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Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0910)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning everyone and welcome to this 14th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Following the Easter recess, this morning we are resuming our work pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), study of the broadcasting and services in French of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games.

This morning we have our favourite commissioner, Mr. Graham Fraser, from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. He is accompanied by Ghislaine Charlebois, whom we also wish to welcome. This morning we also have Ms. Tremblay, a regular at our committee, Assistant Acting Commissioner, Policy and Communications Branch, as well as Mr. Carsten Quell, Director, Policy and Research.

Mr. Fraser, without further ado, you have the floor.

Mr. Graham Fraser (Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Thank you very much.

[English]

Good morning.

[Translation]

Honourable members, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, Mr. Chairman, good morning.

[English]

Thank you for the introduction of my staff. I won't repeat the introductions you've just made.

I'm very pleased to be able to meet with you and talk about the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

The games are a global event and a unique opportunity to showcase linguistic duality as a fundamental Canadian value. It's also an opportunity to celebrate the cultural richness of our anglophone and francophone communities. Your interest in the 2010 Games could not be more timely. With the games less than a year away, progress has been made towards ensuring linguistic duality. However, there is still work to be done.

In my opinion, three important aspects must be considered: the broadcasting of the games in English and French; the preparedness of both the Vancouver Organizing Committee and the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Federal Secretariat; as well as the delivery of services by federal institutions during the games.

Broadcasting the games will enable Canadians who cannot travel to Vancouver or Whistler to experience the various events taking place there and to take part in the celebrations. As the opening and closing ceremonies will be broadcast worldwide, this is a unique opportunity to showcase Canada's linguistic duality.

[Translation]

For 2010, the English-language broadcasting rights in Canada were awarded to a consortium comprised of Bell Globe Media and Rogers Media, while the French-language broadcasting rights were awarded to TQS, RDS and RIS. The commercial contract is exclusively between the International Olympic Committee and the broadcasters. Neither my Office, the CRTC nor VANOC has any power to intervene in this contract.

The TQS, RDS and RIS networks are not all part of the basic cable channels available across Canada. For this reason, francophones and francophiles in many Canadian regions may be deprived of the opportunity to follow the games on television in French, unless they subscribe to additional broadcasting services.

However, the consortium has agreed to grant free access to the TQS/RDS signal to broadcasting distribution undertakings, or BDUs, for the duration of the games. We have learned that the TQS/RDS signal will be unscrambled and accessible one month prior to and during the games, thanks to an agreement between the consortium and the cable distributors. The consortium has also indicated that it would broadcast all competitions directly on its Internet site. While these are very encouraging measures, they are not enough to ensure complete nation-wide coverage. The consortium will have to continue to seek a solution so that all English- and French-speaking Canadians across the country have equal access to the games.

In my report published on December 2, 2008, I highlighted the fact that VANOC has stated its commitment to bilingualism, but that effort is still required in certain areas. Particular attention must be given to communications with the general public, the media and the athletes. My report contains 18 recommendations concerning translation and simultaneous interpretation, the recruitment of bilingual volunteers, signage, the participation of sponsors, the role of the Games Secretariat, cultural activities, and resources allocated to the official languages function.

VANOC has implemented part VII of recommendation 17 by forming an official languages advisory committee. As I recommended, Canadian Heritage will prepare a formal quarterly progress report. I also learned that the Gesca group and VANOC have signed an agreement enabling VANOC to distribute information and advertisements for the games in the chain's newspapers. These signs are very encouraging.

That being said, to ensure that official languages are fully incorporated and present during the games, VANOC and the federal government will need to go beyond implementing the 18 recommendations contained in my report. "Going beyond" means fully integrating official languages in all areas of activity, and at all stages. Respect for linguistic duality must be an early reflex during the planning and execution stages, not an afterthought. The events surrounding the one-year countdown celebrations in February should serve as a warning.

The issue of translation and simultaneous interpretation remains a significant challenge. In fact, the allocated budget seems inadequate to me, given the task to be accomplished. Our study and the information we have led us to believe that VANOC is ill-equipped to ensure adequate delivery of these two services during the 2010 Olympic Games.

Yet we also know that the federal government's expertise in this area (given the work done by the Translation Bureau) is recognized world-wide. Therefore, I expect VANOC and the federal government to address this issue, and as soon as possible. The games should serve as an example of Canada's leadership in language services.

Another issue that concerns me is signage. Visitors will not distinguish between municipal, provincial, VANOC or federal government signage. As I mentioned in my report, the federal government and VANOC must exercise their leadership role with other partners, so that all signage is available in both official languages.

● (0915)

It is also important that VANOC and the federal government not neglect their own bilingual signage obligations.

[*English*]

The Municipality of Whistler is a case in point. This municipality decided of its own accord to ensure that services are provided in both English and French, and that it would offer cultural programming reflecting our linguistic duality. Other municipalities could learn from Whistler's example.

My office has recently launched an awareness campaign among federal institutions. The experience of Canadian and foreign visitors, journalists, and athletes will largely depend on the work done by federal institutions. In addition to our Canadian athletes, foreign athletes, namely those from 30 francophone countries, will arrive in Vancouver, and their Canadian Olympic experience will begin the moment they set foot in the country. This awareness campaign is aimed at intervention at various levels, from deputy ministers as much as from public servants in charge of implementing programs and initiatives related to the games, and in many areas, such as security, transportation, and front-line services to the public.

In terms of best practices and encouraging initiatives, Parks Canada will be preparing a DVD for its employees on "active offer". Other institutions will be reminding their employees of the importance of active offer, and of measures to take so that members of the public can receive service in the official language of their choice.

Furthermore, my staff have met many highly motivated people who are eager to provide visitors and athletes with a positive experience. To do this, they must not only have resources, but also the knowledge that linguistic duality is a priority for senior management. Willingness on the front lines will not translate into coherent action unless it's supported by strong leadership at the head of every institution.

In closing, I believe there's still a lot of work to be done between now and February 2010. I will continue to closely follow the preparations, and I intend to produce a follow-up to our study. This follow-up report will be released in the fall, so that last-minute adjustments can be made, if necessary.

The government must show leadership and usher Canada's linguistic duality into the global limelight. I hope that all partners will rise to the occasion and that Canada will continue to be perceived as an international leader in linguistic duality.

● (0920)

[*Translation*]

Thank you all for your attention. I would like to take the remaining time to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Commissioner.

Before giving Mr. Rodriguez the floor, like you, I must emphasize the importance of the bilingual face of the games, particularly during the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games, both from a linguistic and a cultural perspective.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): That is exactly it.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I absolutely agree, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Good afternoon, I welcome you all. It is always a pleasure to see you here.

I can see that you have worked very seriously on the Olympic Games and that this has concerned you for some time. I have taken note of three or four components in your presentation.

First of all, you stated that you have no power to intervene in the broadcasting contract. I concede that point.

You also stated that some francophones could be deprived of the opportunity to watch the Olympic Games in their language, and as a result, the consortium will have to continue to seek solutions.

I wonder if these solutions exist; if so, what are they?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I know that at the CRTC hearings, the Chairman of the CRTC strongly encouraged the consortium to continue its discussions with Radio-Canada.

I am also aware that the consortium has done an enormous amount of work to broaden the impact of French broadcasting. Discussions are underway with some 200 small cable companies to ensure that the unscrambling, which is currently being negotiated with the major cable companies, will also be accessible to the small companies.

I feel that all means are valid in order to ensure that Canadians will have access to the games, and I will continue to exert pressure in that regard. It is important that everyone who takes this issue seriously continue to maintain pressure on the consortium to ensure that they are exploring every possible means.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You are right. We also dealt with this issue at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Radio-Canada does not represent a real solution for us, because we discussed this with its representatives, who told us that they had lost the bid and that it was the problem of those who won the bid. In their opinion, they feel they should not be asked to lend a hand. You are right, we will have to follow this very closely.

The percentage of athletes who come from Quebec is very high. In fact, over 50% of the Canadian athletes are from Quebec, and as a result, they are largely francophone. You spoke of certain concerns regarding local signage, but what about businesses? We cannot force the hotels, restaurants and various businesses the tourists will frequent because they are part of the private sector. Are efforts being made nevertheless? Is any pressure being brought to bear on them?

Mr. Graham Fraser: First of all, I will be very clear: this is beyond my purview. We can frankly discuss the challenges, but I do not have the power to require anything, given that the Act does not apply to private business.

Furthermore, I was very struck by the fact that the British Columbia hotel industry is very aware of the francophone presence. Often, there are francophones who work in the hotels. People joke that there are two accents in Whistler, the Australian one and the Quebec one. There are also more than 60,000 francophones in British Columbia, of which 90% come from elsewhere.

Also, the British Columbia RDÉE has signed an agreement with Industry Canada intended to target the hotel industry. Following this very targeted effort, the francophone sector is the only sector in tourism that has grown. Also, VANOC has ensured that all of the Vancouver and Whistler hotels have cable access to French television. I have often stayed in hotels, and looked in vain for RDI. I was therefore assured that there will be no problems regarding access to French television in the hotels.

● (0925)

The Chair: Don't worry, Mr. Rodriguez, people will be able to watch the leaders' debate.

We will continue with Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to all of you.

On March 31 of this year, we had witnesses from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, as well as an assistant deputy minister, and we discussed the Vancouver Olympic Games of 2010. During your presentation, Mr. Fraser, you spoke of the cultural wealth of our communities. Ms. Bossé, of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada,

pointed out how her organization is unhappy. I will read you the passage in question and I would like to hear your reaction to it:

We were rather displeased to hear that the French language component for the February 12 countdown to the Olympics show consisted of one musician who himself admitted that he had probably been chosen because of his francophone name. [...] Among the participants there is the Quebec-based group Beast, which sings in English, Bell Orchestre which is a Quebec instrumental group that has a unilingual English website and the Manitoba Métis Music and Dance group which we've heard present a video of Louis Riel over the course of its performance.

That is all there was that was even slightly francophone. We heard there was a choreographer whose work was shown. My colleague, Ms. Guay, responded to that by saying: "By the way, Madam, French is not a choreography but a language."

This happened with VANOC on February 12, 2009; it's quite recent. It is therefore one year before the games as such. This is where we are at in terms of the quality of French, culturally speaking.

I would like to hear your comments on this and know how we can send a clear message to VANOC to tell them that we are not satisfied with their way of viewing French cultural expression for all of Canada.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Personally, I was very disappointed. I appreciate the intervention that you have made here. I have been in touch with members of the VANOC board. We discussed the issue. The only positive aspect of this is that it happened at the countdown stage and not at the launch of the games. We have 10 months in order to get things on track. I think that the committee sent a very strong message. Others did so as well, particularly the FCFA. I think that in a certain way, the situation speaks for itself. Claiming that a choreographer is a component of francophone culture shows obviously that the presence of French is minimal, in my opinion.

● (0930)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I would say it is adding insult to injury, but the fact remains that we can still give people a chance. I asked Ms. Mounier, who is an assistant deputy minister at Heritage Canada, if we could go so far as cutting VANOC's funding if they did not deal more seriously with the French fact. It would be an extreme measure. In fact, she said yes. We are therefore talking about cutting their funding if the contribution agreements are not respected.

I would like to know what deadline we should give these people. They have been preparing for some years now. If it was up to me, I would have given responsibility for this file to the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique a long time ago. These people are sensitive to the French fact and even the English fact, much more than VANOC seems to be, in fact.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Throughout my career as a journalist, I faced daily deadlines. In the case of the Olympics, the deadline is clear. I can tell you a bit about our own deadlines and the way in which we will keep up the pressure to ensure that linguistic duality is respected. We have just wrapped up our awareness campaign for federal institutions. We will come back in the fall with the follow-up study. We want to be a presence. We are discussing the specific way in which to respond spontaneously on the site. Therefore, we are organizing our timelines. VANOC's are very clear.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau. Later on, we will have an in-camera discussion during our proceedings on the timing for the appearance of people from VANOC before our committee.

Mr. Godin.

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

I would first of all like to welcome the commissioner and his team.

I do not want to spend too much time on this issue. I do not know how events will unfold. Perhaps recommendations could be made to CTV, who obtained the contract to broadcast the games. Other technologies exist today. I do not know where these figures come from, but I heard that 5% of people would not have access to a broadcast of the games in their official language. I do not know if you, as commissioner, have a team that can determine whether or not these figures are precise.

Have you heard talk of this percentage?

Mr. Graham Fraser: The figure I heard was 4%, but I do not really trust the figures that are bandied about. Everyone has their favourite statistic, and I do not want to get involved in that debate.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What are CTV's figures? Four percent? Five percent?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe CTV said that 96% of the population would be served.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Well, I think perhaps there could be an agreement with other broadcasters to make sure that both official language groups in this country may access the games. Satellites exist. They could be used to serve the other 4% of the population, so these people could, for instance, receive a signal free of charge for three months. Afterwards, they may perhaps become future subscribers. So, something needs to be done to reach 100 percent of the population, to ensure that both communities, both official languages are considered. I would accept the figure quoted by CTV. If it is actually 15% and they want to make us believe that it is 4%, I am prepared to accept the latter. It is less expensive, but the satellite signal should be provided by these people.

• (0935)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, I know that there have been some discussions about ensuring that, in communities where there is a concentration of people who do not have access to cable, a satellite feed be offered in community centres. I do not know where these discussions stand, but I know a number of people who have made this suggestion, which I consider an excellent idea, one which we should look into. I do not want to be in a position where I am negotiating downward on the rights of Canadians to have access to the games.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I do not understand what you are saying about negotiating downward. Does that mean there has been a violation of the act?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It is not a matter of legislation, because this is a private contract. I have already entertained questions on the percentage which I would find acceptable. I do not want to enter into the percentage game. I want all Canadians to have access to the games.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Absolutely. That is why I am raising this point. It may be possible to offer satellite boxes, satellite television, for the small 4% of the population outstanding.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think it is a very good suggestion, sir.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The other subject is Tourism British Columbia. What appears on their Web site is regrettable.

[*English*]

I really find this totally unacceptable. I don't know if Tourism British Columbia is listening today, but we have two official languages in our country.

It's so sad to see on their Internet site the different countries with different languages. They have Australia. And Canada is there, but when you press "Canada", the site is only in English. They have Mexico, which, for sure, probably will not be in French. And they have the United States and the United Kingdom, and everything there except French, whereas we have over a million francophone people outside of Quebec, across the country. In British Columbia there have been big numbers of francophones.

This is an international site. What about France, which will be a participant in our Olympics?

I find it very sad that they have not fixed it yet, or believe or say they're not covered by the law and don't have to do it. Yet it's the B. C. tourist site that is promoting the Olympics for our country.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. We can get back to that point during the next round. We will continue with Mr. Petit.

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

Good morning, Mr. Fraser, and welcome to your team. This morning we welcome you as our committee's favourite commissioner, as was stated earlier.

I would like to start we a preamble to be sure of the tenure of your recommendations. I would draw your attention to the document you prepared so that committee members may see how things have evolved thus far.

First of all, the committee's goal is to notice problems, point them out to you and, perhaps, help you rectify them. If everything was perfect, we would not need a committee. It is precisely because there are problems that we are trying our best to address them. As Mr. Godin said earlier, there are problems. We are here precisely to raise them with you.

I would like to draw your attention to the first recommendation you made in your document. I will read it and then refer to another recommendation, which I would appreciate your views on. The recommendation reads as follows "That, in future agreements, Canadian Heritage strengthen provisions pertaining to services provided by third parties..." I stopped at the words "third parties". Based on our discussion this may mean television, Tourism British Columbia, individuals who do not necessarily report to government but to whom the Official Languages Act applies.

Your recommendation 13 reads as follows:

That VANOC add language clauses to agreements with future sponsors and, with the support of the Federal Games Secretariat, strongly encourage existing sponsors to use both official languages in their advertising activities.

There are major sponsors like Samsung, Coca-Cola, etc. Have you received or seen what they are preparing? At the very least, have you made recommendations to them? If we are striving for the acceptance, support and promotion of linguistic duality and certain sponsors, for instance Air Canada, are not, then we have a problem.

Given that it is your first recommendation, have you looked into third parties? You seem to be fixated on third parties which seem to be dragging their heels, if I may. I would like to hear your explanations. What have you noticed so far and what can you recommend to them? As a committee what can we do? We could, for instance, issue a requirement for third parties to respect the Official Languages Act in its entirety.

• (0940)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I will probably defer to my colleagues so they may provide you with additional detail.

First of all a third party would be, to my understanding, an entity with whom there is a contractual agreement. For instance, the federal government signed a contract with tenants, signatories of an agreement. In the current situation, some stakeholders are not third parties. For instance, Tourism B.C. is not, because it does not receive funding from the federal government; there is no agreement. The multi-party agreement does not apply. It is a provincial agency funded through hotel tax revenues. So, we can bring pressure to bear on this agency, inspire it or discuss the importance of official languages. I have indeed had this type of conversation. However, it is not a third party, technically speaking.

Is my definition of a third party correct?

Mrs. Johane Tremblay (Acting Assistant Commissioner, Policy and Communications Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Indeed, some obligations apply to federal institutions when third parties act on their behalf. Tourism B.C. is a good example, because it does not act on behalf of the Canadian Tourism Commission, for instance. They are two separate entities. There is no agreement between these two parties.

Some recommendations have to do with third parties. In the annex you will find obligations which apply when third parties act on behalf of VANOC. The recommendation was to the effect that the provision on obligations applying to third parties was not forceful enough.

There are also obligations which apply to sponsors that are not third parties. The recommendation you mentioned does aim to ensure that when there are agreements with national sponsors, there is indeed a language clause, to ensure advertising be done in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I would like to add a technical detail. One of our problems is that the sponsors who deal with the International Olympic Committee, like Pepsi-Cola or Samsung, which you mentioned, are not national sponsors. But if VANOC reaches an agreement with a company that produces, for example, shirts, hats,

or other things like that for VANOC, then the multi-party agreement applies, including linguistic obligations.

The Chair: I don't want to be accused of bias, Mr. Fraser, and so I must interrupt you and ask Mr. D'Amours to continue.

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

Thank you, Mr. Fraser, and thanks to your colleagues for being with us today. There are two very important points that I would like to raise. I will refer, as my colleague Mr. Nadeau did earlier, to the committee meeting of March 31. People from the Department of Canadian Heritage raised a point that I found completely unacceptable. Sometimes we hear things that appear completely illogical. They were talking about volunteers, and we know that they are important. They are the ones who will make a difference and who will ensure that people who come to the Vancouver-Whistler region can receive services in French. They were talking about the number of volunteers, but the witness told us that these people knew how to speak French in varying degrees. How can a francophone express him or herself in French in varying degrees? It is all very well to say that there are varying degrees, but I am not sure that francophones understand their language in varying degrees.

• (0945)

Mr. Graham Fraser: My understanding of the expression “in varying degrees” is that it is somewhat the same as what exists for public servants. There are varying degrees of language requirements. Some requirements are for basic French or English. In order for a volunteer to give directions to a visitor, he or she does not have to have the same degree of knowledge of the language as someone who must carry on a more detailed conversation, give instructions...

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: But Mr. Fraser, there are unilingual francophones who will be travelling to that region.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I agree completely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: We cannot afford to provide varying degrees of French. I'm sorry, but if we're talking about unilingual francophones, then their ability to understand is that of a unilingual francophone.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I agree completely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: It's all very well and good to have 1,000, 10,000 or 20,000 volunteers... If I may, I would like to make a comparison. All kinds of recommendations have been made in the last little while. The Senate Committee on Official Languages made recommendations in February of 2007 and in June of 2008. You also made recommendations in December 2008. However, we are reliving what happened in February, after the countdown ceremony, despite the fact that they had been told, including by us several times... This raises all kinds of questions. I will use an expression we use back home: I really am afraid that we will engage in some badmouthing after the fact, once the Olympic Games are over, because it seems that very few people understand what is at stake. I understand that people might say they are interested in this matter, as you said, but there comes a time when you have to translate words into action. In the past, they were told to pay attention to this, and that we want that. We asked them how they intended to deal with this issue or that one. And yet, less than a year before the games are to begin, and despite all the recommendations which have been made, and everything which has been said, and despite your presence, it seems that the only thing which is happening is that the message is going in one ear and out the other. After the games, there is a risk that the services provided in French will be criticized, and we know that it will be a long time before Canada obtains the Olympic Games again. Let's be realistic: it will probably not happen in the next 10 years. I get the feeling we are missing the boat. Perhaps they feel that they have enough leeway to make it through to the other side, without having to respect the requirements, and once the games have started, it won't matter any more. I'm worried. I might be mistaken; I sure hope so. However, I have serious concerns because, as I said, it seems that the message is going in one ear and out the other. The message is going in and out, and ultimately nothing is really being done to ensure that francophones outside Quebec and elsewhere throughout the world will see their language respected.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I completely share the concerns of the member. If there is one example of an individual I have in mind, and whom I refer to when I speak to the authorities, it is the unilingual francophone traveller. I think we should keep this person uppermost in our minds. You are afraid that, once the games are over, there will be a lot of second-guessing, and that is precisely why we undertook the study 18 months before the start of the games. That is why we have engaged in an awareness campaign, that is why we will conduct a follow-up to the study, that is why, on a regular basis, given the complaints we receive, we are in contact with the authorities, from British Columbia, on a formal and informal basis, to tell them about the complaints we have received.

As for me, I have a double mandate: to encourage and to disturb. I intend to use these two aspects of my mandate to ensure that we succeed.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fraser, I think that you understood my reaction to the events of last February. I'm re-reading your opening statement. You say: "Respect for linguistic duality must be an early reflex during the

planning and execution stages, not an afterthought." We've already had one afterthought. Is there going to be another one once the games are over?

I would also like to talk about broadcasting, an issue which I'm deeply concerned about. It will not be possible to broadcast the Olympic Games to all Canadians. It seems that is not possible. We have not received any guarantees. VANOC cannot do anything about it. I don't know if you, Mr. Fraser, can do anything about it, but we certainly will look foolish if our country is unable to broadcast the Olympic Games to all Canadians and Quebecers, when other countries will be able to do so for their citizens. It will happen in France, in the United States and elsewhere. If they can broadcast the Olympic Games to all of their citizens, and we cannot, we will look like a bunch of idiots.

I would like to know what you think about this.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, I think we are facing a dilemma. The contract was not negotiated with a Canadian institution; this is a private contract negotiated between the International Olympic Committee and the consortium.

Ms. Monique Guay: I am very aware of that, but I think that we can apply significant pressure on the companies which are involved. You have a great deal of power in the area of official languages. Furthermore we are elected officials. I believe that if we work together, we will be able to apply pressure to the broadcasters to ensure that everyone has access to the games, especially since they are taking place in Canada, and that other countries will broadcast the games to all of their citizens. It doesn't make any sense.

I will briefly come back to VANOC, Mr. Fraser, since I only have five minutes. You yourself said that VANOC is ill-equipped to ensure that services are provided adequately. I would like to know more about that. What are your greatest concerns with regard to VANOC? We don't hear much about that. VANOC's members have significant responsibilities. Do they have the financial resources they need? I raised the matter briefly a little while ago. Do they have enough personnel to ensure that all services will be provided, in French in particular, since I am not really worried about services in English?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There is a gap between the current level of funding and what is needed to ensure sufficient interpretation and the translation of documents during the games. From the outset, people underestimated the challenge of getting enough people with sufficient experience in simultaneous interpretation for an event which has its own history and its own techniques. As you all know, interpretation is not only a science, it's an art.

In my statement, I said that it was very important for the government and VANOC to immediately address these issues. For 10 days, there will be a huge demand for interpretation, and it will not be easy to deliver the goods.

• (0955)

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Fraser, do you have any influence over VANOC? You are, after all, the Commissioner of Official Languages. Can you look over VANOC's shoulder and admonish it if it is not doing its job?

I hope with all my heart that, once the Olympic Games are over, people will not think we are amateurs because we were not even able to provide services to Canadians in both official languages, when that was done elsewhere. I hope that efforts will be made towards that objective and that you will apply significant pressure on the organizations involved, including VANOC, to ensure that the services are there for both the athletes and in the area of broadcasting.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Guay.

We will continue with Mr. Godin, and then it will be Mr. Chong's turn. I changed the order of the speakers.

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

I would like to come back to the Vancouver tourist site, an agency that belongs to the province of British Columbia.

[English]

Mr. Graham Fraser: That is Tourism B.C.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, that's Tourism BC.

In appendix A of an agreement reached between the federal government, the Province of British Columbia, the City of Vancouver, the Resort Municipality of Whistler, VANOC, the Canada Paralympic Committee and the Vancouver 2010 Bid Corporation, Canada's official language requirements are outlined.

If it is not covered, could it be a voluntary omission? I can't imagine such a thing. Canada has two official languages and the Government of Canada is spending some \$26 million on advertising for the Olympic Games. But despite all this, an agency that belongs to British Columbia has no official language obligation. The Olympic Games do not only represent Vancouver, but all of Canada. All the languages are there but French.

Sometimes we wonder why we have to pass legislation to ensure that the judges on the Supreme Court are bilingual. Maybe we should pass a law to ensure that in future, the Olympic Games are presented in both official languages.

I would like to hear your comments on this subject.

Mr. Graham Fraser: First, we received a complaint about BC Tourism, and thus I will have to limit my remarks because of the need for confidentiality. All I can tell you is that I have been in contact personally with BC Tourism and the representatives assured me that they are working on this file in cooperation with the British Columbia Economic Development Corporation in order to rectify the situation.

I can't go into any more detail, but I take this matter seriously. We are doing everything possible, both officially and unofficially, to exert pressure, offer encouragement, and shake things up in order to achieve our shared objectives, for example, those regarding linguistic duality for the 2010 Olympic Games.

• (1000)

Mr. Yvon Godin: In that case, Mr. Chair, I would say that the federal government did not do its duty when it signed agreements with British Columbia knowing full well that we are in a bilingual country and that both languages must be respected. In my opinion,

the government failed to do its duty at the time the agreement was signed, if the necessary provisions are not there.

Also, Mr. Chair, I would suggest perhaps that our committee send a letter to BC Tourism to express our dissatisfaction with this matter and ask them to rectify the situation as quickly as possible. And that does not mean after the Olympic Games, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We have some committee business right after the appearance of the commissioner. But we'll come back to this subject.

Mr. Chong, the floor is yours.

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

[English]

I'd like to first ask a question about the broadcasting of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. In your opening remarks, you indicated that while the consortium has put in place encouraging measures to address access for minority communities to broadcast in their language of choice, they're not enough to ensure complete nationwide coverage. It's a hypothetical question I'm going to ask you. If the public broadcaster had been awarded the games, would this have been a non-issue or less of an issue?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It would not have been an issue. The public broadcaster has 100% coverage.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The other question I had concerns the volunteers and the staff who will be on the ground during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Will there will be a sufficient number of volunteers and staff people who are bilingual to ensure that visitors to this country or francophones from other parts of the country will be able to access services in the language of their choice? Are you confident that this is going to happen?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Confident is a very strong word, Mr. Chairman. I am hopeful that will happen. I know that VANOC is devoting substantial effort to recruiting bilingual volunteers and that there have been agreements with Quebec and New Brunswick. There were some rough patches in this process. People who applied submitted their CVs in French and were asked to resubmit their CVs in English. I think the problem has been cleared up.

At this point, I'm not prepared to use the word "confident". I'm raising this issue as often as I can and in as many ways as I can. I am hopeful. I am certainly working, we are all working, so that everybody can be aware of the challenges and everybody can do what they can to ensure that those challenges are met.

Hon. Michael Chong: How many volunteers are we looking at in terms of the Olympic and Paralympic Games?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't have a number on the tip of my tongue.

It's actually in the report on page 22. They estimate that they will need about 25,000 volunteers.

Hon. Michael Chong: Have all of them been recruited at this point? Or does that recruitment continue right up to—

Mr. Graham Fraser: As far as I understand, that recruitment process is going on as we speak.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Do you have any idea how many of those will be bilingual?

• (1005)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think it's unfortunately not a high enough target. Their target was 12%, or 3,000.

Hon. Michael Chong: Are they going to meet that target, do you know?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't know that.

Hon. Michael Chong: My last set of questions concerns signage—municipal, provincial, federal signage—around the games. You indicated that Whistler has decided that it will put up bilingual signs, that it will provide bilingual services. What have the other municipalities in the lower Vancouver mainland decided? Have any of them decided to go in that direction?

Mr. Graham Fraser: My understanding is that those discussions are still under way.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. In terms of the other partners involved with this, have they entered into those discussions as well?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think so.

Carsten.

Mr. Carsten Quell (Director, Policy and Research, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Sorry. Have other federal partners...?

Hon. Michael Chong: We're talking about the non-municipal partners in the games. Have they also considered ensuring that their services are available in both official languages, whether they be staff persons, signage, or literature?

Mr. Carsten Quell: We don't have any information on that right now, but as a follow-up to our study, we will be going back to the people who were interviewed as part of the study. So we hope to have more information on the implementation in the fall.

Hon. Michael Chong: The final question concerns the opening and closing ceremonies.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong, we will have to proceed.

I think it is now time to consult the committee members. We have completed the first two rounds, so we could do a third and final round and then thank our witness. We have a great deal of work to do with our current business. Do the committee members wish to proceed to a third and final round? Fine, let's go ahead. We'll begin with Ms. Zarac.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Fraser. In your December report, you referred to a lack of funding in the areas of translation and interpretation, and you spoke about this once again today. Your report was made public in early December and since that time, we have been hit by an economic crisis that has changed matters somewhat. You asked that

Canadian Heritage, in order to overcome the major obstacles that you mentioned in your report, provide additional support.

I have a question in three parts. First, given the current economic context, do you have concerns? Second, have you received a reply from Canadian Heritage? Does the minister intend to provide additional support? Third—and this is important, because the government is faced with this crisis, but so are our partners—have things been confirmed with our partners to ensure that there will not be any cuts in the area of linguistic duality?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, I have concerns, one of which is that the government's investment in infrastructure, to kickstart the economy, seems to focus on very concrete things and be carried out in a fairly traditional fashion. Tourism is one of these fairly significant sectors and, as I said in my preceding answers, francophone tourism is one of the only tourism sectors on the rise in British Columbia. I think that the Olympic Games represent a major opportunity, not only for physical infrastructure, but also to strengthen Canada's linguistic duality and to establish—if I may put it this way—the human infrastructure required to welcome francophones who may wish to visit us. If we miss the opportunity, I think it would be a real shame.

To answer another of your questions, we have not received any answer, as far as I know, from Canadian Heritage concerning additional funding.

• (1010)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Are you going to go back to Canadian Heritage to ensure that linguistic duality is respected? I understand that the infrastructure must be in place, but it's important that we don't miss the boat on this one. I think that very close monitoring must be done to ensure that the funding is there for linguistic duality. Are these efforts being made?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There are measures in the budget. Yes, we have done monitoring and the Economic Action Plan provides for subsidies for the Canadian Tourism Commission to support promotional and advertising activities. I believe that in the tourism sector, the amounts are already designated. We do have the intention of reminding both Canadian Heritage and the Canadian Tourism Commission that a portion of these funds must be used to underscore the importance of linguistic duality.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You will be publishing a report on the monitoring you have done and make it public in November of this year, I believe. If there is a problem of underfunding at that time, will there still be time to take the measures required before the Games?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I certainly hope so. We will make an effort to ensure that this report is ready as soon as possible this fall. All of our recommendations have been designed to be useful, and several of them have been followed and appreciated, so I don't want to give the impression that there is any resistance. We recommended that a committee be created, and that was done. The deputy minister and the former prime minister of France are both members of that committee. I think the will is there, and we are monitoring the situation as closely as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac.

Mr. Galipeau, do you wish to put a question to our witness?

Mr. Chong.

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

[*English*]

I have a brief question about the opening and closing ceremonies for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. You made no mention of them in either your recommendations or your opening remarks. These are probably the singular most important events of the games, because that's when the audience in attendance will be the greatest and the television audience will be the greatest.

Have you reviewed the preparations and planning for the opening and closing ceremonies to ensure they reflect the linguistic duality of the country?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have not. There is an entirely appropriate shadow of secrecy around the preparation for these ceremonies. The Olympic committee, like previous Olympic committees, wants it to be a surprise for viewers around the world. But the consultant for the committee—which in addition to the people I mentioned also includes a representative from the francophone community—will be involved in approving the content of the ceremonies.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have no further questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Is that fine for you?

Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fraser, during your presentation, you said the following:

VANOC has implemented part of Recommendation 17 by forming an official languages advisory committee. As I recommended, Canadian Heritage will prepare a formal quarterly progress report.

You say that you will be tabling a report in September, therefore in a little over three months. I believe we will be coming to the conclusion that significant efforts will have to be made. We want to make sure that we will not appear to be poorly organized in the eyes of the world. Remember that there are provisions on official languages in the Olympic Charter, in Rule 24. I would like to know if it would be possible for you to table reports with us much more frequently, every quarter if necessary, so that we can react. By waiting until September, we will have very little time within which to react. Year 2010 is not far away. Moreover, I want to remind everyone that China had no problem holding Olympic Games in

Beijing in the two official languages. I do not see why we could not do so at home.

• (1015)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We take note of the members' request. I am glad that she has made reference to the Beijing experience. I find it encouraging that a former French prime minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who sits on the advisory committee, was the Grand Témoin de la Francophonie in Beijing. I expect that the francophonie will announce the Grand Témoin for the Olympic Games in Vancouver by the end of the month.

This person would be an important participant who would push for the Olympic Games to be a success in terms of linguistic duality.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Chairman, I would like the committee to make an official request for quarterly reports from Mr. Fraser's office, so that we can see where we stand. If we can do so in the case of Heritage Canada, we should also be able to do so for official languages. In this way, we will be kept up to date.

I am not alone in this. Ms. Zarak shared her concerns with the committee as well. The committee must be aware of what is happening in order that it be able to react by speaking to those involved or inviting them to appear before us so that they can explain why things have not moved forward quickly and methodically, with a goal to being ready for the Olympic Games in 2010.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Guay.

As the saying goes, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". That is the theme that is emerging from our meeting this morning.

We thank the witness and his team for having come to discuss the Olympic Games with us. Your report will be published on May 26. As we are dealing with the issue of post-secondary education, we will certainly have the opportunity to see you again during the next few weeks.

Mr. Fraser, I thank you for having participated in the committee's work.

We will suspend for a few minutes before continuing our work in camera.

[*Meeting continues in camera*]

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