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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the sixth meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This is the second meeting of our study on braille in linguistic minority communities, from the standpoint of its standardization across the provinces.

This morning, we have the pleasure of welcoming witnesses from the Quebec region. Mr. Jacques Côté is here as a member of the Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians, and Ms. Diane Mitchell is here as a representative of Jymico. Welcome, both of you.

Later, we will also hear from a representative of the New Brunswick Department of Education. Our witness is Ms. Jasmine Gallant, Education Officer for Students with Sensory Impairment.

Ms. Zarac has also tabled a motion. I would like us to set aside 30 minutes at the end of the meeting to discuss it.

First of all, I will explain to our witnesses how we proceed. Each of you will have 10 minutes for your opening statement. After that, we go on to questions by parliamentarians.

So without further ado, I would invite Mr. Côté to break the ice.

Mr. Jacques Côté (Member, Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians): Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for receiving us this morning.

I imagine you are not very familiar with braille, though you are most likely familiar with the name. This year, we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille. Without going into details, I will give you an overview of what braille is so that you can ask appropriate questions when there is something you don't understand.

Braille is not a language, but a method for reading and writing. That means we would take an English printed text, and transcribe it into English braille. The same thing is done on the French side.

I would like to say a few words about the history of braille, because I don't know whether you are familiar with it. In previous years, braille was transcribed in different ways in French-speaking countries. Transcription rules and standards varied from country to country. Thus, a project to standardize braille has been initiated. That standardization project targets French-speaking Quebec, France, Switzerland, Belgium and even Africa. The goal of the standardization—that is, always transcribing French braille in the same way, regardless of the country of origin of the printed text—is

praiseworthy. The goal of standardizing braille is praiseworthy indeed.

Please allow me to take a brief moment to tell you something about myself, because what I do will become clear as I speak. I am a teacher. I am now retired from teaching in Quebec, where I taught blind children. All my life, I have used braille as a teaching method. Personally, I am strongly opposed to the standardization. I will give you some of the reasons for my position.

First of all, standardization means making the transcription similar, regardless of where it is done. People believe that, once braille has become standardized, francophone countries will be able to exchange manuals and books. That's true, they will indeed be able to exchange books, novels. France will in fact be able to transcribe some books and Quebec others, and they will then be able to exchange those books with no problem at all.

•(0910)

However, that will not work in schools. Schools will not be able to exchange textbooks and school manuals, for a very simple reason—there are no common educational programs in France and Quebec. France and Quebec will be able to exchange novels, but certainly not textbooks. But it is in schools that children need to do that exchange, and they particularly need access to textbooks and manuals.

I've told you my position. Now, let me explain how things are. I would like to say a few words about the new code, a copy of which I have submitted to Ms. Dumas. I will ask you for a special permission to do something that will help you. I would like to ask for special permission to table a document that is only in French. It is part of the *Code braille français uniformisé pour la transcription des textes imprimés*. I will certainly not have the authority to translate this into English. It's as if I were tabling a copy of a French grammar book, and you asked me for an English copy of the French grammar book—it could not be translated. So I am asking the chair of the committee: may I table the first 20 or so pages of the *Code braille français uniformisé*, the standardized French braille code?

The Chair: You could table it, Mr. Côté, but before I can give you permission to do so I would need unanimous consent from all members of the committee.

Do we have unanimous consent? Yes, so we can distribute the document.

Thank you, Mr. Côté. Please continue. You have about four minutes left. After that, my colleagues will have a chance to ask their questions.

Mr. Jacques Côté: Please let me know when everyone has received a copy.

The Chair: I will.

Everyone now has a copy, Mr. Côté, except me. Please go on.

Mr. Jacques Côté: The title alone is enough to show there is a problem. The document is entitled *Code braille français uniformisé pour la transcription des textes imprimés*. Just below that, it says: “*Édition québécoise — Mai 2008*.” So from the very start, we can see that this is a territory-specific addition, and that is already a problem from the standpoint of standardization.

On page 7, at paragraph (a), which indicates the territory it covers, it states that the code applies to all of Quebec. However, the goal of this was to standardize everything. I find this difficult to read, but I have no choice because that is what is written.

On page 8, paragraph (b), the code states that it has exclusive authority in Quebec. And yet, the goal of this exercise was to have a code that was standardized across all French-speaking countries.

I have one last comment. The braille alphabet is just like the printed text alphabet—*a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j*, etc.—but it has no numbers. There are no braille characters for our numbers like 1, 2, or 3. Yet, we do need to write numbers. How do we do that? Louis Braille came up with something quite ingenious. He took the first 10 letters of the alphabet—*a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, and j*,—and put a number sign before them. That number sign transforms them into numbers by giving each of those letters a numeric value. For example, if I want to write the number 12, I put down the number character and then add the letters *a* and *b* which are then transformed into 1 and 2. That method of writing numbers has been used for 200 years, and is still used almost everywhere in the world.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté. Could you please conclude your presentation?

Mr. Jacques Côté: I will conclude, if I may.

The Chair: Excellent.

Mr. Jacques Côté: As you can see, the standardization applies in Quebec alone. However, there are francophones outside Quebec, for example in New Brunswick, Manitoba and Ontario. What will happen to their documents, particularly to their school manuals and textbooks? What will happen to those? They will not be covered by the code.

If the point is to make all French-speakers learn the differences and features of the new code, who will have the authority, the staff, the human resources and the financial resources to extend the code to francophones outside Quebec? In my brief, I recommend that the Canadian Braille Authority, which has a French braille section, study the issue. It may one day be able to provide human resources or funding.

I will conclude with one of my strongest recommendations. Until such time as we have properly determined the resources needed and the costs involved, we ask that French braille outside Quebec continue to be transcribed as it has been for the past 200 years.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté. You have cut to the heart of the subject and have raised a great deal of interest among our colleagues.

We will now hear from Ms. Gallant. Ms. Gallant will have some comments, and would also like to speak on the topic Ms. Landry was to have discussed. Unfortunately, Ms. Landry was unable to be with us today.

Ms. Gallant, please go ahead.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant (Education Officer for Students with Sensory Impairment, Department of Education, Government of New Brunswick): May I make my own presentation first, and then try to do justice to Ms. Landry's comments?

The Chair: Do my colleagues agree? Yes, please go ahead.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: I will be making two different presentations.

First of all, let me thank you for giving me this opportunity to say a few words. My name is Jasmine Gallant, and I represent the New Brunswick Department of Education. I am the education officer responsible for delivering services to French-speaking students with sensory impairment. Thus, I am responsible for providing teaching in braille to all French-speaking blind students in the province. Today, I am here on behalf of all visually-impaired students in the French schools of New Brunswick, for whom I am responsible.

First of all, I should point out that, in New Brunswick, all students with a disability are integrated into their local schools. The same therefore goes for blind and visually impaired students. Some 100 French-speaking visually-impaired students receive our services. Fewer than 10 of them learn braille, but regardless of the number that do, they are all entitled to quality teaching. Our service is the only one of its kinds, because all teachers working with the students are specialized visiting teachers. Thus, 10 visiting teachers specializing in the visually impaired meet the needs of blind and low-vision children in all parts of New Brunswick. We provide services as soon as the children are born, or as soon as an optometrist or ophthalmologist determines they are visually impaired. We provide early childhood services in the home, then follow the children through school.

In addition, an orientation and mobility specialist works directly with some children, and provides support for visiting teachers and parents. As well, a visiting teacher acts as a transition officer, helping secondary school students find summer jobs to assist them in their career choices, and provide support for those students until they reach the post-secondary level to make the transition easier.

I am telling you all this so you can understand how important we consider the needs of blind and low-vision students to be. The standardization of the braille code slated for September 2009 has been a surprise and is a source of concern, both from the standpoint of learners and from the standpoint of its application in schools.

As you know, New Brunswick is a bilingual province in every way, and all students learn both official languages. This means that, in order to receive their high-school diplomas, our students must not only know French, their mother tongue, but also English. I know that this is also done in other Canadian provinces, and that our children are not the only ones who need to learn braille in both languages, not only to succeed academically but also to prepare more effectively for their lives as adults.

We believe that applying a different code in English and in French makes the system inconsistent for students, and doubles the learning they have to do.

Given the large number of additional things a blind person has to learn in comparison with a seeing person in order to become a productive adult in society, we believe that we should be adding to their burden as little as possible.

If the standardization were to take place, students would be required to learn not only a specific code for mathematics and sciences and a code for language, but also a specific code for French and a specific code for English.

At present, New Brunswick students and visiting teachers are familiar with all the codes that make it possible to move through literary into scientific notation, without any difficulty. We find it inconceivable to view the education of students in any other way, since literacy is the means through which all learning is absorbed. We believe that changing the codes would increase the difficulties encountered by students in learning those codes, and would thus make their academic learning and pursuit of higher education more difficult as well.

We are convinced that those difficulties would be felt not only in New Brunswick, but in any place where students need to learn both French and English.

In addition, I am concerned about the costs that the standardization would incur. In New Brunswick, the visiting teachers and teaching assistants working with our young blind students are well trained, and the success of our students attests to that. How much time and money would it require for those visiting teachers and teaching assistants to learn the new code?

● (0925)

Our provincial exams have been adapted using the current code so that students can take their exams in a familiar context, such as their regular classrooms. Will the technical equipment used, for example the braillewriters, have to change? There again, what would the costs be in time and money to apply the change and to train everyone involved? At present, our activities and the equipment we use for everyday teaching, learning or transcribing make it possible for students to follow classes at the same pace as the seeing students. What impact would the changes have on children in learning situations? We believe it would be disastrous. Ladies and gentlemen, those are the reasons for which we are convinced we need to keep the flexibility of the current code.

Today, I am testifying before you as an educating officer responsible for visually-impaired students, in order to express my opposition to the changes. I will leave you with the following question. Our blind students are already severely disadvantaged by

their visual impairment—what advantage would there be for them in having two different unified codes?

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you. You finished your first presentation in six minutes.

Would you also like to share some of Ms. Landry's notes with us?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: I have her document. She mentioned some specific things to me, but I do not know if I should read all her notes.

The Chair: Have you understood the main points of her text?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Yes. However, she included some historical elements in her document.

The Chair: Go ahead. It is up to you, Ms. Gallant.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: I was invited to this meeting as an expert on braille. Let me first introduce myself. I am Huguette Landry. I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of Braille Edition & Transcription Inc., located in Shediac, New Brunswick. I began working in the field of braille transcription in 1986. From 1988 to 2003, I was an active member of the Comité québécois de normalisation du braille français en éducation under the direction of the ministère de l'Éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur du Québec. I am a transcriber, reviser and user of French and English braille. I am thoroughly familiar with several codes currently adopted in Canada in both official languages, and in the United States.

In Toronto, in 1993, I obtained from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind a certificate in literary, mathematical and scientific braille transcription. Since 1988, I have been training francophone schoolteachers to use French literary and mathematical braille under the direction of the Department of Education of New Brunswick. Since my company was created in 1993, I have been offering services such as the transcription of documents into French or English braille. These services are aimed at a clientele in schools, colleges and universities as well as in government and private sector organizations. Over the past years, great efforts have been made to review the meaning of braille symbols in order to establish a single unified code to group literary, mathematical and scientific braille codes.

On the other hand, a francophone committee and an anglophone committee are currently working independently to develop two different unified codes. Even before the final acceptance of these two codes, we can state that they will create extra difficulties for users and transcribers of braille when they have to learn all the differences between the two languages.

From the point of view of users and transcribers, what would be the ideal unified braille code? First, it would allow us to use one single braille code for reading and transcribing simpler, literary texts and more complex mathematical and scientific texts. The use of a single braille code allows us to use in French or in English, the same typographical, mathematical and scientific braille signs in the printed version. It allows us to use a braille code that does not have any radical changes, so that we can apply our acquired knowledge. Such a code would not have any serious or overly serious impact on implementation and learning in terms of cost and effort.

New Brunswick is a bilingual province. I think it's important to keep the similarities that currently exist between both official languages with regard to the meaning of braille symbols. Currently the Abraham Nemeth Code allows us to do that. This code was adopted in the United States in the early 1960s. It has been used all over Canada in both official languages since the early 1970s. We were able to adapt this flexible code to the French language. With regard to braille transcription in both languages, be it literary, mathematical or scientific, it very successfully meets all the real requirements of printed braille as they stand today. All the figures, typographical symbols, scientific formula, linear or spatial formula, chemical structures, etc. that we find in print are available in the Abraham Nemeth Code. This code is already a universal code in itself.

When texts are transcribed entirely into braille, be they simple literary texts or mathematical or scientific texts, all the braille symbols are identical and have the same meaning for the user, in French as well as in English. The Abraham Nemeth Code can even be adapted to other languages.

• (0930)

In my own opinion as an expert, the codes currently in use, called *The Nemeth Braille Code for mathematics and science notation*, English version and the *Code pour la transcription en braille de la notation mathématique*, French version, are the ones that best meet the desired objectives of users as well as transcribers of braille, and they can serve as a solid foundation for creating a future ideal unified code in both of Canada's official languages.

Now, with your permission, for clarification, I would like to use the table to show you the current and future developments of braille codes.

Do the people have the document?

The Chair: Ms. Gallant, the document we received is only in French. This morning we only received one copy of the table.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: In this table, Ms. Landry shows the difficulties or the dissimilarities between the braille that is proposed and the current version of braille in both languages.

The Chair: If the committee members agree, I can distribute Ms. Landry's table.

Does everyone agree? Therefore, we can distribute it. Thank you.

You can continue, Ms. Gallant.

• (0935)

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: The first part of the table shows three different currently available ways to represent, for example, the printed percentage sign in braille. In a literary, mathematical and scientific environment, the printed sign always remains the same, which is not the case for braille. In the first part of the table, we see the three methods: in French, in English and in braille.

As for the two unified French and English braille codes currently being studied by the francophone and anglophone committees, the second part of the table shows us, once again, the different ways of writing the percentage sign in braille in both languages. As compared to the currently existing form of braille, the braille symbols of these two unified codes are also differently configured in

both languages. Let us also note that the current study of both unified codes seems to be incomplete with regard to mathematical and scientific transcription.

Do you follow me regarding the second part? Do you see the difference between both systems? There is no similarity between them.

In the last part of the table, the Abraham Nemeth Code offers the alternative of a unified braille code that enables us to transcribe literary, mathematical and scientific texts. Ultimately, the printed percentage sign and all the other symbols will have identical braille representations in both languages. Given the fact that this code has been implemented for the past 20 years, it will be much simpler to integrate and to adopt it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Gallant wore Ms. Landry's hat with gusto.

Now let us begin the first round of questions with Mr. Rodriguez.

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

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming here today.

I am not very familiar with this subject and I am glad to hear it being discussed. Let me put a fundamental question to you. How do you go about writing in braille? Does it take a machine? Who can write in braille?

Mr. Jacques Côté: We have a device for writing our personal notes. The device is like a typewriter, but it only has six keys to correspond to the six points in braille. Moreover, thanks to electronics, we have braille printers. These printers can transcribe large quantities of texts into braille at a very high speed.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: How do people learn to write in braille with these devices? Does it take very special training?

Mr. Jacques Côté: I would say that braille is learned the same way children learn to read at school. When a blind child goes to school, we will teach that child its *ABCs* in braille instead of showing the child how to write with a pencil.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: If a person wants one of those computers at home, would that be very expensive?

Mr. Jacques Côté: The computers are relatively expensive. There are two reasons for this. First, the research and development for this type of electronic equipment is extremely expensive. Second, these computers are only useful to blind children, so their price is exorbitant.

• (0940)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: I will add a few words with regard to learning braille. Ms. Landry trains teaching assistants and teachers who in turn teach braille to blind students. So we teach people how to read braille.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Is this the same type of device which is used in Quebec, outside Quebec and outside of Canada?

Mr. Jacques Côté: Yes, and for a very simple reason: braille, whether it is in English, French, Spanish, or in another language, is a reading system based on six points. This means that a Spanish-speaking person will use the six points to transcribe his reality, and an anglophone will use the same six points to describe her reality, and so on.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm a little surprised by what you have said regarding the standardization of braille, because the premise was that standardization was a good thing. We are certainly not experts, but we wanted to know why braille was not standardized and so we want to study the subject. Your point of view is very interesting because we heard the exact opposite position last week.

I don't really know what to think. Is standardization a good thing or not? Several of my colleagues probably feel the same way I do today.

Mr. Côté, you said that standardization was a good thing because that way books could be exchanged with other countries, but in the field of education, it would not be useful, since the programs are different. I don't think that one excludes the other. We don't have the same programs, but it's the main thing for the regular program. The books are not the same. If we could standardize braille and provide access to French books, be they from France, Belgium or elsewhere, wouldn't that already represent progress, even if the school programs are not the same?

Mr. Jacques Côté: The standardized code was accepted in France last year. Before 2008, novels were transcribed on each side of the Atlantic. Even if there are some differences, novels, when they only contain words, are just as accessible on one side or the other of the Atlantic, without any changes. So the novels can be read just as well as if you or a person from France could read novels written in Quebec, despite some differences in the vocabulary. Texts in braille only have small differences. We wanted to standardize these differences, and in my opinion, we missed the mark.

A little earlier I provided the example of the standardized code for the Quebec edition.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

We will continue with Mr. Nadeau.

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

Good morning, Ms. Gallant, Mr. Côté and Ms. Mitchell.

I do not have very much knowledge about this issue, but if I understand you correctly, your fundamental premise is that it is better to standardize. If I am completely off-base, Mr. Côté, you could provide me with some explanations. We sighted people use a 26-letter alphabet, which is the same in French, English and in Spanish, in particular. If I understand you correctly, it is not necessarily true that braille, prior to standardization, had a similar or equivalent alphabet. Is that correct? That means that there were differences between the French used in Europe and that used in America.

Has standardization upset the applecart for us? France does have the critical mass of citizens in the world who use French the most. If

we do not agree to this standardization, that France has just adopted, will we not be indirectly affected by this situation?

• (0945)

Mr. Jacques Côté: You have hit on an important issue. I will try to explain all of this as simply as possible.

Earlier, I explained that Louis Braille had suggested a way of writing the number 12. The standardized code is now suggesting another way of writing this number. As an example, it's as if we were now suggesting that you use Roman numerals rather than the Arabic figures that you have been used to seeing in any book. You would immediately try to ascertain why we wanted to make this change and why it was advantageous.

This question was dealt with earlier. We wanted to standardize our braille with that of France, something that Quebec had never done beforehand. Quebec had never changed its way of writing numbers, we were still using the numbers that had been suggested by Louis Braille. Moreover, these same numbers are used throughout Canada, including in anglophone communities and in the United States. From now on, in Quebec and only in Quebec, figures will be written differently. Consequently, a child from New Brunswick or Manitoba who has not learned the new numbers may find himself trying to read a document which, in many cases, may be illegible to him.

To conclude, I would draw your attention to the fact that there are not many numbers, they go from 0 to 9. But that is not what is complicated. If you change the figures, you're also going to change the mathematical and scientific codes. You will no longer be writing "12 + 14" in the same way, because the addition sign has changed its code as well.

I do not want to give you a lesson, but I can simply explain that the code, which will have a Quebec version, will marginalize much more than it will standardize.

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

We will now give the floor to the New Democrats. Mr. Gravelle, the floor is yours.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And good morning to the witnesses.

There are some things that I don't understand, perhaps because I am not a regular member of this committee. I would like to understand why we want to change the braille system.

Mr. Jacques Côté: Why? That is a difficult question.

In 2001, an agreement was signed in Casablanca, Morocco, between the countries that I referred to earlier, namely Quebec, France, Switzerland and Africa. At that time, the parties discussed the possibility of standardization.

I am going to throw an idea out, but I don't really want to start a debate. Take the political situation in Quebec. Some people—and this is my personal opinion—have political leanings, and standardization ties into certain objectives or dreams to standardize francophone Quebec within the francophonie. I would repeat that this is my own position, but I would be able to defend it. Ms. Gravelle, the somewhat secret objectives of standardization are much more political than realistic.

• (0950)

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Ms. Landry emphasized, as Mr. Côté mentioned, that ideally, this committee's objective, which is a standard code, was a praiseworthy objective at the outset. Nevertheless, a very specific tangent developed, and it surprised us in New Brunswick. At the outset, the committee wanted to establish a universal formula, but suddenly, the situation has become very specific.

The Chair: You have another minute, Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Why are francophones outside Quebec not represented here?

Mr. Jacques Côté: Let me add another "why", because you also seem to be quite ready to do that.

Why, as this work on standardization was going on, were all those people who did not share the same orientation systematically set aside?

Today, those who originated this maintain that they consulted others, but they set aside all those who might have had a different point of view. I did not answer that question "why", but I will now answer your question. They wanted to divide things into sectors. You certainly saw the document earlier. In Quebec, this document, this code has been given priority. It is only usable on Quebec territory. Why is that? I told you earlier that the objective of standardization was perhaps more political than real. Possibly, it was easier to divide things into geographical sectors than to include francophones outside Quebec, although it would have been reasonable to do so.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Unfortunately, I must leave you because of an emergency.

The Chair: Thank you for having come, Mr. Gravelle.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: I would like to add that Ms. Landry was a member of the committee until 2003 and, to her surprise, she learned in September 2009 that they suddenly wanted to adopt this new code.

The Chair: Thank you for your remark, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Petit, it is your turn.

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

Good morning, Mr. Côté, good morning Ms. Gallant.

First of all, I am glad to see that one of my electors has taken the witness stand. We had suggested your name especially as we were aware of the work that you have done. We know that in our riding, there are at least three companies directed by blind persons, which is almost a record in the province of Quebec. The same subject was

also raised by Ms. Guay, whose father has visual problems, and by myself, as my godmother was born blind. We are interested in the subject from a slightly different point of view.

Let me first make a comment, and then I will put a question to you. First, Ms. Gallant said something very important: her province is bilingual. Therefore, it must deal with people who come from anglophone or francophone families. The school curriculum for these people must apply identical methods, so as not to confuse the students. A couple may well consist of a francophone and an anglophone. Their child might be registered in the anglophone or in the francophone system. This would create an extra problem for them.

There is no end to the problems that we can find, Mr. Côté, but you raised this matter and I have the same question as Mr. Rodriguez, who represents the Liberal Party. I am a bit skeptical regarding your version and what we heard previously. If I correctly understand your explanation and the explanation from Ms. Gallant, the unified code does not seem to please anyone because it transfers the Code Antoine into your number system, which causes problems for you. This means that a young student who has finished his schooling up to the CEGEP level and who has to switch overnight to the unified code could not even recognize chemical formulae anymore. There would be a risk that he could blow up the laboratory. I am exaggerating slightly, but this is more or less the situation.

Canada has two official languages: French and English. We learned that there was a problem with creating a unified code. European and African francophones are trying to implement a system in Quebec. This seems to have had repercussions in your province of New Brunswick. I can affirm that there are repercussions in Ontario and in Alberta as well, because they have the same problem.

When a young person registers with a school system, no matter what subjects are taught, he ultimately wants to get a diploma. Ms. Gallant, Mr. Côté, I thought I heard you say that you are currently using the braille code, which really consists of the six graphic forms of braille writing that can exist in English as well as in French. Am I right?

• (0955)

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Petit: What is the difference, with the exception of the Antoine Code problem? Is there another problem regarding the plan to transfer Quebec's standardized code to Alberta, Saskatchewan, etc.? Setting aside the numbers, is there a problem?

Mr. Jacques Côté: Earlier I talked about the 10 figures. As for the mathematical code... If I may, I would like to give you an illustration.

Let's take the example of a child in first grade who is learning the Antoine Code. He will learn the Antoine figures in first, second and third grade, right up until the end of high school. That will not create any problems because he will also learn the Antoine Code.

All of these courses provided in English will not use the Antoine Code, let's be clear on that. In New Brunswick, where there are two official languages, there are many more courses offered in English than there are in Quebec.

A student who has completed high school using the Antoine Code and who wants to pursue sciences at the CEGEP or university level will find that most of the school books at the college and university level are in English, particularly in the scientific field. Despite the fact that this student may have been brilliant when he used the Antoine Code, once he's at the CEGEP or university in Quebec, he will no longer be able to use the code. He will no longer be able to obtain books made in France, because nothing is the same.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you.

Please be brief, Ms. Gallant.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Right now the new code has not yet been completed for mathematics and science. So what will happen?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. D'Amours.

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

I would like to thank the three of you for appearing before us this morning. I too am finding this somewhat difficult to understand. Our colleague from the Bloc asked us to study the standardization of braille. It seemed to be an important issue, but today, you're telling us the complete opposite.

Perhaps the people who spoke to us last week are not living the same reality as you, Mr. Côté. In my opinion, the use of braille is very important to you. I understand your reasoning and that of Ms. Gallant very well. Standardization is the best way of confusing all of those people who will try to understand what is no longer understandable. Writing French properly is already difficult when you're able to see and read. When an individual changes educational levels and can no longer use the same tools and has to learn everything over again, this individual will be at a disadvantage for the rest of his or her life and may have problems at the post-secondary level. Furthermore, this individual may not be able to attain the same job level as someone else who has not had to deal with such an obstacle.

It is too bad that Ms. Guay is not here. I'm trying to understand why our committee wants to push this study regarding the standardization of braille. Although neither you nor Ms. Gallant use braille in everyday life, you have clearly explained what the impact of this standardization will have on future generations.

Mr. Jacques Côté: If I may, my answer will be twofold. First of all, the aspect we are discussing this morning is huge. I am not surprised by what you are telling me. Indeed, those who had very significant aspects to present were dismissed. As I said earlier, I worked on these committees, and in 2003, when we were supposed to deal with this issue, I was dismissed, because people knew that I was able to defend my point of view.

Secondly, I would like to give you an example. Earlier I explained how we write the number 12. We take a numeric symbol and we add the letters *a* and *b*. This is done throughout the United States, Australia, in the rest of Canada and in the United Kingdom. This is still being done in Quebec, but just until September. It seems to me that if we really want to standardize braille, we should have gone this

route, which has been accepted everywhere with the exception of France. Instead of standardizing with France, we should have standardized with the rest of the world.

I don't know how you feel about this, but this makes sense to me. I would have to give you a course on braille in order to explain why we chose to write figures and scientific coding differently, but that is another issue. The people who came to talk to you about this topic had the advantage of presenting this as being something that was very simple and easy, something that didn't pose any problems. However, the problems are going to crop up at the academic level, in teaching this method, and not amongst those who read reviews.

• (1005)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours): Thank you, Mr. Côté. I know that my time is up, but I would like to thank you. You have clarified the situation by talking about the practical aspects and this attempt to convince us that standardization is the best approach. You have said that this approach was the best way to destroy the future of our young people and others as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

We will now hear from Mr. Nadeau.

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

I would like to react to the comments made by Mr. D'Amours, who has in fact pointed out an aspect that I had referred to earlier, namely the contrast between the two positions. This serious dichotomy is easy to understand.

Earlier, Ms. Gallant informed us about the comments made by Ms. Landry, an educator who teaches the codes to people who need to learn them. You referred to the Abraham Nemeth Code. If I understood correctly, this code is a type of standardization. This is understood in both French and English.

Moreover, as Mr. Côté pointed out, France, through some kind of organization that I am not exactly familiar with, wanted to standardize the French language. It is different from the standardization brought about the Abraham Nemeth Code. If we can draw a comparison, this code is for people, I presume, who use the alphabet that we use in both French and English.

I'm going to ask you a \$10-question. Would not the Abraham Nemeth Code be a solution to this standardization which would make the job easier? I know that this would be one reform on the heels of another, but would not this be simpler than going ahead with this so-called French standardization of French that we are already familiar with in Quebec? In this way, the people from New Brunswick or elsewhere who are learning the code in English would not have to deal with three different codes, namely the code from France, the one from Quebec and the one used in anglophone Canada. Would not the Abraham Nemeth Code be a comprehensive solution to the situation currently being experienced by people using these codes?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: That's what Ms. Landry pointed out in her comments earlier. Since the Abraham Nemeth Code is already very flexible, it would provide a very good base that would enable us to continue doing work which would perhaps be more adequate, given our situation.

•(1010)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: It's about letters but numbers as well. Would the Abraham Nemeth Code also enable us to deal with the problem of numbers?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Absolutely. You can switch from literature to scientific texts much more easily than if you had a code for French and another one for English. The proposal before us does not have any code for mathematics and sciences.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: In Acadie, which is francophone, which code is being used? Is it the Quebec code? Will Acadie standardize to the French code?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: It is the Abraham Nemeth Code.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That's what you were saying. Indeed, the way I see it, there are three codes for the francophonie: the very recent French standardization, the Acadian code, which is based on the Abraham Nemeth Code, as well as the Quebec code, which has been based on braille for the past 200 years.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: No, it is the same code. We are currently applying the same code in Quebec and in New Brunswick, for both francophones and anglophones.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Both provinces use the Abraham Nemeth Code?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Yes, until September, when the proposed standardization will be complete.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So the Abraham Nemeth Code will no longer be used in Quebec?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Correct.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So there has already been some standardization. Under the so-called French standardization—

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: You have asked a \$100-question and not a \$10-question.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I will send you the cheque.

Mr. Jacques Côté: If I may, I would like to raise a point in order to clarify the situation properly.

The Chair: Be brief, sir.

Mr. Jacques Côté: Mr. Nemeth, whose first name is Abraham, tabled his code, how can I say—

The Chair: Mr. Côté, you will have time to reformulate your thoughts. We will now give the floor to another colleague, Ms. Shelly Glover, who is the Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you for coming. I will give you time to complete your thoughts, Mr. Côté. I will then ask you another question. Please go ahead.

Mr. Jacques Côté: It will be very quick. Mr. Nemeth invented his code and tabled it. This code satisfied one requirement, which pertained to everything concerning mathematics, sciences, chemistry, physics. This was a way of transcribing into braille everything that is done in a scientific or mathematical format, starting in grade one right until the PhD and even post-doctorate level. He developed this code in order to transcribe scientific reality. If we had only to transcribe novels, we wouldn't need the Nemeth Code

because novels are words, whereas a mathematics or science text does not read easily like a novel. In Quebec, the Antoine Code will replace the Nemeth Code.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Côté, I come from Manitoba. We obviously have visually-impaired people in this province who use braille. You gave a very good explanation of the Quebec version, but you said that visually-impaired people outside of Quebec will not be using the same code.

Ms. Gallant, you described the situation in New Brunswick.

I would like to know what is going on in Manitoba. Which code is being used? Which code do francophones using braille in Manitoba use?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: They use the same code as we do.

Mr. Jacques Côté: They use the code that they have been using up until now.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: The code described by Mr. Côté is the Quebec version that may be implemented in September 2009. We are not going to be doing that.

•(1015)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: It is really Canadian. It is something that is used throughout Canada.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Not this Quebec version, no.

Mr. Jacques Côté: No. It is clearly stated in the documents we gave you that this new code applies exclusively to Quebec. So the situation in your region remains the same, unless one day you find some money and human resources in order to train your teachers and children.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: As a mother, I am wondering how our children are going to manage if we change the code. How are they going to manage? How will this affect them emotionally, not only with respect to the difficulties associated with reading and doing school work, but also with respect to their emotions? Would you agree?

Mr. Jacques Côté: No. I gave you my position: I do not want nor desire change. I asked a very simple question: where are the benefits? Where are the benefits associated with this change? If someone can tell me what the benefits are, I will be the first to go ahead with the changes. There are no benefits; quite the opposite, these changes create additional problems. For those francophones outside Quebec, the difficulties will be even greater.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: And especially for our children. In the educational sector, it does not make any sense whatsoever to even think about introducing something completely new in their learning.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you. I agree with all of my colleagues who have given their opinions. You have shed light on this issue. There is a great deal of information to absorb and I think it was very important to hear from you as witnesses.

Do you have any other information to provide us that does not deal with the school programs? Do you see other problems aside from those related to the school programs?

The Chair: Unfortunately, I must stop you, Mrs. Glover. I thought that you were about to conclude but you asked another question.

Our second round has now been completed. Some members have expressed a wish to do a third and final round, because we want to deal with our motion this morning. So we will begin a third round, and we will give the floor to representatives from each political party.

Mrs. Zarac, from the official opposition, you may begin.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): I would like to thank the witnesses for coming here today. Honestly, we were all a little bit confused at the beginning, but you did clarify things for us at the end. At the outset, we thought that standardization was a good thing.

I would like to look at this table once again, simply to better understand it. It is about braille as it exists. If I understand correctly, right now French is different from English. Two different alphabets are used.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: No, not necessarily. The first part of the table explains what is happening right now.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So the symbols are different.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: The printout is similar.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: All right, the printout.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: The first pertains to the printout; the second pertains to the braille symbol. Then, you see the number 25 as a printout and then as a braille sign, in English and French, in the third part of the table.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That is the Nemeth Code.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: All right, now I understand.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Then, in the second part, you can really see the differences. It states clearly that the transcription, for the time being, will only be for literary works. This has not yet been completed for mathematical and scientific documents, for which there is no option.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So if I understand correctly, it is simply an alphabet used for spelling. Finally, regardless of whether it is in English or in French, it is the same alphabet.

So when we start to standardize, it is as if we were changing the alphabet completely and teaching a new alphabet to the students starting out in primary school. It is completely different from what we thought. It is not the system that we have been shown. In the final analysis, according to what you have said today, the standardized French braille code does not standardize; rather, it does the opposite. It is really by maintaining the Abraham Nemeth Code that we are going to be able to standardize. Those are your recommendations today.

Thank you very much for this clarification.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: You are welcome.

• (1020)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac, for summarizing our meeting.

I will now invite Ms. Thi Lac to take the floor. Pardon me, I will get back to you, Ms. Thi Lac, but in accordance with our speakers' list, I must first of all give Mr. Petit the floor.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Let's let Ms. Thi Lac ask her question now, because she has already prepared it. I will speak after.

The Chair: Fine. Go ahead, Ms. Thi Lac.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good morning, Ms. Gallant and Mr. Côté. It is a pleasure meeting you this morning. I am here simply to replace Ms. Guay, who had suggested that the committee undertake the study.

I am familiar with the problems experienced by many visually impaired people, because I have sat on committees along with visually impaired individuals. The vice-chair of my executive committee was not sighted. So this is something that I am very familiar with.

You explained the great difficulty that currently exists in learning this at school. I would like to understand the impact of this standardization on teachers. This requires a great deal of structural change for the school system. What will the main consequence of all this be?

Furthermore, how much time will it take to assimilate all of this? For someone who had to learn this standardized code, how much time does this represent?

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: First of all, the difficulty lies in the production. I do not know how we are going to deal with this production.

As for how much time is required to learn it, it all depends on the individual, the individual's knowledge and baggage. As for the students, we know that children are, generally speaking, flexible. However, for those students at a higher level of learning, for example, students in high school and those preparing for post-secondary education, I do not think that they will be as open to learning a new code, because the students will then, once at university, have to go back to the old code. That is why I hesitate to state how much time is required to learn this code.

Mr. Jacques Côté: The problem lies in the fact that all of the school books, particularly in science and in math, are already transcribed according to the Abraham Nemeth Code, and this applies to all students, whether they be francophones or anglophones, whether they come from Quebec or elsewhere, it does not matter. First of all, we are going to have to think about retranscribing the books in accordance with a new code. This scientific books are going to be the most problematic. I am not talking about novels, because they are not complicated to do.

Then, we have to ask ourselves how much time this will take. A child is like a sponge, if I can use the expression: a child can absorb a great deal. This child will not have too many problems learning something new, but the fact remains that, in his French course, he is going to have to use one code for writing, and in his English course, he will have to use the code used by anglophones, and if he gets to CEGEP or university, he is going to have to use documents transcribed in Quebec, in anglophone Canada where...

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Do you agree that this could even set back an entire generation of students?

Mr. Jacques Côté: More than one generation. This is an extremely serious matter, madam. Basically, we should find out why that was done. We are told that it will help standardization, which means one single system for preparing books in Quebec and elsewhere. There is a question that I have always put and that no one ever wanted to answer. There is absolutely no common school program. I am not talking about novels. France could transcribe *Le Petit Prince*, and we could transcribe something else. That is not where the problem lies.

• (1025)

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The Abraham Nemeth Code is the one currently being used in Quebec. The Code Antoine is the new system, is it not? Could an adult who has left school long ago and who has always worked with the Abraham Nemeth Code be able to read a novel as quickly if he uses the new code?

Mr. Jacques Côté: Yes, absolutely, and for a very simple reason, Mr. Nadeau. The pages of the book will be numbered in the Code Antoine. There are 10 figures to learn. Novels do not create any problems because the only figures are the ones used to number the pages.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thus, the problem is with academic and scientific books.

Mr. Jacques Côté: You have understood the whole picture.

Ms. Jasmine Gallant: Except for the fact that an adult is sometimes not as flexible and has more difficulty in learning.

Mr. Jacques Côté: Let me give you a very simple example.

The Chair: Mr. Côté, we will come back to your example if we have any time left.

Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will address Mr. Côté and Ms. Gallant.

I had the opportunity to learn about the existence of the Abraham Nemeth Code. Naturally, a person who is not blind cannot decipher the meaning of this code. The main reason why you are here is standardization. Currently, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Territories are using the Nemeth Code. Therefore, we have standardization. However, the new standard French braille code coming from Europe was just introduced in North America and it is about to shake things up. With the Nemeth Code, we can communicate with anglophones in United States, in Australia and in other countries. However, the francophone community is pressuring us to use the new standard code. This would upset all the work that you have done over such a long period of time.

From coast to coast, the current national standard is the Nemeth Code, both for anglophone students and for francophone students. In Quebec, there are also blind anglophones, literally speaking, of course. Mr. Côté and Ms. Gallant, you already made a very specific point when you said that we already have standardization, and you explained this at great length. The standard French braille code must not be allowed to upset all the work that has been done in Quebec and in all the provinces.

Mr. Jacques Côté: The Nemeth Code is used in Quebec and in Canada. However, it is not used in France, in Switzerland and in Belgium. Those countries use the Code Antoine. However, this code is very incomplete; it is a homemade code. Earlier, I spoke of politics. Quebec wanted to join in the standardization. In my opinion, Quebec had no business entering into complicity with la Francophonie, which has never used the Nemeth Code and still does not use it. This resulted in pushing us off to the side. We must find out what the advantages of standardization are. Show me one single advantage of standardization and I guarantee that I will become an enthusiastic defender of it.

• (1030)

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

If I may, Mr. Côté, I'm going to be politically incorrect as our business draws to a close.

I'm going to be frank with you and admit that we really did go headlong into this business. Today, you have given us a fresh perspective. Initially, we hadn't intended to do a report, but since we'll be discussing future business, we'll take a look at this matter.

Ms. Gallant, you have presented the point of view of the people we represent, more specifically, minority groups. You have certainly done a lot to spark discussion.

I would also like to thank all our colleagues for the excellent round of questioning. We really got the sense that we were moving in the same direction, and that helped us to plow ahead.

It's now time to talk about our committee's business. So, I'd like to offer you my sincerest thanks on behalf of the members of the committee.

Mr. Jacques Côté: Thank you for listening to us.

The Chair: As our witnesses get ready to leave us, I'd ask you to turn to the motion which was moved in both official languages by Ms. Zarac. I'd call on Ms. Zarac to address her motion.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: The motion is in response to the recommendations made last week by the Official Languages Commissioner, Mr. Fraser. The notice of motion states:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the President of the Treasury Board to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages to elaborate on its new functions in regard to the Official Languages Act, further to the transfer of some duties of the Canada Public Service Agency to the Treasury Board.

Shall we dispense with reading it in English?

The Chair: Can you elaborate?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Basically, the purpose of the motion is to ensure that matters are taken seriously. Mr. Fraser told us that he had concerns regarding the transfer of some duties. So I'd like to hear from officials at Treasury Board and get assurances from them that they do indeed have the resources they need and that they are going to take any and all necessary steps. It's not always easy, when you have new responsibilities, to set priorities. It's simply a matter of ensuring there's oversight and that there's no dragging of heels.

The Chair: Good.

[English]

Thank you.

I will now turn to Madame Shelly Glover.

[Translation]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you. I'd like to make a comment and perhaps propose an amendment.

This change of governance is far-reaching. It doesn't only affect official languages, it affects many other areas. In my opinion, the officials that are undertaking this work are the ones who are in the know and could share this information with us. That's why I want to start by inviting them. They're the ones with the knowledge. We could meet with them, and then see if it's appropriate to hear from the president.

• (1035)

The Chair: Is that an amendment, Ms. Glover?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Yes it is, I move that we begin by inviting Treasury Board officials.

The Chair: I'll now entertain comments on the amendment.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: If I've understood correctly, you're talking about Mr. Toews and his officials. Is that right? It is, isn't it? So, goodbye Mr. Toews, and hello officials.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to oppose this amendment. When it comes to representing the government the buck stops with the president of Treasury Board. And if you want to assign a date to it, the political system has been that way since 1848. I'd be happy with Mr. Toews' coming along with his officials. In any event, ministers rarely come alone—I'm not saying that doesn't happen—but they come with support staff from their department, and that's not a problem. I really want Mr. Toews to appear. He's the minister, the elected representative, and the onus will be on him to explain to us why the government is redoing in the 40th Parliament what it undid in the 39th Parliament. The minister was in that position at the end of the previous Parliament and he's still there today—and he's the one who has to appear. His officials can be there to support him, but he needs to be the voice of the government. And that's why I am supporting Ms. Zrac's proposal. And it's also why I'm opposed to the amendment that was just brought forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

I would like to clarify something with Ms. Glover. In your amendment...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Can I request the vote be held immediately?

The Chair: No, because I still have two speakers on the list.

Ms. Glover, according to your motion, you would like to begin by inviting Treasury Board officials, then potentially follow up with the president of Treasury Board.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Your motion is broad. When you hear from several witnesses, you don't have time to ask as many questions. We could invite the officials to the first meeting, to get some background, and discuss another motion to invite the president.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover. Your amendment is clear and I think the members of the committee understand it.

Mr. Petit, do you still want to be recognized?

Mr. Daniel Petit: Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

We discussed the transfer at length at the last meeting. I believe Mr. Rodriguez focused specifically on the matter and said that anything that had to do with official languages was presented to the Prime Minister's cabinet and that is how things work best. Since then, there have been changes. Now, we deal with the president of Treasury Board. However, the last time Mr. Fraser appeared before the committee, we asked him the question. And I think that he referred to what used to happen and to what happens now.

In my opinion, there is a problem with the flow chart. The motion reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the President of the Treasury Board to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages to elaborate on its new functions in regard to the Official Languages Act [...].

If there are new duties, there need to be documents, books, flow chart or transfer statements laying out when, how and by whom that was done. Does it affect all departments? I am all for inviting Mr. Toews, but in order to be able to ask relevant questions... The federal government is a huge enterprise, and official languages permeates every department. With that in mind, I want the officials to tell us what authority has been handed over. Have they relinquished all or part of their authority? Are there some areas for which they have not done so?

Let me give you an example to explain this. Mr. Fraser clearly said that he did not understand why the position of deputy minister did not have a mandatory bilingual designation. He said that the last two or three times. I want to know who is excluded from these new powers. Before going any further, I would like to get my hands on all documentation. Given that we are dealing with new duties, I have to make sure that all my colleagues get this documentation so that when Mr. Toews appears before our committee, we will know exactly where the problem lies. Is there a problem and do we want to fix it? Maybe there is not and we're trying to create one; I don't know.

That is why our parliamentary secretary's amendment makes sense. We should have an opportunity to speak with a long-standing senior official so what we know exactly what the lay of land was before and after. You know as well as I do that politicians come and go, but that the public servants remain. Everyone knows that.

These functions have not been handed over to one single individual, but to the entire machinery of government, which is very powerful, in this particular case. I want to know exactly what functions have been vested in the senior officials and if they are different from those they used to have. And in order to do this, I need documentation.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: No, Mr. Chair, you cut me off. I know that we have just welcomed a new member from the NDP, but I wanted to say something.

I'd like us to support this motion, but amend it in such a way that we begin with the officials and get copies of any and all documentation relating to the transfer. And then, we'll have the president of Treasury Board appear before us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. D'Amours, you'd like to comment on the subamendment?

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be quick, because I know it's time to move on to the vote.

Once we've voted, perhaps Mr. Petit can inform us of his vision, his organizational chart, as to how to ask the minister questions when he appears. That would be really interesting. In that way, we'd know more. Mr. Petit seems to want to get a lot of information from the minister. And I think he could share that information with us. And in doing so, we can make sure we're given all the details we need, from A to Z. Our time with the minister should be really interesting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Thi Lac.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Petit, your remarks contradict what Ms. Glover said. They didn't complement what she said, they went against what she said. Ms. Glover said she didn't even want the minister to appear, whereas you've indicated you want him to appear after the other witnesses. What you're arguing for isn't really clear. We should vote on Ms. Zarac's original motion.

The Chair: Procedure dictates that we must start by voting on the amendment to invite Treasury Board officials.

I still have to hear from Mr. Rodriguez and Ms. Glover. Then we'll cut the vote on the amendment.

Mr. Rodriguez.

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

The motion is very important because it deals with a major change to the internal structure of government. It's important to have the minister appear because the buck stops with him.

We could possibly start by inviting the officials to give us a bit of context and then decide whether or not we invite the minister. We also have the option of inviting the minister right from the outset, because the buck stops with him. And he may or may not wish to bring his officials with him. That would give us an opportunity of getting answers from high up.

So I'm against Ms. Glover's motion to invite the officials and support instead Ms. Zarac's original motion, which was to invite the minister.

• (1045)

The Chair: I see.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I want to be very clear. I never said that. I find it unacceptable that you're trying to put words into other peoples' mouths. I never said that I did not want the president to appear. I said that I'd like us to start by inviting the officials and then

ascertain whether we need to invite the president. To be fair, I wanted to clarify that.

I agree that we need to invite someone to explain these matters and I want that to be indicated in the record.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll proceed with the vote on the amendment that the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite officials from the Treasury Board and, thereafter, the president.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: We'll now vote on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Before we conclude, I'd like to ask members to give me their witness lists for the post-secondary and Olympic Games studies. As you know, we're trying to group various topics.

Let's get back to today's subject. If we're able to reach consensus quickly we can dispose of the matter. Do you want to prepare a report on the possible standardization of braille at this current juncture? We could also debate this at a later stage.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I just have one comment to make: who are we to write a report on a topic we know absolutely nothing about? We realized this this morning. We have no business issuing a report or telling anybody what to do, because we have no idea of what is going on in that area.

The Chair: I'll hear from a representative of each party on that issue.

Mr. Daniel Petit: I'd at least like the committee to take a stance. Education is a provincial area of jurisdiction, but setting standards is a federal responsibility. I'd like the committee to speak to the protection of Canadian standards which are already in use, and to lend its support. Indeed, people are going to end up with a French code which you can't apply in Quebec and which will marginalize my province. That's what I don't agree with.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chong.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, are you asking for ideas?

The Chair: I'm asking for advice on whether we are to provide a report on the study on access to information for print-disabled Canadians. Initially, we were supposed to have one or two meetings on that issue, and now it seems that there's some issue that has raised the interest of the members.

I'm raising the point about whether or not we are willing to have a report, yes or no. I want to have some instructions so that I can give some advice to the analyst, whether it's just on a more passive mode or whether he has to take action.

Hon. Michael Chong: Didn't you mention something about witnesses for our study...?

The Chair: Yes. I invite all the members to present their lists of witnesses for the post-secondary education study and the Olympic Games in Vancouver.

Hon. Michael Chong: Can I make a suggestion?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: I think it's important to have a couple of university presidents from predominantly anglophone universities appear in front of our committee. I know we're probably going to invite the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, but I actually want to be able to listen to somebody like the president of the University of Toronto, or the president of the University of Guelph or the University of British Columbia, and actually ask them questions about why they're not producing the bilingual graduates we need in the public service.

I think it would be useful for the committee to hear from them as to why they're not providing us with those graduates so that they themselves become aware of this issue. If it's simply the association that represents universities, by the time it trickles back to the university president, it's not going to have the same impact as it is if we ask them, in a very friendly manner, questions with respect to the graduates they produce.

My suggestion on the list of witnesses is that at least one or two from big anglophone universities are invited to appear in front of our committee with respect to the study on post-secondary education.

• (1050)

The Chair: Your point is taken and noted.

[*Translation*]

I also wanted to mention to the committee that we've invited several stakeholders to discuss post-secondary education. We may put forward a new list of witnesses and may have to increase the number of meetings that we'd originally planned on, if that suits you.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I have a comment about the report on standardizing French braille.

In my opinion, in order for the committee to produce a report, and given that we've heard two completely different perspectives, I think we need to have further meetings, and I don't think anybody wants to do that. I think that we should simply say that we've received interesting information. An official record of the proceeding will be released and that's an official document that people will be able to refer to. I don't think that we should be taking an in-depth look at the issue nor do I think we should delay moving ahead with our schedule to draft a report on the meetings we have held.

We cannot speak to this because we've heard opinions, both last week and this week, which were diametrically opposed. And we're not here to adjudicate the matter. In my opinion, we've both heard and learned things. The official record is available, and those who wish to consult it can do so, but personally, I don't feel that I'm in any position to make a recommendation in either direction.

Let's forget about the report on standardizing Braille and get on with the business as planned. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau. We'll be hearing from two more witnesses. In fact, we'll be hearing from four witnesses on Thursday on the same topic.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Well, let's drag it out.

The Chair: Mr. Rodriguez.

[*English*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Very briefly, I suggest that for the next study we submit a written list and then put it together and send it back and we discuss it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much and have a good day.

This meeting is adjourned.

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