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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. This morning, we will be hearing from Mr. Toews, Mrs. d'Auray and Mr. O'Sullivan.

I would like to simply mention that Mr. Toews will be with us until only 10 o'clock, but that Mr. O'Sullivan and Mrs. d'Auray will remain here in order to answer any of your supplementary questions. We will therefore begin with Mr. Toews. After his presentation, we will have a first round of questions and answers.

[English]

Mr. Toews, good morning. We're happy to have you with us this morning.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you. It's my pleasure.

Would you like me to start, then, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Yes, please.

Hon. Vic Toews: Thank you very much.

Members of the committee, Madam Chair, thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak to you today.

I have with me today two individuals whom you've no doubt met before: Michelle d'Auray, the chief human resources officer at the Treasury Board Secretariat, and Marc O'Sullivan, the acting senior vice-president of the workforce and workplace renewal sector, office of the chief human resources officer.

As you know, our government is committed to official languages, and we have made many efforts to ensure Canadians fully benefit from linguistic duality and its advantages.

As the President of the Treasury Board, I am responsible, first, for ensuring that Treasury Board develops and coordinates federal principles and programs for the application of the parts of the Official Languages Act dealing with delivering services in both official languages at offices designated as bilingual, in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's in part IV of the act.

Second, I am responsible for creating and maintaining work environments that are conducive to the effective use of both official languages in regions designated as bilingual for language of work purposes. That is in part V of the act.

Third, I am responsible for ensuring the equitable participation of members of both official language communities in federal workforces and equal employment and advancement opportunities for both communities in federal institutions. That is part VI of the act.

Complementary to the efforts of my colleague, the Hon. James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, I also play a role in applying part VII of the act in institutions. Specifically, I ensure that initiatives that Treasury Board is asked to approve take into account the enhancement and development of official language minority communities.

In addition, at the end of each fiscal year I am responsible for tabling in Parliament a report on the official languages program in institutions that are subject to the act.

I know that the Commissioner of Official Languages has expressed concerns about the creation of the office of the chief human resources officer. I would like to clarify this issue for the committee members.

As you know, on February 6 the Prime Minister announced a new human resources governance structure that provides for the creation of the office of the chief human resources officer within the Treasury Board Secretariat. The new office was established on March 2, 2009, by combining the functions of the former Canada Public Service Agency and the sectors within Treasury Board Secretariat responsible for pension, benefits, labour relations, and compensation.

In terms of official languages, the mandate of the office of the chief human resources officer includes providing support for institutions subject to the act to help them achieve their official languages objectives. Let me be clear: the restructuring has not in any way changed my responsibilities, nor those of the Treasury Board. The office of the chief human resources officer has the same responsibilities with respect to official languages as the agency had.

I would also like to recognize 2009 as the 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act. Let me mention a few key achievements.

First, slightly over 90% of official language minority communities have access to federal services in their language. If we think back to 40 years ago, when communities had to communicate with federal institutions in the language of the majority, this is incredible progress. In 40 years we have gone from a practically unilingual public service to a bilingual public service in which employees can generally use the official language of their choice at work, subject, of course, to obligations relating to services to the public, other employees, and the supervision of employees. The percentage of bilingual positions increased from 25% in 1978 to 40% in 2007.

Linguistic duality is a cornerstone of our national identity and a source of immeasurable economic, social, and political benefits for all Canadians. Our government is committed to strengthening this duality. Our road map for Canada's linguistic duality for 2008-2013 includes an unprecedented five-year commitment to provide \$1.1 billion in funding in support of the road map and is a sign of this commitment.

As our Prime Minister said, and I quote, the road map:

...reiterates the commitment of the Government of Canada to linguistic duality and our two official languages. It lays out the path we intend to follow over the next five years to build on Canada's sturdy foundations. English- and French-speaking Canadians have come a long way together since the founding of Quebec City.

This Roadmap points the way to an even stronger future and a more unified Canada.

Additionally, our government has a centre of excellence for official languages within the Treasury Board Secretariat, which will continue to be a leader and closely monitor official languages developments in federal institutions. This centre of excellence is working on including official languages in each of the four priority areas for public service renewal: first, integrated human resource planning; second, recruitment; third, employee development; and fourth, enabling infrastructure.

I would also like to point out that one of the objectives for 2009 is to continue recognizing the place of Canada's two official languages in the workplace. Overall, the situation is positive. According to the 2005 public service employees survey, 86% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice when they prepare written materials; 90% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice when they communicate with their supervisors; 85% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice during meetings in their work units; and 93% of employees say that the material and tools provided for work are available in the official language of their choice.

In closing, linguistic duality is a major asset for both the public service and Canadians. Canadians need a modern public service that provides services in both official languages and is representative of the various communities making up Canadian society.

So, Madam Chair, my officials and I are happy to take your questions. Thank you.

● (0910)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zsazac): First of all, let me thank you for your presentation. You mentioned that you wanted to clarify the situation, and it is following the commissioner's visit here that the committee had invited you, because of the concerns he had. So thank you for coming here to clarify the situation.

I will give the first round of questions to Mr. Rodriguez.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Good morning, Minister. Welcome to the committee.

I would like to thank each of you for coming here today.

Minister, do you speak French?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: No, I don't.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Do you not feel that someone with your responsibilities should be bilingual?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I consider that quite an insult. I speak two other languages other than English. I don't speak French, but I should feel free to speak the official language of my choice. For you to even ask that question is an insult.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: This is not an insult, Minister. I, too, speak other languages. However, there are two official languages in Canada: French and English. In my opinion, when you hold a position such as yours, it is important that you be able to express yourself in both official languages and understand them. And here I am not referring to languages other than French and English. I, too, speak other languages.

Do you not think that deputy ministers should be bilingual?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: There are official languages policies that require officials such as deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers to speak both official languages.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I am referring to deputy ministers.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm sorry, I misunderstood your question. The assistant deputy ministers are required to speak English and French to a certain level, and the deputy ministers are taken from that pool. I'm not aware of any deputy ministers who don't speak French, but you may have a point there. I don't know.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: French or English, no....

[Translation]

If there are no obligations with respect to deputy ministers, I think it is important to give some thought to the matter.

You referred to the Roadmap for linguistic duality in your presentation. I am under the impression that not many details have been provided on this issue. Statements of principle have been proposed and discussed. However, I would like to know what your role is, as a minister, with respect to this Roadmap.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I know that generally speaking, the Treasury Board's responsibilities related to official languages are supportive ones. Treasury Board is responsible for overseeing the overall application of the act with regard to services to the public, language of work, and equitable participation. In that context, it adapts and adopts policy instruments, and it oversees the status of the official languages program.

With respect to the road map, there are three departments specifically charged with responsibility for that, and they are Canadian Heritage, Health, and Justice. Those departments bear the responsibility for implementing that program.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That does not seem to be very clear to me.

Do you spend any time on official languages in your capacity as minister? How much time do you spend on this file?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'll have to check my records and get back to you on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Do you have any idea how much time you spend on this file? It seems to me that you have to look into a good number of things, Minister, and that if the officials were not here, you would not have been able to answer even one question up until now.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I couldn't answer that with them, or without them, without checking my files.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I don't get the feeling that we are getting very far right now.

A few years ago, we adopted Bill S-3, which furthered the Official Languages Act somewhat. The bill pertained to the development of minority official language communities.

Do you feel that you have a role to play in this area?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I've indicated my responsibilities in respect of parts IV, V, and VI of the act. I would indicate that Treasury Board submissions have to ensure access to services.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

We will now turn the floor over to Mr. Nadeau.

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

Good morning, Minister, Mrs. d'Auray, Mr. O'Sullivan.

As Mr. Rodriguez was pointing out, there is some discomfort in Canada with respect to official languages. There is the issue of the assimilation of minority linguistic groups, which we are all very familiar with. Francophones are being assimilated. Mr. Toews, you know something about this, since you come from Manitoba. People in that province have worked very hard, but the level of assimilation remains very high. I think the Canadian government should reconsider the following question, which is important. If the government wants to demonstrate a real desire to support linguistic duality in this country we call Canada, the leaders of the government should set an example. Hence, the Prime Minister and his ministers should have a good command of both French and English.

This is part of a dilemma which is obvious when we look at representatives of the Supreme Court and deputy ministers, who represent the Canadian state. You know my position on the subject and I know that you do not share it. You demonstrated this earlier. In my opinion, you should not feel insulted. As a francophone Quebecker, I find the position taken by the federal government very hard to swallow. That being said, I think that's Canada and it's unfortunate.

With respect with the Roadmap, I see that the government was going to invest \$2.7 million in this plan to ensure, I believe, that future public service employees would already be bilingual when they were hired. Do you not think that this is a prerequisite? Do you agree with this principle?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Let me address some of your initial points. I don't know if you've ever been west of Ottawa, but I come from the province of Manitoba. We have a very proud tradition of French and English there, and we have done some excellent work. When I was in provincial politics, we commissioned an individual by the name of Judge Richard Chartier, and he produced a report called "Above All, Common Sense", talking about how we can further the francophone language rights in the courts.

I represent a riding that is probably somewhere in the range of 15% to 18% francophone. My colleague from St. Boniface represents a riding with approximately the same number of francophones. There's some disagreement about who has more francophones in their riding, but I can indicate that we provide government services in Manitoba in a way that has developed francophone language rights. I'm very proud of our record.

I can point not only to the justice area, with the courts specifically, but to the policing. We have bilingual areas in my riding out of St-Pierre where the police officers are all bilingual and serve a huge area of my riding bilingually. I was very proud when I was the Minister of Justice, and continuing in my role as a regional minister, to make recommendations and to speak with the Minister of Justice about the appointment of francophone judges. For the first time in the history of Manitoba—under our government—we had three francophone judges on the court of appeal, so that any appeal could be heard in French without translation. Now, unfortunately one of those judges decided—no, no, you've indicated that we—

• (0920)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I would like you to answer my question.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Yes, and I'm responding to your comments.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Minister, I spent seven years in Saskatchewan, working to set up a French school board. French schools were abolished in 1931 and did not exist again until 1995.

In Manitoba, your province, we were fortunate to have people like George Forest who stood up. From 1890 to 1979, Franco-Manitobans did not even have the right to be tried in their language in your province, which resulted in terrible assimilation to the point where today, in Saskatchewan, there are only eight French schools, whereas there were 63 in 1931. So don't tell me that assimilation does not exist in western Canada or elsewhere. I am a Franco-Ontarian by birth, sir, and you cannot teach me any lessons about Canada.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm simply responding to some of the very erroneous statements that you left on the record. I needed to correct those, and I thank the chair for allowing me to do that.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

We will now turn the floor over to Mr. Godin.

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

Good morning, Minister. Is your deputy minister bilingual and, if so, at what level?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: That's very difficult for someone like me to understand, given that I don't speak any French, but he does speak French. I find that the more I can understand French, the poorer their French is. In fact, I can't understand him when he speaks French, so I assume it's good French.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I do not want to play cat and mouse with you. You are the boss, you are the minister. You should know whether your deputy minister, who reports to you, is bilingual. My question is clear. Is your deputy minister bilingual, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I've made it very clear that all of my officials are entitled to speak French in meetings with me if they choose to speak French. I will of course need translation. I know that the deputy minister does speak French. The level of the French would be in his public service record, and I would be happy to bring him here to have him explain directly how much French he speaks.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to know the level of competence of your deputy minister in French.

On page 39 of the Sixteenth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada, there is a table entitled "Previous Human Resources Governance Structure". Official languages are found under the heading "Implementation of the PSMA", the Public Service Modernization Act.

Could you explain to me why official languages are no longer part of this new human resources governance structure?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: The responsibilities related to official languages have not changed at all in the movement from the old structure to the

new structure. In fact, the amount of money dedicated to official languages has not changed. That has remained—

• (0925)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Minister, why don't the words "official languages" appear in the structure? Why were the words removed? Your government is telling us that, with our Roadmap and the promotion of official languages, etc., that it is establishing a new structure. So good-bye to official languages!

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: As I understand from Madame d'Auray, it is in there. It's indicated in there. Perhaps she can indicate to you where it is.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have page 39 before me. I would like to have some explanations. I am studying the new structure, and those words are not found there. In the former structure, official languages were found on the following page, but it is no longer there. Are there any words written somewhere in this report which state that we respect official languages, or whether this is part of the structure?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray (Chief Human Resources Officer, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): It is part of the structure. The components that came under the former Public Service Agency of Canada are now found in my office; they are exactly the same. The people who reported on this issue under the former structure are also here. You can see that Mr. O'Sullivan, who was formally from the agency, now reports to me. The duties, policies, anything that has to do with departmental support remain exactly the same.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So why was this reference been taken out?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Essentially, in order to simplify things, we kept the responsibility for policies and coordination. These are the aspects which are represented here and they are exactly the same.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Don't you think that sends a strange message? An individual reading the annual report and comparing both structures may wonder what happened to official languages. They're basically on your desk now, from what I gather.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: No. You're saying they're now on my desk?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, you referred to your desk.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: No, my office is responsible for that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's in your office? So, it's now within your office?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: We're talking about the structure.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They're not on your desk but in your office?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I would say that the duties, the structure, which previously fell under the agency's area of jurisdiction are now squarely within mine.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What can you tell Canadians? The report is for them, they need to be informed that it is ambiguous. We see what is going on in the area of official languages. Things aren't moving ahead at 300 miles an hour in the area of official languages. Otherwise, there would be no need for an official languages committee. What is the status of official languages in the Roadmap and what is being done in this area?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Your time is up, unfortunately.

We will now move on to Mrs. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[English]

Welcome, Minister Toews, Madame d'Auray, and Monsieur O'Sullivan; *bienvenue ici*.

I want to thank you, Minister, for helping me to get to the place where I am now. I want to put on the record for members opposite that when I became a candidate, you were very helpful in addressing the Chartier report and making me aware of it. That helped me substantially to learn about official languages in our province of Manitoba, as well as about the official language situation across the country. I commend you for your efforts.

I also want to mention that I too, as you stated, believe in knowledge, competencies, qualifications, and experiences to make up part of what we want to see in our leaders. I commend you for all of that, and I welcome your responses to some of my questions here today in that light.

The first question I would put to you, Minister, is this. You've indicated that you have a role to play in ensuring that government institutions comply with the Official Languages Act. I'd like to know what the Treasury Board does to ensure that.

Hon. Vic Toews: Thank you very much, Ms. Glover.

The responsibility of Treasury Board related to official languages is quite clear and it is in a supportive role. I should say that every institution is responsible for the application of the act within its own organization. Treasury Board, however, is responsible for overseeing the overall application of the act with regard to service to the public, language of work, and equitable participation. More specifically, it adopts policy instruments and oversees the status of the official languages programs and institutions, subject to parts IV, V, and VI of the act, as I've indicated in my preliminary comments, and particularly through the annual assessment that it asks those institutions to submit.

Of course, it also provides support, opinions, and advice to institutions through the office of the chief human resources officer. Perhaps she could add something to my comments.

• (0930)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Go ahead.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Thank you, Minister.

We do a fair amount of work in support of the organizations that are perhaps having some of the challenges in providing services to the public. We also support the coordinators of official languages.

We work with organizations to provide easy-to-use tools, for example, in understanding how they should establish bilingual positions. We are essentially the people who establish policies, as the minister indicated, but also those who facilitate and support and work very closely with departments and organizations. Ultimately, they are the ones who are responsible for meeting their obligations under the act.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Excellent. Thank you for enlightening us on that.

I want to make mention as well, Minister, that the Commissioner for Official Languages was here and spent a bit of time commending Manitoba for its French language service in the area of immigration, saying that we actually are leaders in this country. I know you had a big part to play in that as well, so I thank you for it.

I want to touch on what you just said, Madame d'Auray.

[Translation]

Ms. d'Auray, you said there were tools we could use. Which ones?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Thank you.

We provide a number of tools. For instance, if an organization or a department wants to set a level of linguistic skills for a given position, it is given the tools to establish this level objectively. We also support departments in establishing points of service which must provide services in both official languages according to census data.

We also help departments determine what they should be focusing on to facilitate the hiring of bilingual individuals. We provide a range of tools for the various organizations. We provide interpretation of questions regarding use or scope of regulations. We help the organizations a great deal.

We hold a number of meetings and discussions so that departments may share their best practices. Not everyone has the best possible ideas. What works for one department could be applied or implemented in another. We provide this type of networking and support, but ultimately the burden of responsibility rests on institutions.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you.

We will now move to the second round of questions, three minutes each. I would like to remind all members that Mr. Toews will have to leave at 10.

Mr. D'Amours.

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

I will be asking you alone to answer my questions given that the two individuals accompanying you will be staying behind for an extra hour once you've left the meeting, and that you cannot stay with us for the entire two hours.

It seems as though it is a real burden for you to be here today, all the more so given that your prime minister has asked you to be responsible for a number of aspects relating to official languages. It looks as though you'd rather be elsewhere. When we speak of official languages and bilingualism in Canada and you are told that you should perhaps be bilingual in order to serve all Canadians, you take that as an insult. I personally find it insulting that you would have the gall to make such comments. Without looking at your notes, can you tell me, with respect to language of work...

• (0935)

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, the minister has come in front of our committee to answer questions, not to be badgered by members of this committee and insulted. I would ask, Madam Chair, that you ask the members of this committee to accord the minister the respect that his office entails.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): I'm sorry, Mr. Chong, this is not a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Because this was not a point of order, I would hope my time has not been cut short.

Minister, without looking at your notes, are you able to tell me in what part language of work...

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: A point of order. I believe he's allowed to look at his notes whenever he wants. I don't think it's up to us to tell him whether he can or cannot look at his notes.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): I'm sorry, this is not a point of order either, Mrs. Glover.

[Translation]

Mr. D'Amours, please continue.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I can understand that Conservative members may not want their minister to respond, but they should have some respect for members of the opposition.

Minister, under what part of the Official Languages Act does the issue of language of work arise?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Yes?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I'm awaiting a response.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I know you're trying to belittle the whole process here. You're trying to make a mockery of it. No, no, let me finish. Hold it, you've had your questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, I asked you a question. Where can we find language of work addressed within the Official Languages Act?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Let me respond. Just have the decency to let me respond.

I came here in good faith, and the first thing that happens to me is I'm insulted. For some reason I'm less of a Canadian, I'm less entitled to hold public office, because I only speak one of the official languages. You know, for the past number of years, as a public official in Manitoba, I have worked very hard for French language rights in that province. I have stood for French language rights.

My own riding understands where I stand on the issue of French language rights. I have never hesitated to protect French language rights, and I am willing to protect minority language rights in every part of the country. I'm willing to respect those who speak French alone, unilingually. I respect those who speak English, and of course there are certain fortunate people who speak both official languages.

I'm very proud of my own daughter, who's bilingual, who went to an immersion school. I didn't have that opportunity, but I can tell you that I am as committed as anyone to the issue of bilingualism in this country, the recognition and the protection of both official languages, and for you to come here and insult me in that way is quite a disgrace. I thought we had gotten beyond that kind of situation. Unbelievable.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, there's a difference between being a Canadian citizen and having the right to speak in the language of one's choice, and being the minister responsible for the application of official languages within the public service, and for ensuring that the people providing these services are in a position to do so.

I will ask my question in other terms. In your opinion, under what part of the Official Languages Act does the issue of language of service occur? I'm only asking for a number.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I understand it's in part V.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I'm really sorry, but it's part IV.

[Translation]

It's under part IV, Minister, and not part V.

I simply changed my question. I started by referring to language of work and, to be sure that you knew the answer, I referred to language of service.

Minister, you are responsible for the application of those parts of the Official Languages Act intended to ensure that we provide services to francophones and anglophones across Canada. Yet, you yourself are not even in a position to tell me what parts of the Official Languages Act you are responsible for. That is shameful!

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Pardon me for interrupting.

[English]

I would like to make a comment at this point. I think that no one should take anything personally. The objective of the committee here is to ensure—and that's why you were invited, Mr. Toews—that the official languages are—

Hon. Vic Toews: I've been at many committees, and I've never experienced this kind of insult toward the fact that I speak only one of the official languages—never in my life. And I never believed that the Liberal Party would take that kind of position. But it's clear that the Liberal Party considers those of us who speak one official language to be less of a Canadian with the responsibilities of Canadian citizenship, including elected office and appointment to the executive. I would have found that very difficult to believe had I not heard it here.

Those are the kinds of comments that irritate people right across this country, that we are not entitled to have the same rights as everyone in this country.

• (0940)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): I'm sorry, Mr. Toews. I think this is not new to you. I'm sure it's not new to you. It's a point that's been brought up several times.

Hon. Vic Toews: It's certainly news to me in terms of the Liberal Party taking the position that because I only speak one of the official languages I am not competent to act as a—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): It is not directly directed to you; it's directed to the ministry.

I have a point of order. Go ahead, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Chair, I would just ask that as chair you run the meeting so that there is respect shown for the witnesses. It is unacceptable that there are personal attacks being levelled against the minister of the government because the opposition wants to make its point. We must treat all our witnesses with respect. If we want our committee to have credibility and to function well, Madam Chair, we must show respect. Madam Chair, it is your responsibility to ask the opposition to show respect. They can ask their questions. They can ask hard questions, but they must show respect.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Lemieux. You've made your point. That is definitely what I want, to keep that respect here.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I have never asked the minister any questions of a personal nature. I asked him questions regarding his responsibility as minister. I asked him to tell me what parts of the Official Languages Act he is responsible for.

This is his responsibility as minister. This is not his personal responsibility, or his personal right to speak one language or another. It is not his responsibility to know what parts of the act he is responsible for as minister.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

[English]

That's the point I was trying to say before, that the comments here shouldn't be taken personally. It's just a question of what you represent as a ministry.

Hon. Vic Toews: I come here and I'm told by that member and his colleague from the Liberal Party that because I don't speak the other official language, I shouldn't be a minister. I consider that a personal attack.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): That's not what I heard.

Hon. Vic Toews: Well, that's what I heard. I heard it very clearly, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): That is not what I heard, and that is why I mentioned, Mr. Toews, not to take it personally.

Hon. Vic Toews: Well, let's look at the record and see what the record says, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I have a point of order, because I began this round of questions.

I think the minister is trying to play petty politics at the expense of official languages. The questions I initially asked amount to this: if an individual is officially responsible for aspects of official languages, should he or she not, as a minister, speak both languages? Yes or no?

I'm asking the question, but the difference, Madam Chair...

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): This is not a point of order, Mr. Rodriguez. Thank you.

We will continue with questions. I would ask all members to show respect, and, Mr. Toews, I would ask that you not take comments as personal attacks.

We will now move to Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I don't think these are personal attacks, but rather serious and important questions on official languages.

I simply have a comment to make. As an employer, I would personally feel uncomfortable asking my staff to be bilingual without being so myself, quite simply. That is my own opinion.

Minister, you said in your presentation that employees can generally study the official language of their choice in the course of their duties. You also said that 86% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice when drafting documents. You say, furthermore, that 90% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice when communicating with a supervisor.

Minister, is that not a way to discourage individuals within the public service to become bilingual? I'm asking you the question because, although individuals may be able to use their mother tongue, would it not be a way to discourage them from being bilingual and from offering services themselves in both languages? Would this not essentially compel them to transfer requests for services to another individual who speaks the second official language?

It is worrisome to note, in light of your comments, that French, or the second official language, is not really important to you. I would like to hear your comments on this. I'm sincerely concerned.

• (0945)

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Actually, I don't know how you got that impression, and I'm sorry if I gave you that impression. To me, the use of both official languages is very important. The 2005 survey of the public service indicated the will or the ability of the public service, in a very high percentage, to speak the language of choice in the workplace, in speaking with their supervisors and indeed in providing written materials. In my opinion, what that does is ensure that they are encouraged to use their mother tongue, if they so choose.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Minister, I only have five minutes.

We know full well that within the public service individuals have a certain number of years to learn the second language. For some positions, bilingualism is mandatory, but they have five years to become bilingual, and if they're not after five years, they can then request another five years. In the end, they never really become bilingual. I think a major effort has to be made in this regard and that is not currently the case, minister. It isn't happening. Do you agree with me?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: As I understand it, the first time period is two years.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: No, it depends on the position.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: It's two years, I understand. I'm not sure what you're suggesting—that we not give public servants the appropriate period of time?

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: No, it isn't that the period of time granted is inappropriate, it is that you should force them to learn the second language as soon as possible. And if people haven't learned the second language, minister, well that's just unfortunate, but then you should find someone else for the position who speaks both official languages, because the position must be bilingual.

I'm going to ask you another question. We are talking about the public service, we're talking about young people, students, who are not bilingual. Over time, we have seen a decrease in the number of bilingual youth to fill positions within the public service. What is being done to increase this number? We know this, we are currently

studying bilingualism at the post-secondary level, in our committee. We are seeing an increasing number of young people who are not bilingual. Well, the fact is that we are going to be needing an increasing number of young people within the public service. What will we do then? Are we simply going to recruit anglophones and forget about bilingualism?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Actually, I think that's not correct. We're seeing

—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: There is no increase.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Well, hold it, let me finish.

As I see it, we are producing more and more bilingual individuals in Canada, who then have—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: No, that is false.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Well, if you look at my own province—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Just ask the heads of universities; they themselves have told us this.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm very proud of the steps that we've taken, both provincially, when I was in the provincial government, and federally. I'm very proud of what my Prime Minister is doing to enhance the development of bilingual people in Canada and that they have opportunities to come into the civil service.

Now, I'm not quite sure of the statistics you're relying on or referring to when you're saying that bilingualism is going down in this country. I would say it's the opposite, that—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Ms. Guay.

We will now move to Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

I'm very embarrassed about the way my opposition colleagues have been conducting themselves.

[Translation]

I would like to point out that there are two official languages in Canada. If I prefer to speak French, I can certainly do so.

[English]

If I want to speak English, I have a right to speak English. I can choose either one language or the other.

We're not here today to attack the minister. We're not here to set traps for the minister. Monsieur D'Amours, in his famous question, says "Ah, Minister, I changed one word in my question and you gave the wrong answer." That's infantile.

We don't treat any other witnesses this way. We've had many witnesses in front of us from francophone and anglophone institutions and we have never grilled them on why they're speaking French today, on whether they speak French, on what their level of French is, or how they can call themselves this, that, and the other thing when they don't speak both official languages.

This is cheap politics, and it lowers the credibility of the colleagues—not you, Madam Chair, but of my colleagues—and it lowers the credibility of our committee. We're trying to do good work here, and instead it's being undermined by infantile, cheap political tactics. They're taking advantage of a situation.

We are actually here, Madam Chair, to talk about policy—

• (0950)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Mr. Lemieux, can we move to your questions and comments for Mr. Toews, so that we may benefit from his attendance while he is still here?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Madam Chair, I have five minutes. You did not ask that of any of the opposition colleagues—to zero in on the question, to stop making a certain comment. I have my five minutes. If I want to talk for five minutes, I can talk for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Lemieux can judge the questions as he wishes, but they were intended for the witness. Right now, Mr. Lemieux is addressing the opposition.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: He can say what he would like, but these questions were addressed to the witness. The problem lies in the fact that the witness came here today but has absolutely no knowledge of his file. He does not know how to answer so he is trying to deflect attention away from himself. That is exactly what he is doing.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: First of all, Chair, that's not a point of order.

Secondly, I'm not talking to the opposition colleagues. I am commenting on their conduct here in the meeting and how unacceptable it is and how it's an embarrassment for this committee that they have conducted themselves so.

That they would call that a point of order just gives evidence to what I'm saying.

[Translation]

So I am saying that if a unilingual francophone likes speaking French and only French here, he can do so, he is entitled to speak French. The same thing applies to anglophones. We have the choice of speaking either of the two official languages or both, it is our choice. It is the choice of each and every Canadian.

Minister, there are approximately 72,000 bilingual positions in the public service. Sixty-eight per cent to 70% are found in the National Capital Region. Twenty per cent are in Quebec. I would like to know

what the government is doing to ensure that all Canadians have equal opportunities to secure employment and be promoted within the public service.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Thank you.

The Treasury Board assesses the performance of institutions regarding this component of the official languages program. Through the work done by advisory committees and an annual best practices forum, my officials address the issue of equitable participation and equal opportunities to obtain employment and advancement for official language communities.

They also provide support for institutions having difficulty in that regard. The participation rate of both official language groups, linguistic groups, tends to reflect their participation to the Canadian population, and we think that's a good thing.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I would like to know what efforts the government is making to recruit new bilingual candidates? Instead of having to provide training after hiring, what specific efforts is the government making in order to find good bilingual candidates to staff the bilingual positions?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'll let my official talk about that in a more general way. But I had occasion to be in Victoria recently, at the university, where Treasury Board officials and public service officials were holding a job fair for students to try to encourage them to come into the federal public service. I thought that was quite remarkable. I was more than 2,000 miles away from Ottawa, and there was a real concerted effort by the public service to attract people from other parts of the country. So it's not simply people who live within 50 miles of Ottawa who have access to those jobs. I think that's good.

Ms. d'Auray, do you have any comments to add?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Thank you, Minister.

We participate quite actively in career fairs that are held at universities across Canada. We make sure the opportunities offered by a bilingual workforce are highlighted. We're also working very closely with universities. The Canada School of Public Service has a pilot project with universities to encourage them to promote the capacity and competence, in both official languages, of their graduating students to enhance their capacity to enter the public service.

That said, there is an opportunity for people coming in to get language training if they don't meet all the levels.

• (0955)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Ms. d'Auray.

[Translation]

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, have you already made recommendations to the Governor in Council to establish the enforcement principles of the Official Languages Act, as you are authorized to do?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm sorry, I misunderstood that. I thought the question was directed at Ms. d'Auray about whether she had made recommendations—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, I have asked you the question, Mr. Minister. Have you made any recommendations to the Governor in Council to establish the enforcement principles of the Official Languages Act, as you are authorized to do?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: The last one was made in 1991, I believe.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So you weren't here then.

Hon. Vic Toews: That's correct.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's what I thought.

[Translation]

I have another question. The Treasury Board is responsible for doing the official language testing at Canada Post. Is that correct?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: We have a supportive role in that respect, but we are not directly responsible for the French language rights at Canada Post.

As I indicated at the beginning of my comments, each department or agency is primarily responsible for that. We play a supportive role.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I realize that you provide support, but who has ultimate responsibility for administering the test? For instance, it used to be Ms. Jeanne-Marie Légère, from the Moncton office, who tested the Canada Post employees in Lamèque, New Brunswick. I do not think that it came from Canada Post.

Things have changed. The tests are now done directly from Montreal or Ottawa. The current events in Ottawa are not the same in Lamèque, New Brunswick. You hear the same news if you listen to Radio-Canada, but the regional news is not the same. According to the comments that I have been hearing from Moncton, from Lamèque and Bouctouche, the people cannot pass the exams.

In its survey on bilingualism, Statistics Canada asked questions about grandfathers and grandmothers and the names may have been English, because there are anglophones in Lamèque. However, I would say that 98% of the population there is francophone. Bilingual testing is administered from Ottawa or Montreal, not from our region. Acadian French and Quebec French are not the same as Ontario French.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm also led to believe that Manitoba French is not the same as Quebec French, and that causes some issues.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If we all agree, what can we do to correct it?

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm certainly willing to listen to any recommendations you have in that respect. I think there has to be

some standardization of language if people are going to communicate in that language across the country, and therefore the public service has a role to play in that. I'm not an expert in linguistics, but there have to be certain standards.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand, but if you take somebody out of Lamèque and they have to come to work here in Ottawa, maybe you could question it, but a person in Lamèque who gives a letter to a person in Lamèque, I don't think he has to learn the French of France to be able to give the letter to the person in Lamèque. That's what you have to look at—or even the anglophone.

If you have somebody working in a Canada Post office for 20 years, and he was good for 20 years, but that person applies for a new job, and they say, no, your bilingualism is not good enough—it was good for 20 years, but the way we have your test, we're going to fail you because the test comes from Ottawa—I think it's something to look at.

Hon. Vic Toews: I think it's an interesting observation that for certain local conditions there should perhaps be some flexibility in how the language—

• (1000)

Mr. Yvon Godin: It was like that before, and it changed.

Hon. Vic Toews: I'm not familiar with why that would change, but I'll certainly have my officials look into that. If there's something that can be done to ensure it can be accommodated without sacrificing the principle of linguistic duality in official languages here, I would certainly encourage the responsible stakeholders to take a look at it.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Godin.

[English]

As you have mentioned that you need to go at 10 o'clock, I would like at this moment to thank you for being here. As you can see, the committee had lots of concerns following the visit of the Commissioner of Official Languages. He also mentioned his concerns, so it was very important for our committee to have you. I want to thank you.

Hon. Vic Toews: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and I enjoyed it very much.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): We will suspend for a few minutes.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•
•(1005)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): We will resume our work.

We will now welcome Ms. Louise Racine, Acting Director General, Official Languages. Good morning, Ms. Racine. Thank you for joining us.

We will now begin our third round. If the committee is in agreement, I would like to ask a question. If you want me to change seats, I can do so. May I ask a question? Would you agree, to than Ms. Glover?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Yes, providing that you do not launch into an attack like the others did.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): I would like us to continue to be respectful.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Chair, I would like to make a point of order.

Earlier, it was said that the opposition should respect the minister. I did not understand Ms. Glover's comment. Could she explain what she meant?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): That is not a point of order, Mr. Godin.

I would like to continue our meeting in a respectful fashion without making any attacks. The witnesses are here and we would like them to give us answers. I would invite everyone to cooperate and to ask their questions.

I would like to read a passage from the Official Language Commissioner's report:

While the Prime Minister and the Minister for Official Languages repeated their commitment to linguistic duality several times, the government has, in fact, directly undermined the Action Plan over the past year. By eliminating the Official Languages Innovation Fund, a key component of the Action Plan, the government has adversely affected the Plan's objectives. This Fund, as mentioned previously, financed projects aimed at improving the quality of services offered by the public service.

How do we ensure the quality of services provided by the public service by cancelling two of the three initiatives of the action plan, leaving only one initiative in place?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Madam Chair, when implementing projects, programs and initiatives, we often take advantage of best practices and re-allocate the funding in order to focus on those components deemed to be the most significant.

For example, in order to support official language communities in a minority situation, we have, in the Roadmap, put quite a lot of emphasis on health, education, access to economic development, etc. With respect to the activities in the public service, the departments were able to benefit from the innovation initiative, take the best practices and apply them to their own organization, in accordance with their own requirements and mandate. We were able to learn some very good lessons from this initiative, and the government

chose to focus on components that were given more priority in the Roadmap.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): We are anticipating a decrease in the number of bilingual candidates graduating from Canadian universities. How are you going to be able to staff bilingual positions without providing language training at the start of the individual's career?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The departments are working on this issue in several ways. We are currently working with Canadian universities to again increase awareness of our recruiting needs and job opportunities in the federal public service.

We have university champions, deputy ministers who are responsible for interacting directly with the universities throughout the country. For example, the Public Service School set up a pilot project to work directly with certain universities and to strengthen the use of its tools to prepare graduates hoping to be hired in these positions.

Furthermore, as the minister stated, we are actively participating in job and career fairs held in Canadian universities. The organizations are also responsible for providing language training.

We, the federal institutions, have the reports produced by the organizations and which must also indicate the amounts of money spent on language training. So we can total the amounts spent, which is quite a lot of money. As far as the core public administration is concerned, I believe about 52 to 53 million is spent per year.

•(1010)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): What is the duration of this pilot project you mentioned?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: To my knowledge, the Canada School of Public Service pilot project will be carried out over four or five years. It is one of the initiatives indicated in the Roadmap.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): Alright. And when will these four or five years be over?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I am referring to the Roadmap.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarak): Fine, thank you.

Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have been involved in advocating for the rights of official languages in a minority situation for more than 40 years. I was there when the Official Languages Act was established. I have observed the work of this committee throughout all this time.

About 10 years ago, I was part of the staff who assisted the committee chair. I never witnessed the partisanship and fanaticism that I've seen here this morning.

I must tell you that 40 years ago, things were very difficult, because people objected to the very concept of official languages. They did this in a very disgraceful manner. Right now, we have reached a point where we need to get things back on track, and we can do this better using honey as opposed to vinegar.

As for the issue that concerns me this morning—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Chair, on a point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Chair, we are here, in committee, to ask the witnesses questions. We asked the witnesses questions, and this is called partisanship.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Chair, how many chairs are there here today? Are there 10 or 1? I am addressing you, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Yes, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We were talking about partisanship. The last time that I chaired the meeting, before I could ask a question, Ms. Glover said that the chair should not be able to ask a question.

Today, the same thing is happening. So there is a double standard here. Madam Chair, with all due respect, you wanted to ask a question as the chair, and that did not seem to pose any problem to Ms. Glover.

Madam Chair, we could also call that partisanship. Alright—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): I'm going to ask permission to—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I simply want to say that we need a little bit more respect in our committee. I'm in favour of that and I am sure that you would agree with me on that issue.

We are entitled to ask our witnesses whatever questions we want. We are entitled to do this.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Indeed, we are entitled to ask questions. And when it is an individual's speaking time, this must be respected.

Mr. Galipeau, once again, the floor is yours.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

If I remember correctly, before I was given the floor to ask questions, you had asked for the agreement of all committee members, and I did not hear any objection at that time, either from the government side or from any of our three opposition party members.

My question is for the officials. It would appear that the renewal of the public service is a priority. How will the official languages be affected by this?

•(1015)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Thank you for your question.

Renewal of the public service is a priority. It is an integral part of the report recently tabled by the clerk. The clerk strongly recommended that this be done and provided clarifications as part of an action plan that every deputy minister had to produce for the fiscal year that has just ended and will have to produce for the current fiscal year.

The place of official languages is an essential component in recruiting, both to ensure service delivery and representation in the

public service. If I may, I will quote an excerpt from the clerk's report:

There is also a need to make improvements in recognizing the place of Canada's two official languages in the workplace. This goes beyond representation of francophones and anglophones at all levels of the public service, where in fact we have been quite successful. Rather it means ensuring that we are operating a public service that uses and respects both official languages in the workplace and in services to the public.

So we are talking about the workplace, recruiting and representation. These aspects are an integral part of our recruiting measures in universities, in accordance with what we call talent management within the public service, namely, when we consider potential, development and career training for employees. Official languages are part of the essential criteria considered.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much, Ms. d'Auray.

What impact has the creation of the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer had on official languages?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The mandate comes from the Treasury Board, as the minister indicated. In my opinion, the repatriation of the policy development and support functions provided to the department and other federal institutions within the Treasury Board Secretariat strengthens my department's ability to support and encourage departments to fulfil their obligations.

We are back in the hub of the department responsible for coordinating policies and programs. In my opinion, our role has been strengthened because we are part of headquarters. We will continue to support the departments and...

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Ms. d'Auray.

Your time is up, Mr. Galipeau.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I represent the riding of Gatineau, where approximately 6,000 people work for the federal State. So the federal government is an important employer. We are told that francophone public servants—those for whom French is the language spoken at home, the mother tongue—can work in the language spoken at home in their departments. I do not want you to pay any heed to these words, because from one department to the other, from one agency to the other, from one Crown corporation to the other—I realize that the Treasury Board does not cover these groups—, things do not transpire the same way everywhere. We are in the federal capital region, and some people have problems working in their mother tongue. In some instances, they stop communicating in this language because their superiors make absolutely no effort to understand them or do not forward the memos or work notes prepared by these employees. These individuals, however, do live in what is said to be the most bilingual region in Canada.

We need to pay attention when we make such affirmations. You may be generalizing, but in some departments, this is not the case.

Ms. d'Auray, when an employee cannot work in his mother tongue and is dissatisfied, what recourse does he have with his employer, without being penalized?

•(1020)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: If I may, I will clarify one point. You said that people find it difficult to work or communicate with their supervisor. I know that we are talking about overall numbers, but the fact remains that 89% of management positions have been designated bilingual and that 94% of these people are perhaps...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Yes, but Ms. d'Auray, I have read the statistics. This was mentioned in the presentation given by Mr. Toews, who could not remember the figures that he himself had given earlier, with respect to the legislation. It was quite pitiful, thank you very much.

I would like to know what type of recourse is available to a state employee when dealing with the employer, namely the Treasury Board, when he wants to work in French but is made to feel uncomfortable doing so, and obstacles are put up. I am referring to people working either in Gatineau or in Ottawa.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: First of all, employees can appeal to the person responsible for official languages in their department and indicate that their supervisor is not fulfilling his obligations. They can ask for an interim supervisor to take over so that measures can be taken.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I would like to know whether or not this supervisor is known to everyone, if this person is readily accessible. Is this the type of person who could tell the employee's superior that the employee is not happy with his work and that he should watch himself or would this be the type of person who would work with the Public Service Alliance or a union in order to protect the employee and ensure that he is not subject to indirect or malicious retaliation?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The coordinators and individuals responsible for official languages programs are well known in the departments. The employee may also have access to the person who is, to some extent, his supervisor's supervisor. As far as retaliation is concerned, if the employee feels that he is in a bad situation, he can avail himself of several recourse mechanisms or he can call upon the coordinator to resolve the conflict informally. With respect to disclosure, the matter remains completely confidential, in this case.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right.

How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarcac): Your time is up. Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

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

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

I have a question for Madame d'Auray. As the chief human resources officer for the government, you've got a pretty big responsibility, seeing that the Government of Canada, with all its agencies and departments, is the largest employer in the country. If you include all the crown corporations and the like, it employs close to half a million Canadians. Yet we seem to have trouble hiring public servants who are bilingual when they start. As a consequence, we have to devote a significant amount of resources and effort to training many unilingual public servants to ensure they are bilingual.

Have you or has your group tried to indicate to the universities and colleges producing these graduates that they are not coming to us with the qualifications we need? In other words, Canadian universities aren't producing the bilingual graduates we need in the public service. Have those discussions gone on directly with either the universities or their associations?

•(1025)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The short answer to your question is yes, there are many discussions that are currently under way.

For example, we have a network of deputy ministers who have been assigned or named as champions. They work directly with universities to encourage them and to determine the best ways they can help encourage and continue to encourage the students currently in their programs in order to make sure they are proficient in both official languages.

As I think I mentioned, the Canada School of Public Service is going to be launching a pilot project with a number of universities to see how it can in fact spread the use of its own tools in order to increase the proficiency of graduating students in both official languages. We're all going to be watching the results of that, because it's a way of embedding into the curriculum or the process in which students are learning the use of existing tools and mechanisms either to enhance their capacity or to develop a capacity in the other official language.

It is an issue in which the Commissioner of Official Languages is also very interested. We have had a number of discussions with him on that to see if we can join efforts to work together and to speak to universities. In all instances, though, the government recognizes its responsibilities and does in fact provide learning and training in the other official language in order to make sure that employees have the ability to increase their career opportunities within the public service.

I think one element that is actually quite important to remember is that not all positions are bilingual. So we are dealing with a certain set of positions—I think about 40% of our positions—within the core public administration that are bilingual.

Hon. Michael Chong: When I go to anglophone universities throughout the country, I don't get the impression that this is at all the focus. When you go on campus, you don't get the sense that the general student population is at all aware that if they have post-university aspirations to join the public service, they really ought to learn the other official language. You don't get that impression at all, whereas for other careers after university, whether they be in high tech, research, finance, or the like, students have a fairly clear idea of what they need to do in order to be competitive in the application process, and what they need to do to make sure they're equipped to join those workforces. But in many university campuses throughout the country I don't get the impression that the public service is very visible in its recruitment efforts, or that students have any idea that while this is a potential career path, if they want to choose it, they need to know the other official language.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: You are correct in pointing that out.

Last year we participated, as the minister indicated, in four career fairs, because we had not had a concerted presence, an organized presence. It made a huge difference. This year we will be continuing. We bring departments and agencies together, piggyback on the career fair days that are actually organized by universities, and establish a very visible federal presence to give a sense of the range of opportunities that exist within the public service.

For example, our slogan is “One Employer, A Thousand Opportunities”. We might actually want to say two thousand opportunities, but the thousand actually rings better, though the other is in fact the case. Students, as we go out and explain all of the opportunities that are available in the public service, are quite enthused, and we have seen, in that sense, quite an increase in the level of interest and application.

• (1030)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Ms. d'Auray.

Mr. Chong, your time is up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rodriguez now has the floor.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Racine, your name does not appear on the notice. Could you please explain your duties?

Mrs. Louise Racine (Acting Director General, Official Languages, Treasury Board Secretariat): I am the Acting Director General of Official Languages.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: And what is this position, exactly?

Mrs. Louise Racine: I am responsible for a section with duties that come under Part VII of the Act, namely, the development of policies for Parts IV, V and VI of the Act. We produce the annual report and support Mrs. d'Auray, Mr. O'Sullivan and the minister.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Do you consult the minister? Do you occasionally speak to him about official languages?

Mrs. Louise Racine: I report to Mr. O'Sullivan.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: And through him, to the minister.

I have a general question for each of you.

The coordination for official language activities used to come under the Privy Council Office, where there was a secretariat. This responsibility was transferred to Heritage Canada. In my opinion, this structure is more complicated, and official languages certainly do not have the same weight. It is not as easy to coordinate all of the official language responsibilities from a department just like all the others than it would be from the Office of the Prime Minister.

Has the elimination of this secretariat from the Privy Office Secretariat made things more complicated?

Mrs. Louise Racine: Ms. d'Auray could answer this question.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The changes made to the structure and responsibilities are in accordance with the organizations in the best position to deliver the services. In this case, the Department of Canadian Heritage is officially responsible for coordinating all activities. Accordingly, it is quite logical that coordination be done from this department. Given the changes that were made to my office

and my responsibilities within the Treasury Board, the two main responsibilities are now much simpler and more accessible. It is either one or the other.

Another fundamental component of the legislation is that compliance now lies with the institutions. Accordingly, it is essential that they themselves take action to fulfil their obligations, whether it be the Department of Industry or the Department of Justice. Coordination remains important, but these organizations, departments and institutions must nonetheless fulfil their obligations.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I agree with you. However, when this responsibility came under the Privy Council Office, one had the impression that this office carried a little bit more weight when it told organizations that they were not doing their jobs. It was easier back then to compile and centralize information in order to understand the official language activities being carried out by the various departments or organizations.

As far as coordination was concerned, do you not think that it was easier?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Coordination is just as effective. We receive the reports, just as the committee does. The institutions still have to provide them. We are in the process of refining and better targeting the information required, for the express purpose of being able to prepare more in-depth reports and to work with organizations and institutions where more progress is needed.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I asked the minister a question and I did not really understand his answer very well. What are his responsibilities with respect to the Roadmap?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: As he told you, the minister is responsible for coordinating the policies and programs under Parts IV, V and VI of the Act. In the Roadmap, he is, in particular, responsible for the centre of excellence, which comes under my group. This is his specific function and this has been set out in the Roadmap.

• (1035)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do not know where we are headed with all of this. The minister came here this morning, we asked him questions and he felt insulted when Mr. D'Amours asked him what came under Part IV. He thought this was a trick question. He spoke about this issue in his presentation and he did not even remember it. He would not have had to look very far. I think that he was poorly prepared or maybe it was something else.

Ms. d'Auray, you stated that every institution or department must submit a report. Is that accurate?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Every organization must produce a report.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It must produce a report. The Department of Canadian Heritage never tabled a report on official languages — this is supposed to be done once a year under the Act — for the years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. I had to ask about these reports in the House of Commons. Finally, one week later, we received the 2006-2007 report. We have yet to receive the report for 2007-2008.

Who coordinates the tabling of these departmental reports to Parliament and citizens? You said that this is an annual responsibility. I can tell you that, right now, the minister responsible for official languages was to present an annual report for the years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. We finally got the report for 2006-2007. Where is the report for 2007-2008? We are now in 2009.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: If I understand the question—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Who follows up on that?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The report on official languages—which is this one, I believe—is produced by my agency and it is the 2006-2007 report which was tabled by Minister Toews in March of this year.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When was the Treasury Board report tabled?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: It was the 2006-2007 report that was tabled in March of this year.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Because the reports are very complex and very long and we are in the process of—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Excuse me, but two weeks after I submitted the request to Parliament, the signature changed. It was Ms. Verner's name that appeared on the report and now it is the name of the new Minister, Mr. James Moore, that appeared on it when it was finally tabled. So someone is shelving these reports.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: We are reporting on Parts IV, V and VI.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Which the minister is not aware of.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I believe that the report you are referring to is the report on Part VII. Is that right?

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is right, Part VII.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Alright. That does not come under my duties.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Fine, but please explain to me why the Treasury Board report for 2006-2007 was not published until 2009.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Because this was the report that included all the reviews and there were a great many analyses to be done. The 2007-2008 should be published shortly. We have fallen somewhat behind, but we are now catching up.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If we look at the Roadmap, for example, we can see that there is no mention anywhere of official languages in the 2007-2008 or the 2008-2009 Action Plan, for renewal of the public service, and that the public service is not mentioned in the Roadmap as concerns linguistic duality. Why is it not included in the Roadmap?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The responsibility for public service renewal falls to each individual department. It is part of our ongoing and current obligations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but the Roadmap should tell us what will happen in future. Why are official languages not important enough to be included therein? That means that there is no coordination, that there is no supervisor to look after this. So it gets lost in the departments.

Do you not agree with me?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I do not agree with you at all, because it is my agency that is responsible for coordinating Parts IV, V and VI. We ensure this coordination. The Department of Canadian Heritage is responsible for coordinating Part VII. We have obligations, we take due note and we gather information from the reviews. We make reports to the department. As part of management accountability, each department is assessed based on—

• (1040)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can bilingualism not be included in the Roadmap?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I would say that it is a method and an ongoing activity—

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is a method of hiding it.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: You are... I would say that these are obligations that the departments must respect—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Godin. Your time is up.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: —and that they must deliver on.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You referred to the 85% whose official language was not respected. In which department or which branch does this occur?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Mr. Godin, your time is up. Thank you.

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

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Once again, good morning.

I would like to have something clarified. I would like to find out the details of something. The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, which I believe reports to the Treasury Board, is responsible for ensuring the respect of official languages in federal sectors or agencies that do not come directly under the Treasury Board.

You know that dunce caps are given each year by the Commissioner of Official Languages to those who I would say make it a habit to flout the Official Languages Act. I am thinking of the Department of National Defence or Air Canada, for example, where the French fact is not respected and where there is the highest rate of complaints coming from Canadian citizens or, at least, of criticism from the Commissioner of Official Languages.

I would like you to explain to me how the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer will be able to do what the Treasury Board has not been able to concerning National Defence or Air Canada, for example, or how it will be able to ensure that official languages are indeed respected. There are other examples as well.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: A clarification: the Treasury Board is responsible for coordinating the program and ensuring that policies are implemented.

I will now come back to an essential element: the institutions are the ones that are responsible for complying with the act and for fulfilling their obligations.

It is true that we are responsible for working with them, encouraging them and giving them the required guidelines and direction. In this regard, we have also taken into account the observations made in the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. We have been working and, indeed, continue to work with Air Canada very specifically on how this company can improve service delivery and language training for its employees.

We are also working with the Department of National Defence. The Canadian Forces have their own system and their own obligations under their legislation. We also hold discussions with several other agencies.

Our change of direction over the past few years has helped us focus on agencies that appear to have more difficulties honouring their commitments or that seemed to trigger the most complaints.

Instead of covering everyone, over the past two years, we began to focus specifically not only on central government organizations, but also those institutions that come under the Official Languages Act, to help them improve their performance.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I am aware of the role that you play in the machinery. You are not the decision-makers; you carry out the decisions that are made by the department or the minister.

However, it is disappointing to observe that we must always go back to the drawing board with the players I mentioned earlier, and that there is no greater reinforcement.

If your role is simply to pay lip service, then it is up to the minister to show some leadership and to change things. We have seen who the minister is, and that is all I will say.

Active offer is more than just a theme. It is a reality that should exist throughout the federal government apparatus, from sea to sea, to ensure that francophone citizens—because it is they who are mostly in the minority, if I may express myself thus—can obtain services in French. In addition, active offer means ensuring that, in person or on the phone, these francophone citizens can obtain services in French, from the outset.

The Commissioner of Official Languages once again showed in his latest report that there are shortcomings in this regard. How do you ensure, in a tangible manner, that an active offer of service exists in all departments?

• (1045)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I would like to point out that active offer is applied in the offices or service outlets that are designed for the purposes of bilingualism. This means about 30 or 33% of the central government service outlets.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: There are still problems with these service outlets.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Nadeau. I am sorry, but your time is up.

Does the committee want to go to a fifth round?

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You may go on, Ms. d'Auray.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The major shortcoming pointed out by the Official Languages Commissioner was with active offer. A measure adopted by the Commissioner over the past 18 months, which we support and for which we provide some follow up, is to submit quarterly reports to agencies in order to help them improve the situation on an on-going basis. I was formerly Deputy Minister with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and in that capacity, I received my report from the Commissioner once a year. Now, these observations, or quarterly reports, help ensure that progress is made throughout the year on the part of the chief officers.

We work jointly with the departments. Through coordinators, we inform them of the tools available and of best practices. We want these services to be offered automatically and instinctively. We encourage them to opt for active offer.

It is important to point out that in the Commissioner's report, an improvement was noted in the ability to offer service. It may not be active offer as such, but the report refers to service availability and the ability to provide this service in both official languages.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

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

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Ms. d'Auray, do you meet with the minister regularly to keep him informed of this file? Does someone speak with him every day? He gave us the impression that he was extremely ill informed in this regard. I am not trying to be partisan, but I must say that we have seldom seen a minister so unable to answer questions. Does someone speak to him regularly about the coordination of official languages?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I started this job on March 2, 2009, and so—

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: So what?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: And so, I have been meeting with the minister since I began my new job.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Regularly?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Yes.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: And you keep him informed?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Yes, about an entire range of subjects.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Perhaps you should meet with him more often.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Duly noted.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I am going to continue, Madam Chair.

Ms. d'Auray, you stated that you meet with the minister regularly, but that you have other duties besides those related to official languages. Do you discuss your responsibilities with regard to official languages regularly or rather infrequently?

•(1050)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I will unfortunately have to repeat myself. I took up my new duties on March 2, 2009, and today is May 5. I think I should be given the benefit of the doubt. I can tell you that I meet with the minister regularly to address an entire range of subjects which, as you have just said, are part of my responsibilities. Perhaps you could ask me the same question again in a year.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: But perhaps the roles will have changed by then.

Mr. O'Sullivan, do you have the opportunity to meet with the minister regularly to discuss official languages, among other things?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan (Acting Senior Vice-President, Workforce Workplace Renewal Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): The department and the minister communicate through the deputy ministers. We forward our information in the form of briefing notes, but I do not participate in briefing sessions directly with the minister.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I am going to ask you a final question. Do you often prepare briefing notes for the minister that deal with official languages?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: I do this as needed. For example, I do this when the Commissioner of Official Languages tables his report or when requests for information are made.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: You are referring to occasions when documents are published, but not necessarily when there is a request. Requests are not very frequent, is that right?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

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

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Earlier, the minister said that he was proud to be able to speak the language of his choice in our country. I respect that. You may have noticed that I did not comment on that. However, the report says that 85% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice in meetings held within their branch. What about the other 15% of people who do not have a choice?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: This figure comes from an employee survey. So these are the answers employees gave to this question in 2005. We are currently completing the analysis of a survey that was conducted in 2008, so we will soon see whether there are changes in perception, because it is always a question of perception. We will see what the employees think about their ease and ability to express themselves in the language of their choice.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Where is the problem? It says that 90% of employees feel free to use the official language of their choice when they communicate with their supervisor. It says that all supervisors are bilingual. So how can there be any problem communicating in the language of one's choice if all the supervisors are bilingual? Under the law, deputy ministers do not have to be bilingual, but assistant deputy ministers must be. But it says that 10% of employees do not feel free to use the official language of their choice when they communicate with their supervisor.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: This survey was intended to determine peoples' impression. So it is just that, their impression. Does it reflect the reality? That is another question.

Mr. Yvon Godin: May we have a copy of that survey and find out who it was conducted by? For example, I would like to know whether National Defence was canvassed as part of that survey. Sixty per cent of people at National Defence do not feel free to speak in the official language of their choice.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Yes, the survey is posted on the website of the Treasury Board. All the data from this survey has been made public.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is it possible to see all the data on the questions asked and find out who exactly answered? For example, are there any questions about the Prime Minister's airplane, which comes from DND, unilingual English-language movie theatres, and so forth? Is everything included in that survey?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: You will see. The questions on official languages in this survey are posted on the website, as well as the answers, broken down by department. These questions deal with how employees perceive their ability to communicate, receive material, and so forth. These questions deal primarily with employee perception.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We will summon witnesses from DND. Francophones are not even able to obtain documents in their mother tongue when they receive training in Borden, whether it be for a trade or for other things.

•(1055)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): Thank you, Mr. Godin. Your time is up.

I now turn the floor over to Mr. Chong.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to make a comment as opposed to asking a question of the witnesses.

All ministers of the crown in the federal cabinet are responsible for upholding the Official Languages Act, but in the opinion of Liberal members of this committee, only bilingual citizens need apply. I think this is an insult to the millions of Canadians, many of whom are immigrants and recently arrived in this country, who are struggling to make a life here and who don't speak the other official language.

What Liberal members on this committee are saying is that these Canadians are not full citizens, that they need not apply or aspire to positions in the federal cabinet or to senior positions in federal institutions. I think the message being conveyed is that they are second-class citizens.

Therefore, Madam Chair, I would ask that you provide an opportunity for Liberal members on this committee to withdraw those remarks.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): I believe this is your conclusion, but I don't think it's the opinion of the committee, so I will not ask the member to withdraw anything that has been said. I think everybody had the opportunity today to say what they wanted, and that is what the committee is supposed to do.

Do you have another question?

Hon. Michael Chong: No, Madam Chair, it was just simply a comment. I wanted to afford them the opportunity to withdraw those remarks, because I think they're highly offensive.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): That's your opinion, Mr. Chong.

Go ahead, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I just want to follow up on Mr. Chong's comments that the Liberal Party does not have a good track record when it comes to bilingualism. Their MP, Mr. Trudeau, in fact insulted unilingual anglophones and unilingual francophones before the last election when he called parents who do not teach their children a second language "lazy". This was in all front page news. It was highly insulting, and it is not the first time the Liberal Party has embarrassed itself on the policy of official languages.

Just to follow up on what Mr. Chong was saying today, the Liberal Party has shown its colours today. Members have shown their misguided understanding of official languages, and they should be embarrassed by their performance today.

Merci beaucoup.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Lise Zarac): I would like to thank the witnesses for their patience and for having come before us to answer questions today. I would like to point out that the purpose of this meeting was to ensure that the new duties that have been transferred to Treasury Board are properly assumed by the Treasury Board.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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