain the delay in tabling the Action Plan on Official Languages?

In your report, you state that the language of work situation has even declined in some institutions. What institutions might those be?

In your view, would the appointment of bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada demonstrate the kind of leadership that you want to see from the government in terms of promoting linguistic duality?

We have noted that Air Canada has received a fairly large number of complaints again this year. What can Parliament do to ensure that Air Canada is no longer so high on the complainants' list?

Lastly, we note that most complaints come from Quebec and the National Capital Region. In your view, why is that so?

• (1000)

Mr. Graham Fraser: With regard to the delay in tabling the second action plan, that question must be put to the government. I would not like to speculate. I have already said what I had to say on that.

With regard to the language of work, we note there is a gap between the satisfaction of francophones in Ottawa and the satisfaction of anglophones in Quebec. Frequently, among anglophone employees in some departments located in Quebec, such as Parks Canada, Service Canada and Canada Post, the level of satisfaction is fairly high. Satisfaction ratings for francophones in bilingual regions are as follows: Ottawa Airport Authority, 60% in 2006-2007 and 49% in 2007-2008; Health Canada, 68% in 2006-2007, and 58% in 2007-2008; Correctional Services, 76% in 2006-2007 and 67% in 2007-2008; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 73% in 2006-2007, and 67% in 2007-2008.

In a single year, we can see that satisfaction ratings have declined. I cannot explain whether this would be attributable to personnel transfers, or to a greater awareness of employees' right to work in their own language.

The Chair: Could you conclude your answer, please, Commissioner?

Mr. Graham Fraser: A working group will be looking at the problems that we see at Air Canada.

Regarding appointments to the Supreme Court, that is one area where leadership is very important, as I said to the committee last time.

With regard to Quebec and the National Capital Region, I believe those are both regions where contacts among anglophones and francophones are particularly frequent. As a result, the provision of services in both languages represents a greater challenge there than it does anywhere else in Canada.

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

That concludes the first part of our meeting. We will now move on to our study of the Olympic Games. We could begin with the second part of Mr. Fraser's presentation.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Chair, the commissioner will speak to the issue of linguistic duality at the 2010 Olympic Games. I am prepared to listen to the report, but our questions do not necessarily have to deal with that issue. You granted us seven minutes, which was not enough time to ask questions about the report. I am not taking this lightheartedly, and I would like you to give us some instructions.

Might I carry on, Mr. Coderre? I am being serious.

Hon. Denis Coderre: If I may, I would like to repeat exactly what I have been saying since the start.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, order, please.

Mr. Petit...

Mr. Daniel Petit: I asked a question. I am not talking about the report.

The Chair: As a point of clarification, Mr. Petit, I would like to point out that all political parties have up until now had the same amount of time, i.e., seven minutes, plus a three-minute follow-up question. I now plan to do the same thing for our consideration of the Olympic Games, time permitting, of course.

Mr. Commissioner.

• (1005)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Thank you Mr. Chair.

I presume that all members have the right to ask any question they want.

The Chair: Mr. Commissioner, questions must normally be relevant to the issue under consideration. That is up to the chair's discretion.

The floor is now yours.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I apologize, Mr. Chair, for having presumed to know the committee's role.

As I pointed out in my annual report, my office has undertaken a study on the bilingualism of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The study focuses on the readiness of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games (VANOC) to meet the language requirements identified in Annex A of the multiparty agreement signed in November 2002. Our study does not examine the broadcasting of the games in both official languages. This study is a preventive step, because I do not want to go to the organizers after the games, with complaints in hand, telling them what they should have done. Our study, which was done with the cooperation of VANOC, should help it address potential shortcomings before the games.

I emphasize that VANOC clearly considers linguistic duality to be an important value and a key consideration in planning the games. VANOC is committed to exceeding its official languages responsibilities. Although study of this matter is still underway, we have already identified some key issues, particularly regarding resources allocated to official languages within VANOC, growing demand for translation and simultaneous interpretation, signage, and volunteer recruitment. VANOC would be much better able to become a model of bilingualism for the next games and achieve the vision of a bilingual games were it to implement effective solutions to resolve these issues.

In terms of signage in the Vancouver-Whistler corridor, the federal government, along with VANOC, should provide leadership and work with its provincial and municipal counterparts to ensure that Canada's linguistic duality is apparent to everyone in any location where the games are featured.

Recruiting a sufficient number of qualified bilingual volunteers from across the country is essential to the provision of high-quality bilingual services at all sites to athletes, Olympic officials, the media and the public.

However, we cannot forget that not everything happens at the games site. Many federal institutions (border services, the RCMP, airport security, etc.) will play a key role in projecting Canada's image as a host country in both official languages. My office is already working with these institutions to ensure that this aspect of the games is also successful. I believe that the 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Games are a golden opportunity to showcase Canada's linguistic duality to the world.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Commissioner.

We will begin the first round of questions with Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Commissioner, based on your thoughts prior to your statement and the request by my friend Petit, I should perhaps ask you whether any future Supreme Court of Canada justice ought to be bilingual and attend bilingual Olympic Games. That way, you could talk to me about those two issues at the same time.

Following the blunder in Nagano, I had the Canadian Olympic Committee sign an agreement to ensure that everything would henceforth be bilingual. Today, the Canadian Olympic Committee makes sure that everything is bilingual, whether it be its dealings with the media or with people in general.

I am hearing a lot of "shoulds" in your statement, and that is of some concern. I know Messrs. Poole and Furlong of the organizing committee quite well, and I know that they are quite attuned to this issue.

Also, we should not simply depend on the system. Based on what you know, what has the government done? Have agreements already been signed with the Campbell government and the cities of Whistler and Vancouver to ensure that, first, the signage is being prepared, and second, the services will be bilingual? And coming back to what you have said about the interdepartmental committee, do all the ministers, including Mr. Emerson, the minister responsible for the Olympic Games, have an agreement to ensure that all services will be bilingual, and that bilingualism will be guaranteed, not only on the Games site, but in all other areas as well?

Furthermore, there is a key issue—and I think that everyone is aware of it—that is the broadcasting of the Olympic Games. Some francophones will not be able to watch the Olympic Games in their own language, unless they pay for the broadcast. There is a discrepancy between the French language network and CTV.

I therefore believe that all these questions require not only a response but also some follow up. So what has been done up until now? Between now and 2010, what can you do to ensure that all these issues are resolved, and how can we help you to ensure that the government no longer be reluctant to show some true leadership, as you indicate in your report?

• (1010)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have already met with Mr. Emerson on a number of occasions and I got the impression that he was determined to ensure the full respect of linguistic duality during the Games.

As for the specific agreements between the federal government, the province and municipalities, I am not aware of them.

Ms. Catherine Scott (Director General, Policy and Communications Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): To my knowledge, the multiparty agreement on signage between the federal government and VANOC deals with signage produced by VANOC, that is all official signs for the Olympic Games. Our study is still ongoing, but what we have heard during our interviews leads us to believe that VANOC has some concerns as to whether the cities and the province will produce all their signage in both official languages. That is why, at this point in time, this appears to be a concern that should be addressed.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We are not sure that things will be taken care of. So far, the issue has yet to be addressed. Is that what you are saying? Is there no agreement?

Ms. Catherine Scott: That's correct.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We therefore have to ensure that people can obtain those services. Signage is one thing, but service delivery is another. Having a sign in English and in French is simply not enough.

You could perhaps talk to me about your relations with the francophone community in British Columbia. I hear that it has done exceptional work. Work done at the Canada Games in Whitehorse, for example, was quite remarkable. Can we ensure that the same level of service will be delivered at the Games? There will also be a need for volunteers.

You could perhaps end your response by addressing the broadcasting issue.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed, volunteer recruitment is part of our study. I have yet to see the results. I know that there have been contacts, discussions and cooperation with the francophone community of British Columbia as well as other communities. However, I do not wish to get into the report's findings since I have yet to read the preliminary report.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Are you satisfied that each time the management committee needs to discuss services, there is a representative in attendance? I know that there are francophones on the management committee, but did you make sure that there is a francophone presence on the executive committee to ensure the issue is addressed?

Ms. Catherine Scott: We will be looking into that as part of our study. We will check to see whether the executive committee regularly addresses the official languages file to assess the situation.

Hon. Denis Coderre: And what about the broadcasting?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We are closely monitoring the broadcasting file. I recently met with CTV officials. I shared some of my concerns with them. We had a positive meeting, but a number of elements still need to be determined. I spoke about my concerns regarding hotels. CTV assured me that that would not pose a problem, that a free service would be offered to hotels. They will be responsible for hooking up to the service provided.

I do not know whether you have ever experienced the same thing as I have, Mr. Chair, but I have often arrived at a hotel looking for something that I thought was available and found out that it was not. I definitely would not want to see athletes' parents or francophone journalists arriving at a hotel and not being able to access the service that is provided free of charge, thanks to a cable television system. I have been assured that it would be available, but hotels have to be made aware of the situation.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coderre. I found all of your questions relevant.

We will now move on to Mr. Malo.

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to continue with the issue of CTV. During your discussions with the broadcaster, you were told that a team had been set up to study the issue and make sure that the service would be available not only in hotels, but everywhere. If I am not mistaken, it is not enough to simply extend the service offer, services also have to be provided to each and every client group. You spoke about clients staying at hotels, but there are a number of specific clientele.

Has a team been assigned to this task? Did they confirm this with you?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have the impression that they are taking this issue seriously. Some of the elements are not yet ready. They have had some discussions with the owners of both the large and small cable companies with which they had yet to reach an agreement. I underscored the fact that this was an essential element. But a gap remains: a number of households do not have cable or satellite access. This remains an ongoing issue because there is a limit to how much CTV can do in terms of traditional, live broadcasting. The dialogue is continuing, this is being taken seriously.

I had never heard of this before, but apparently a simultaneous French-language service will be available on the Internet at all times. This innovation was news to me.

Mr. Luc Malo: If I understand correctly, your study will be conducted through to the completion of the Olympic Games, so that you can have an ongoing oversight of all the aspects of the games.

Mr. Graham Fraser: The study focuses rather on the state of readiness. We wanted organizers to have our study sufficiently ahead of time so that they could make the necessary corrections.

Mr. Luc Malo: And so that you could then react to the corrections as they are made.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, that is correct. A preliminary version will be available this summer, and the final version will be issued in October.

Ms. Catherine Scott: The goal is to have a final study and a series of recommendations by this fall, giving VANOC the time needed to implement the relevant measures, but once the study is published, we will undoubtedly continue to closely monitor the file and how the recommendations are implemented.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We will be using the Olympic Games to gain leverage with other institutions. I touched on that earlier. I do

not want the linguistic duality and the games' success, in terms of linguistic duality, to be limited to the games sites. Visitors arriving at the airport or border crossings will have their first Canadian experience dealing with an RCMP officer. We are looking to work with all institutions. Do they know that it will be even more important for them to fulfil their obligations during the Olympic Games? People arriving in Canada for the games have to be made aware that Canadians place great importance on their country's linguistic duality.

• (1020)

Mr. Luc Malo: In your study, you go beyond the facade, the signage and the people speaking French. You also speak about the understanding of how the francophone network operates. People within that network must therefore think and act with the knowledge that their clients come from different networks.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed, we are covering all aspects: allocation, management, translation, interpretation, signage and reception. In order to successfully stage the Olympic Games in both official languages over a rather brief period of 17 days in February 2010, you need to be prepared. We are helping in the preparation, and to our knowledge, there is currently a very good relationship between the francophone community of British Columbia and VANOC.

I would like to add that I am fully convinced that Mr. Furlong is determined to ensure the respect for both official languages.

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

We have taken good note that your recommendations and study on the games will be ready by the fall.

Mr. Godin.

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

I have also met with officials at CTV and RDS and I must say that I was impressed by all that they have done so far. I might be proven wrong, but they certainly impressed me. However, their broadcast coverage will not reach all francophones. It does not make sense to install transmission towers across Canada to reach all those Canadians who do not have access to RDS at this time. You said so earlier, some people cannot have cable service at home, or pay for the Internet.

Would you agree that CBC/Radio-Canada, given that it is a public television network, has a national mandate? It has a mandate, and that should be part of it. The corporation tells us that it is not up to us to make programming decisions. It is very firm about that, but does it not have a duty to reach an agreement for the sake of Canadians and both official languages? CTV, RDS, TQS and the cable companies are all working together. Some of them are even going so far as opening up free, public channels. I am sure you have all heard about that. But what is CBC/Radio-Canada doing about this issue?

Mr. Graham Fraser: As it now stands, the CBC has said that it made the efforts and put in a bid, but that it did not win the contract because CTV's bid was about \$60 million higher. There was an exchange of correspondence between CTV and the CBC. But I don't think that discussions are ongoing right now.

As far as the mandate is concerned, which is a problem in this discussion, the broadcasting contract for the Olympic Games was signed by the International Olympic Committee and the company which put in the highest bid, and...

• (1025)

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's fine, thank you.

CTV was awarded the contract, we all know that. If CTV was able to sign contracts with TQS and RDS, it seems to me that the CBC could put its pride aside and agree to help Canadians.

Do you agree with me on that? If Radio-Canada did not exist, people, francophones, would not have access to French television, and it would be completely impossible.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, we all saw the figures on the number of francophone households which do not have access to cable in Canada. I hesitate to put out those figures, because it is very difficult to determine the exact number of people affected. Under IOC rules, the successful bidder must be able to reach 95% of the population, and CTV claims it can do this. It is not up to me to define the mandate of the CBC and Radio-Canada. I don't see how, given the fact that a contract was signed between the CBC, TQS and RDS, we can target the 9,000, 20,000 or 40,000 households—based on the figures—without competing with the people who paid to get the contract. I think it's fairly complicated. However, there is another possibility...

Mr. Yvon Godin: You see problems, but they never told us whether it was hard for them to reach an agreement. Representatives from the CBC said that they did not get the contract and that they did not want to get involved. No one told us that there would be competition. TQS never said that it did not want the CBC to be involved. Really, I don't understand where you're coming from.

Mr. Graham Fraser: It was a problem raised in the course of some of the conversations I had. That's when I raised the idea of bringing in satellite TV in community centres in communities which, for one reason or another, have a considerable number of people who do not have access to television by either satellite or cable. We can always explore that idea. I also said, in the course of my discussions, that I did not want to exclude any solutions which had been rejected in the past. I am not rejecting any potential solution, but I recognize the fact that it might be complicated.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

We will now move on to the government side with Mr. Denis Lebel.

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

Mr. Fraser, Ms. Scott and Ms. Tremblay, Mr. Dussault, thank you for being here this morning.

We have read what you have written and listened carefully to what you have told us this morning. We will continue as always to assume our responsibilities, to do our work, and show leadership, of which you would like to see even more. We will continue to do that. We will also continue to be very committed to the official languages of our country, to take our responsibility seriously as a government and to fulfil our promises like we always do.

I feel that there has been leadership shown up to this point on the issue of the Vancouver Olympic Games. Mr. Furlong and his organizing team made a presentation before us, and we were impressed by the efforts they are making. Mr. Emerson is also showing great leadership on this in terms of government representation. For preventive reasons, as you said earlier, it is quite reasonable, and I understand this very well, for us to carry out an analysis and make recommendations at this point.

I understand that the report will be presented in the fall, but from what you have seen so far regarding how things are developing from an official languages standpoint, what is your view of things?

• (1030)

Mr. Graham Fraser: To begin with, I feel that there is a determination to succeed and an atmosphere of cooperation. Like you, I admire Mr. Furlong and I am impressed.

That said, I have the impression that VANOC started out using the Turin Games as a model. They then realized that the Turin Games had had serious difficulty representing the Olympic Games' two official languages. So we are trying to figure out exactly what would be needed for interpretation at all sites, translation of documents as well as the availability of volunteers.

There is work to do in all those areas, and additional resources will probably be needed at some point to ensure success. There are technical considerations, such as the need to find enough interpreters for quite a limited period. That requires some amount of planning. I have begun discussions to make that happen. I think that the report will indicate where work is still needed for a successful outcome.

I would like to express my appreciation for the spirit of cooperation we have found in working with Mr. Furlong and his team. In my annual report, I talked about the new ombudsman role, but it is not just a formal role. We can use studies as an example of our desire to work in cooperation with institutions. This collaborative effort between ourselves and VANOC is a good illustration.

Mr. Denis Lebel: I think it would be important at today's meeting to remind the VANOC people that we are aware of their efforts to ensure that Canada's two official languages will be well represented. The event should be a showcase for the world to show Canada's bilingual status. The francophone community in British Columbia also needs to be aware that we value their contribution to the preparation underway and that we will continue to work with the community to improve the situation and ensure that the results meet our expectations.

You talked earlier about broadcasting rights. I would just like to remind everyone of the background on this, since it is quite important. When the International Olympic Committee receives bids, the countries and municipalities involved already know that the broadcasting rights will be negotiated by the IOC itself. It calls for bids—correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Fraser—and companies and consortia are invited to tender, which is what happened in this case. A consortium offered \$60 million more than the CBC on a strictly business basis. The consortium initially involved CTV and TQS and it looked at how to provide coverage to the whole country. The consortium needs to take into account what is happening at TQS, but I am not assuming that TQS will withdraw. The consortium will therefore have to continue these discussions from a business standpoint, since it is having discussions as well with other partners.

You mentioned earlier that the CBC was among those partners, but I think the discussions right now are focused on the business side. Is that correct?

• (1035)

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's what I understand about this matter, but Ms. Scott heard other things that you haven't mentioned.

Ms. Catherine Scott: Exactly. What was clear from our meeting with CTV is that the discussions with broadcasters were positive and that it will be possible to get a free signal from those companies so that RDS can be broadcast in places where it is not currently available. However, discussions with small broadcasters have not yet taken place.

Mr. Denis Lebel: Our government wants all Canadians to have access to the Olympic Games in their language of choice. So, we will continue to hope that these discussions... I want to thank you for the steps that you have taken in advance to ensure that this objective can be achieved.

How is the organizing committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games of 2010 in Vancouver reacting to the need for volunteers from all regions in Canada so as to provide services in both official languages? We are asking people to take two or three weeks' holidays to provide those services. How did this committee react when you told it that you would recommend an increased number of bilingual volunteers?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It has reacted positively. It is becoming aware of the scope of the challenge. It is visiting schools and making contacts with minority communities. For example, we hope to see the implementation of an assessment process to verify whether people who say they are bilingual are really able to serve people in both languages. We are trying to do a follow-up on the nature of existing problems.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We will now begin our second and final three-minute round with Mr. D'Amours.

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

Thank you, Mr. Fraser, and thanks to the people accompanying you.

Given the ambiguity concerning the broadcasting of this event and the current situation with regard to TQS—and we don't know in

which direction it is headed—the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages will be tabling a motion asking the consortium responsible for broadcasting the Olympic Games to testify before the committee in order to explain itself and perhaps to reassure us, as well as to tell us what the problems are.

We are aware of the problems that can affect the RCMP when it comes to providing services in French to francophones. No doubt, you are aware of the recent case of Ms. Paulin in New Brunswick. The Olympic Games will be held in Vancouver.

Are you concerned with regard to the ability of the RCMP or any other police force to respect the official languages policy so that francophones in Canada and throughout the world will be respected and will not be forced to make 25 calls before finding somebody who can speak adequate French, and that after this event, they won't need to appeal to the Supreme Court in order to ensure their rights are respected?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, that is exactly why we are raising the issue of the Olympic Games when we talk to other institutions, such as the RCMP or National Defence.

Renald, perhaps you could speak about the discussions we have had with other institutions, with regard to the Olympic Games.

• (1040)

Mr. Renald Dussault (Assistant Commissioner, Compliance Assurance Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): As the commissioner pointed out, we have already begun discussions with a number of federal institutions, for example with airport authorities at Pearson, in Toronto, the headquarters of the Canada Border Services Agency, in Ottawa, and individual airports. Mr. Fraser met with the RCMP Commissioner recently, and that is one of the points that he raised.

We intend to increase our preventive efforts with all those institutions. As the commissioner said earlier, this is an opportunity for us to take advantage of the Olympic Games to make federal institutions which are the point of first contact, more aware of their responsibility to provide services in both official languages.

This work has already begun, and we certainly intend to increase our activities in this regard over the coming months.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

We will now go to Mr. Daniel Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you very much.

My question also concerns something that you referred to a little earlier. My colleague Mr. Chong had asked a question. I am referring to page 74 of your report. Could you tell me when your report on second language learning opportunities in universities will be ready? You know—

Hon. Denis Coderre: Point of order. Mr. Chair, we had this discussion at the beginning. I asked for and I wanted for us to be given two full hours on topics of our choice. You refused. This question is not relevant and has no connection with our agenda. I would ask my colleague Mr. Petit to ask questions about the Olympic Games.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, I had not had time to hear the entire question because you interrupted Mr. Petit. On the one hand—

Hon. Denis Coderre: I am not trying to start a fight. You know, he is reading the report. Personally, I would not have had a problem with that. The official opposition, Mr. Petit—

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, you have made your point, thank you.

Mr. Petit, please continue.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I have a supplementary point. Mr. Chair, I made a point of order, so I must continue along those lines. I want people to know that the official opposition fully agreed with the process suggested by Mr. Petit today. If he had voted with us, he could have asked that question, but since I have already been called to order and told that there was an agenda, the member should not be allowed to ask his question. So, I am asking the chair to stick to the agenda.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, I am trying to respect the agenda, but first I would like to hear Mr. Petit's question. I think that your comments have been noted. In any case, that had been made clear right from the start.

On that note, we will go on with Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chair, I am going to send you my questions in writing, and you will have the opportunity to respond. As I said, I have two subjects: justice and an answer for my colleague Mr. Chong.

With regard to the Olympics, in fact, you have seen that a number of questions relate to the same situation. When Mr. Furlong appeared, one of my questions for him was simple. At the very least, will people be greeted at the airport in French? It is a first step, for a French national from Paris who comes here. If that person is spoken to in English, they will get angry and it will snowball. I understood that the airport was collaborating with VANOC. It was a first, when I heard the announcement.

You were there and I imagine that you have to travel to this airport from time to time. The Olympic Games will take place very soon, in 2010. Do you see it gradually becoming more bilingual, or will this only be for the Olympic Games?

You said something that I find interesting. I don't know whether it is just for the Olympics. I would like, and we will need, a follow-up, because we are investing money in this. As an individual and as a commissioner, have you seen a change at the airport?

Mr. Graham Fraser: In fact, Mr. Furlong told me about an agreement. At that time, negotiations were on the way so that passengers arriving at the Vancouver International Airport will already be on a Olympic site. Consequently, all measures to ensure that an Olympic site functions in both official languages will apply to the Vancouver Airport.

Furthermore, I can share with you an anecdote. A passenger, who did not file a formal complaint, told me that there is still progress to be made with regard to bilingualism and posters or announcements in Vancouver. There is also a committee within the public service and there are already obligations.

I would say one thing. I do not want to talk about the tragedy that took place, but we can say that the incident that occurred in

Vancouver has ensured that the airport is much more aware of the linguistic issue now than a year ago. Based on their effort to ensure linguistic duality at the airport, we will speak to other institutions, as Mr. Dussault said.

● (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

We will now go to Mr. Gravel.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: I do not know if I am going to be able to ask my question, since it is not related to the Games in Vancouver.

The Chair: I hope that you will be allowed to ask the whole question first.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: Mr. Commissioner, earlier, you said that you would answer all questions related to the official languages. I want to backtrack a little bit. You said that you hope that the federal government would take advantage of the renewal within the public service to promote linguistic duality.

The Chair: Mr. Gravel, I do not know whether you are aware of this, but we talked about having two sections. First, you are going to end the section on the Olympic Games in Vancouver.

Mr. Godin, point of order?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Out of respect for the member, we should let him ask his question in its entirety. Who says the public service has nothing to do with these Games? If the official opposition, which never votes in the House of Commons, wants to act like a baby this morning, it can, but we should let the member ask his question.

The Chair: Mr. Gravel, I can assure you that it was not—

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Godin, your rain of insults is not getting through my umbrella of indifference.

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Gravel.

Mr. Raymond Gravel: I am not going to ask my question, because it does not relate to the Olympic Games.

The Chair: Mr. Gravel, have you finished?

Mr. Raymond Gravel: I do not have a choice.

The Chair: We will move on to Mr. Godin.

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

I want to draw the Commissioner's attention to page 142 of his report. With regard to CBC, you stated in the second paragraph "[...]—and acknowledging—its obligations under the Official Languages Act."

If I understand correctly, CBC has official language obligations. Mr. Commissioner, what are the two official languages in Canada?

Mr. Graham Fraser: If I have read my terms of reference correctly, they are English and French.

Mr. Yvon Godin: CBC is preparing a program about hockey in Punjabi and Mandarin. Are these two Canada's official languages?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I keep coming back to this matter and I do not intend to drop it. Regarding the Vancouver Olympic Games, the Société Radio-Canada has a mandate, an obligation towards us, which is to find solutions, because it is the only—let's admit it—broadcaster which broadcasts French programming throughout the country, including in regions where other broadcasters cannot do so. Based on my interpretation, SRC programming must reflect its official language obligations, in particular because it is our public broadcaster.

• (1050)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I will choose my words carefully.

We have a fundamental disagreement with the CBC and Radio-Canada regarding their responsibilities under the Official Languages Act, in particular Part VII of the Act, which obliges federal institutions to take positive measures to promote the development of minority language communities.

As for us, we claim that Radio-Canada, like any other federal institution, must assume its obligations, which Mr. Godin referenced. However, the position of Radio-Canada is that, as far as programming is concerned, it is solely accountable to the CRTC. This is a very fundamental disagreement. I asked to meet with Mr. Lacroix to see whether it would be possible to find a solution with regard to our conflicting interpretations. Whatever the case may be, our position is stated clearly on page 144.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That completes this round of questions. I think we may have time for one or two additional brief questions before the end of the meeting.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do indeed have a brief question.

[*English*]

I was wondering when your study on post-secondary education and bilingualism would be completed.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We sent out the questionnaire this week. I signed the letters to all the various heads of institutions. We're hoping the information will be collected in the fall and the report will be finished by the end of the year.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I am sorry, but the questions must be on the subject on our agenda, namely the Olympics.

Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chairman, my question is straightforward.

Given the current situation TQS is in, which is not a very good one, should the Official Languages Commissioner not suggest that

VANCO ask the International Olympic Committee to reassess the way the Olympic Games will be broadcast? There was an agreement between RDS and Radio-Canada with regard to coverage of Formula 1 racing. For now, the Société Radio-Canada is not open to any new approaches because it has lost the fight anyhow. If Mr. Godin does not know how broadcasting works, I can give him a lesson, and he will understand clearly, but this is a business matter.

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

Hon. Denis Coderre: Forget it. You attacked me earlier and called me a baby; now it is my turn.

The Chair: Mr. Godin has a point of order.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is not up to Mr. Coderre to decide whether my point of order is admissible or not.

The Canada Games were held in Bathurst when the Liberals were in power, and we had to fight with them to make sure they were held in French.

The Chair: That is not a point of order, Mr. Godin.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That is not a point of order and that is completely untrue. I myself made the announcements.

The Chair: Please ask your question quickly, Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Don't you think that the Official Languages Commissioner should ask, given the current situation TQS is in, that the broadcast will indeed be accessible to everyone? As it now stands, that is not a sure thing.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am hesitant to speak to the future of a television network, since the issue far exceeds my mandate. All I know is that TQS is currently before the CRTC. We are aware of the fragility of the situation, but we have no other information. We will take the situation into account when the time is right.

• (1055)

Hon. Denis Coderre: I understand your situation, but since you are aware of the concept of access, can I at least expect that you will study the situation? If this requires intervention on your part, you could at least raise the matter with VANCO and make it aware of the concerns which this committee has expressed.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I believe that it would indeed be very important for the government to act if TQS is not in a position to provide the service it committed to under contract.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

This concludes our meeting. Thank you for being here. We will meet on Tuesday to discuss the follow-up to the report on the collaboration agreements.

Thank you very much, Mr. Commissioner.

The meeting is adjourned.

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