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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): I call to order the 16th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[English]

This morning, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we continue our study of immigration as a development tool in official language minority communities.

We have as witnesses members of the Government of Manitoba.

I would first like to welcome Mr. Ben Rempel, who is the assistant deputy minister, immigration division, Department of Labour and Immigration. As well, we have with us Mr. Colin Lemoine, policy and program analyst, immigration division, Department of Labour and Immigration.

Welcome to our committee.

[Translation]

Also with us are representatives of the Government of Nova Scotia. We have the director general of the Office of Immigration, Ms. Elizabeth Mills, and Ms. Joëlle Désy, who is an officer with the Nominee Program of Nova Scotia, also with the Office of Immigration. Welcome to our committee, ladies.

Without further ado, I invite the representatives of the Government of Manitoba to make their opening statement. They will be followed by representatives of the Nova Scotia government. We will then hear questions from members. Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Ben Rempel (Assistant Deputy Minister, Immigration Division, Department of Labour and Immigration, Government of Manitoba): Good morning, everyone.

Thanks for inviting us to present before this committee. We have some good things to report from Manitoba. You have a copy of our presentation in front of you so I won't go over it verbatim, but I will provide a high-level summary.

I am here with my colleague Colin Lemoine, who can assist me in our other official language, if that's a preference for anybody. He's a policy analyst who is a key point person on our francophone initiative right now.

I am joined also by Lei Wang, who is joining us in Ottawa for meetings with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, our key partners

in all of these efforts and part of our employment supports area for immigrants.

Just go back, with a little bit of the context that you have in front of you, the targets that we've set for Manitoba—7% for francophone immigration—are ambitious, but Manitoba is no stranger to ambitious targets.

Much of what we accomplish in the province in the area of immigration is on the basis of our partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Our bilateral agreement, the Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement, has really helped us through our provincial nominee programs and our devolved settlement agreement to accomplish the achievements we've made in immigration over the last decade.

I want to talk specifically about our francophone initiative, but I would like to put it in the context of a province that has moved on from 1998-99, or that area, as an immigration have-not province. We weren't on the radar for much of Canada, and certainly for much of the world, as an immigration destination of choice.

On the basis of this very creative and dynamic partnership, we have actually made Manitoba one of the premier immigration destinations in Canada, again, by setting ambitious targets that we have been able to meet: 10,000 landings by 2006 and a renewed target of 20,000 landings by 2016. Part of our challenge with the ambitious targets we've set for francophone immigration is that, although we made significant gains as our overall immigration totals increased, we need to catch up on the percentages a little.

That's the context for our immigration strategy in general.

Of course, we haven't done this by ourselves. I referenced the strong partnership we have with the Government of Canada. Key players in this have been the community stakeholders, with whom we work very closely. The presentation you have in front of you provides a list of the key agencies that we work with throughout our francophone communities, not just in Winnipeg, but throughout the province of Manitoba and our regions.

We are working towards a proportion now wherein 75% to 80% of our immigration is coming through our provincial nominee program and 30% of those provincial nominees are settling in regions outside of our capital area, outside of Winnipeg. We don't yet have a similar distribution with our francophone immigration, which is still predominantly urban. Nevertheless, our regional communities are active players in this strategy, through organizations like CDEM, which is le Conseil de développement économique du Manitoba.

I'm going to speak a little bit about the promotion and recruitment side of things and then about the area that is more important, which is what we do to assist people when and after they arrive.

Our promotion and recruitment campaigns have focused on la Francophonie in general, with certain countries being naturally more predominant than others, but certainly, no country with a potential francophone population interested in migrating to Manitoba would not be of interest to us.

We have worked very closely with our key partner, la Société franco-manitobaine, in promotion and recruitment missions. They are also a key settlement partner. The organizations listed in our brief—CDEM, ANIM, and so on—are affiliated with the SFM. We've participated with them in recruitment initiatives in France, Belgium, and West Africa. I guess that the populations of interest to us in many ways could be, broadly speaking, looked at in three categories.

International students, through the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, have been a key element of the immigration strategy: the transition of international students to permanent residence status through our provincial nominee program. The international student movement has been an important component of our immigration strategy under the provincial nominee program.

Manitoba was the first PNP to introduce a category for international students to allow them to transition from temporary to permanent status based on securing employment after graduation. We continue to benefit from that movement to Manitoba. The Collège, as our largest and very successful francophone university, is no exception. In fact, in some ways I think the proportions coming from that institution are larger than others. There's a very successful movement coming out of that institution, largely with origins in West Africa—Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Mali.

We have made visits to our embassy partners in those regions to try to raise the profile a bit of our community and our institutions. One of the challenges when you are a province that's not recognized as a first choice or logical destination for francophone immigration is to put yourself on the map, to show that there are destinations outside of Quebec where it is possible to live and educate your children in French. We feel that Manitoba certainly is a very solid destination in that category, so we have partnered with those institutions in raising our profile somewhat in those target countries.

Other key partners in these efforts have been the embassy in Paris, the visa section, and of course Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Events like Destination Canada and the funds that flow to those initiatives from the federal government have been very important for all provinces to provide a platform to promote ourselves as destinations, again, for potential immigrants from France, Belgium, and francophone-speaking areas of Europe, to consider as an option. It's different from what Quebec offers, which is obviously the first choice for many francophone immigrants, but it's an environment where you, your family, and your children can work and live in both official languages. Certainly, through our immersion programs in schools and post-secondary institutions, you can educate your children and live in French.

I think those promotion and recruitment efforts are still very much, while successful, a work in progress. I've taken the opportunity of being here in Ottawa to meet with my colleagues, both international and local, in Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and to think how we might come up with new strategies and initiatives. I'd be happy to talk about those a little more.

We've achieved what we've achieved in Manitoba by putting ourselves on the map and generally by taking new approaches: partnering with communities and institutions, federal governments, and international offices overseas to do things in ways that weren't done before, while maintaining, of course, the integrity and quality assurance standards that immigration requires. For us to continue and to be more successful in attracting francophone immigrants to destinations outside of Quebec, we're going to continue to need that creative and innovative approach to partnership.

Immigration often tends to focus on the attraction and the numbers side of the equation, but we feel that an essential part of our success in Manitoba has been what we do with individuals at arrival and after arrival through our settlement programs. We fund a wide variety of language training, settlement and integration programs, and employment support programs for newcomers, and we feel that is a key part of our success in retaining immigrants.

● (0910)

One of the things about the provincial nominee program—and it's important to remember that it distinguishes us a little bit from our colleagues further west—is that it's not based on a temporary foreign worker movement. We select our potential candidates on something much closer to a human capital model, something closer to, I suppose, the philosophy of the federal immigration program, on which we based on own selection criteria. This means that most individuals are coming without pre-arranged employment. We do have a temporary foreign worker component, but 70% of our intake is made up of individuals or families coming to us without pre-arranged employment.

The success we have achieved in terms of the very high labour market participation rates of immigrants is among the highest in Canada. We have one of the highest retention levels in the provincial nominee programs. It is in the 80% range, give or take, depending on the state of the economy. Nevertheless, it's consistently high. It's based on the interventions that we make with individuals at and after arrival.

Our francophone immigration is no exception. We work very closely with our partners to ensure, through L'Accueil francophone and other agencies, that people are welcomed at arrival, receive guidance and orientation to the programs they need to begin the early stages of settlement, and then, of course, are connected through to language training and employment opportunities.

The francophone component—and I should emphasize this—is part of our bilateral agreement with the federal government, which was renewed in 2003 and is in the process of being renewed now, to make francophone immigration a key priority. I sometimes forget to mention that part of our agreement, because we would do it anyway. It's an important part of what we do in Manitoba.

It's an important reflection of our community composition. It's an important strategy and priority for our government itself. So while it's been an active and successful partnership with the federal government, and we partner in the funding of some of these agencies, we feel that we have achieved significant results so far, and some of those numbers are sketched out in the presentation.

What I guess energizes us in the division and in the communities—I met with a number of my partners before coming here—is the work we are still doing, the work we have done such the Destination Canada job fair in November, for which a large team made up of not just government agencies but all community agencies, urban and rural, went to France to interview families, to tell them about Manitoba, and to tell them about our francophone communities.

Right now, we're looking at a very successful result of that. Thirty families who had previously probably not had Manitoba, St. Boniface, or our francophone communities on their radar or even on their maps, were interested in Canada and are now submitting applications. Some of them have been approved and many have made visits to our province.

It's that kind of approach: working on the ground in countries where people are interested in Canada, convincing them that Manitoba is a destination of choice, and then engaging with them consistently throughout, from the time of selection, through arrival, and afterwards, to ensure the success of their settlement.

I suspect that I'm out of time. I kind of ran over a bit, so I'll stop there. I'm happy to answer your questions.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you for sharing this great story.

We'll now move on to our guest from Nova Scotia.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills (Executive Director, Office of Immigration, Government of Nova Scotia): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the parliamentary committee. Thank you so much for inviting us to present to you this morning.

I'd like to introduce Joëlle Désy. Joëlle is one of my colleagues at the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. She is our designated francophone staff within the Office of Immigration.

Thank you, Joëlle, for joining me.

Like Ben, I'm just going to put everything in context for you. I'll perhaps compare and contrast Nova Scotia a little bit with Manitoba to give you a sense of where we are with respect to Manitoba.

Nova Scotia's population is under a million. Of that, about 35,000 people are individuals whose mother tongue is French. They would be of Acadian descent. Of those 35,000 people, about two-thirds live in very rural parts of Nova Scotia. That gives you a little bit of context about our population.

You may know as well that Nova Scotia's population is older than that of any other province in the rest of Canada, so immigration is very important to Nova Scotia for a variety of reasons: labour market needs, population, cultural diversity and, of course, French language maintenance as well.

Unlike in Manitoba, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration did not begin our immigration efforts in earnest until 2005. Until then, our provincial position was that immigrants come to the province—that's good. They stay—that's good. But there was no policy direction that really supported this initiative.

That changed in 2005, with the development of a strategy and the opening of the Office of Immigration. We are a small office compared with Manitoba's, but I will say that we were very fortunate, in that when we opened the Office of Immigration, we were hosted by Manitoba. They shared with us many of their lessons learned and their excellent programs and excellent ideas. I will say that the Manitoba is a beacon for the other provinces. They have been bold in their immigration strategy and they have been successful because of that. So we are following the game and following what they're doing in many ways.

I also want to say that we, like Manitoba, have an agreement with the Government of Canada, with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. They are the principal partner in immigration, of course, and they provide the lion's share of funding for settlement programming.

Unlike Manitoba, however, we do not have a devolved agreement. So the Nova Scotia division of Citizenship and Immigration Canada allocates funding directly to community-based organizations for the programming they do.

Now, we do have some good news. In 2003, our base year for immigration numbers, we had about 1,400 people coming to Nova Scotia. In 2008 we were up to over 2,650. That's an increase of about 79%. We think we're going in the right direction, but our numbers are very modest, and certainly modest when compared with Manitoba's. But we believe that we have to set the ground in order to have a successful immigration program.

In addition to doubling our landings, we have also improved our retention rates. In 2003, the 2001 census data told us that our retention rate was about 40%. That was really embarrassing, but I'm proud to tell you that in the census period of 2006, our retention rate went to 64%. So we're delighted with both of those trends, but we also see that we have a long way to go.

Like Manitoba, we have an immigration agreement, and an annex, or part of that agreement, which allows us to also have a provincial nominee program. Unlike Manitoba, however, our nominee program represents about a third of all the landings. Manitoba's was about 70% to 80%, you said, but we're at about a third, so we see the opportunity to optimize our nominee program further.

We have also developed partnerships with the local community organizations, and certainly with the local francophone Acadian organizations. That partnership has done us very well. We provide funding to those organizations for initiatives they're undertaking, as does Citizenship and Immigration Canada—and I believe they access other sources of funding as well. So we have a partnership with them.

We have also participated in immigration destination fairs, Destination Canada, in Paris, France, and in Morocco and other parts of the world. We started to do that only in 2005, so we are starting to see the fruits of those immigration fairs. They're starting to have a return on investment for us in Nova Scotia.

● (0920)

We do have one major settlement organization in Nova Scotia. It has recently changed its name. It's called the Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services of Nova Scotia, ISIS. This organization, though small, is I think a very effective settlement organization. They provide programming in a number of areas: settlement, language training, and labour market attachment, etc. Those programs and services are available in French to all francophone immigrants who come to the province of Nova Scotia; they provide a significant part of their programming in that regard.

With regard to our nominee program, which is our major tool to attract immigrants, and also with selection, you have an opportunity to also affect your retention rates. So if we are very effective in selection—helping to nominate those individuals who are likely to come to Nova Scotia, are likely to stay in Nova Scotia, and likely to succeed—that will certainly improve our retention rates. Our nominee program is our principal tool in that regard.

As I said, it represents about a third of our landings. We have nominated probably under 2,000 people at this point, but of the 2,600 landings last year, about 229 individuals identified that, of the official languages, French was their sole spoken language and/or bilingual language. I think about 27 of them identified French as their official language that they could speak; the remaining 202 said bilingual.

So our numbers, as I said, were modest, but we feel that we are working in the right direction to attract more immigrants. As I said, we are setting the groundwork to do that with our partnerships with our Acadian and francophone organizations and with the Université Sainte-Anne. But we also have in Nova Scotia a French-language Services Act, and this act ensures that individuals have access to services in French.

Our office of immigration is committed to that as well. We participate on national committees and we also participate in a local francophone immigration round table that is looking at developing strategies to recruit and retain more immigrants.

I see my time is running out so I'll conclude on the development of a new strategy. Our first strategy is from 2005, so it's about to end. We're now in the process of developing a new immigration strategy for Nova Scotia.

We've consulted with our francophone partners on that and they have been very clear on the vision that they see for Nova Scotia with regard to attracting francophone immigrants. Their recommendations to us include improved pre-arrival information on Acadian and francophone communities and services being made available to new and prospective francophone immigrants. Like Ben says, once we start working with immigrants overseas, we need to begin working with them while they are abroad to fully educate them on what is available for them in Nova Scotia.

Also, our francophone organizations would like to provide direct access to settlement, labour market and language training delivery through francophone organizations. Currently, most of our settlement and language training is done through ISIS. Our francophone organizations would like there to be a separate organization—or organizations—that would provide those services in French. They would be French organizations. Finally, they would like the creation of a francophone welcoming centre that will provide these services.

These are the recommendations they've put forward, both to Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the federal government, and to the provincial government. We are working with them to consider if and how this could go forward, but we are very hopeful that our partnerships with these organizations, with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and with the good friends we have from other provinces will help us to be very effective in the future with our francophone immigration and our immigration strategy overall.

Thank you.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mills.

We'll now start our first round with Monsieur Bélanger.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, all, for being here.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Rempel and Ms. Mills, for your presentations.

Five minutes is a very short time. I will ask a few questions, and if there's not enough time to answer them, perhaps colleagues will pick them up, or you can send the information in through the clerk, if you don't mind, so it can be shared.

If I recall from the documents that I've read, 7% for Manitoba and 9% for Nova Scotia are the targets for the francophone element of your immigration. Is that correct?

Mr. Ben Rempel: Yes, it's 7%.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I believe it's 4% for Nova Scotia.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay. I'll look it up later. My documents say 9%.

The 7%, you state from Manitoba, is the percentage you figure you'd lose, so that's... I want to congratulate you for setting that target. I wish we could set a similar target nationally. Is it 7% of 20,000? Is that the number? Have I read it correctly?

Mr. Ben Rempel: The 20,000 is our 2016 landings target from all categories. That would include the economic, humanitarian, and family categories and 7% would be the proportion of that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Starting from what year?

Mr. Ben Rempel: Well, we're in the process. So if we were meeting our goals, last year... For 2009, for example, we don't have official numbers yet, but let's say we had 12,000 people landing. If we're meeting our goals, that would be 7% of 12,000.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So 20,000 per year is your target.

Mr. Ben Rempel: Yes, that would be our target.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay. That's good enough for me.

I'll switch to Nova Scotia.

[Translation]

Ms. Déry, I would be curious to know whether in your opinion the Government of Nova Scotia is going to recommend what is being asked for by the FANE.

• (0930)

Ms. Joëlle Déry (Nova Scotia Nominee Program Officer, Office of Immigration, Government of Nova Scotia): You are referring to the recommendations Ms. Mills mentioned at the end, is that right?

The Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse is presently holding discussions with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The discussions we held with that organization took place in March. Discussions are ongoing in our office as well. The FANE applied for financial assistance as it does every year, but the decision has not yet been made as to the exact amount that will be allocated to it this year.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: This would be the government's decision to make, but does the public service of Nova Scotia intend to issue a favourable recommendation?

Ms. Joëlle Déry: I can't answer that question.

[English]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Mills, would you be willing to answer that?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I will answer. Actually, this morning, Joëlle and I discussed this. We thought this would be a question that you might ask.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No....

A voice: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: You may know that our government is now in financial restraint and has a budget that is going back to a balanced budget, so at this point we are in a very tight fiscal position, but I would say that our government has allocated new moneys to immigration, which it has not done for each department. I think that speaks to the commitment that our government has expressed and is honouring with regard to supporting immigration efforts.

But I do not perceive that we will have significant new dollars in the future. What we will need to do is have a very close look at the outcomes that we are enjoying from the funding that is being allocated to date, to determine whether the outcomes that we need are the outcomes that we are getting. If not, we have two options: one, to encourage a different way of service delivery, or two, a reallocation of funding. So—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's fair enough. It wouldn't be appropriate to push further.

In the time remaining, I would like to know for Manitoba... I've heard and read that the refugee numbers have increased. However, I had occasion to chat recently with a representative of the Congolese community, and there is a problem. I just want to flag it for you. The problem is that because of the age of those refugees, they are quite often assumed to have a certain level of education and are therefore put at a certain level in the system. Yet they can't cope, and therefore they tend to sort of *décrocher*, to drop out, and then get into a downward spiral.

Would you be open, Mr. Rempel, to having whichever appropriate department—or school board, I suppose—take a look at this so that, indeed, we catch that situation at the outset and not create a situation down the road?

Mr. Ben Rempel: You're exactly right. We are very much engaged with our departments on that issue. It is a challenge.

The presentation mentioned the significant proportion to date of our current francophone immigrants who have come through the humanitarian category, most often from Africa. When individuals come from a war-torn background, with an interrupted education, and so forth, it is a challenge to try to fit them into the school system.

There is a type of prevailing pedagogical philosophy that says it's best to put people of similar age with cohorts, but it sometimes doesn't work because they've missed several years of schooling and so on. It is a significant problem that we want to engage more successfully on, through a couple of avenues that we're looking at.

One is that inside the Manitoba government we recognized that when we started small, everything that had to do with immigration could be located within one department. It came down to me and my colleagues or my predecessor dealing with them. For success in immigration, and with the support we had at the grassroots level, we needed to give a message to our colleagues in other departments that in many ways it's everybody's job to successfully settle immigrants.

We have a very successful growth strategy initiative that was launched by our previous immigration minister, Nancy Allan. It's an ongoing strategic partnership with other departments on education and training, and with the French language secretariat and so on, to address these problems. It can often become localized within one department and people then say it's not their mandate. We need to have a shared mandate. I think that's what's been recognized in Manitoba.

On the other piece, I think we need to involve Citizenship and Immigration Canada more on the front end.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Nadeau.

[Translation]

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

Good morning to you all.

My question is addressed to the people from Nova Scotia.

What is the assimilation rate, the rate of loss of French, in your province?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: I apologize, but I don't have that percentage. However, I can say that it is obvious that there is assimilation going on.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So you acknowledge that there is assimilation.

Can you tell me how the Nominee Program will help to counter that assimilation?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: It should be specified that the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse and two other francophone organizations receive funds from the Office of Immigration. I should have specified that to Mr. Bélanger earlier. These organizations offer settlement and reception services to francophone newcomers. I think that it is important to concentrate on promotion and recruitment. However, settlement and integration services for the francophone community are services that allow newcomers to integrate well. Those are concrete services they receive when they arrive.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: As to employability, what can you guarantee to newcomers who want to work in French in Nova Scotia?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: In Nova Scotia, there are very few jobs that don't require at the very least a knowledge of English. Newcomers must be aware of that reality. That is part of the information that must be provided to them before they arrive. Francophone organizations such as Direction emploi and the Conseil de développement économique work together with francophone and Acadian employers. The objective is to make the available jobs known but also to encourage Acadian employers to hire immigrants and make them aware of the advantages that immigration can bring to their business or organization.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: In Nova Scotia, can a newcomer register his or her children in an English-language school anywhere in your area?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: In an English-language school, yes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: And what about in a French-language school?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: There are criteria.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Anywhere in the province?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Yes, the provincial Acadian school board covers all of Nova Scotia and there are French-language schools everywhere.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Fine. So in the region of...

Ms. Joëlle Désy: ...Baie Sainte-Marie, for instance, there are schools.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So they can register their children in these schools anywhere in the province. Transportation will be guaranteed and so forth?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Yes. There are Acadian schools.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: My comments will now be addressed to the representatives from Manitoba.

Good morning.

What is the rate of assimilation, of loss of French, in Manitoba?

[English]

Mr. Ben Rempel: I will respond in English and then I'll let Colin elaborate in French.

I don't know that we have a rate of assimilation. In the context section, you can see the difference in percentage. Some of that is related to the increase we've had on the anglophone side of immigration, but our situation in some ways is similar to Nova Scotia's, in that the main language of the workplace in Manitoba is English, so—

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: If I understand correctly what you are saying to me, Mr. Rempel, you don't know if there is assimilation, a decrease in the francophone population in Manitoba.

Does Mr. Lemoine have something to say in this regard?

Mr. Colin Lemoine (Policy and Program Analyst, Immigration Division, Department of Labour and Immigration, Government of Manitoba): The 2006 census showed a decline in the percentage of francophones in Manitoba. There is assimilation in Manitoba. The anglophone population has also increased. So it is a bit of both. There is a decline in the French-speaking population and an increase in the English-speaking population. So the proportion has decreased. That is why we—

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The official languages commissioner praised the immigration program, the objective of which is to increase the proportion of francophone immigrants to 7% of the number of immigrants that are received on an annual basis by Manitoba, whereas francophones represent about 4% of the province's population. Does the immigration program help to combat assimilation? Can you expand on this a little?

Mr. Colin Lemoine: It increases the vitality of the francophone communities. The 7% target is a long-term objective, a broad proportion. We are not there yet but it increases the vitality of our communities.

● (0940)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That's good.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, I'll come back to this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gravelle, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Good morning.

Mr. Rempel, do you have statistics on the number of international students who stay after their studies are finished? Do you have any programs in place to encourage them to stay?

Mr. Ben Rempel: If you're talking about the exact statistic, I can follow up with you.

Colin's telling me that there have been 26.

Mr. Colin Lemoine: Yes. In the last three years, 26 francophone international students applied to the PNP and were accepted.

Mr. Ben Rempel: What we have done to encourage them to stay is to encourage off-campus employment programs for them while they're studying. We were part of the negotiating team of provinces that arranged this with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. We also assist students to connect with employment opportunities after graduation to allow them to stay.

And also, I think, we need to recognize—I think this has been a bit of the shift in thinking—that the first job an immigrant gets after graduation is not going to be their career job, just like it was for most of us after we graduated. We will have to accept a ladder, in many ways, a stepping-stone type of job. That's what we've done with a number of our students to encourage more of them to make the transition.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: If I were a French immigrant, other than the fact that Manitoba is a wonderful place to live, what would encourage me to come to Manitoba?

Mr. Ben Rempel: When we are overseas speaking to potential immigrants—and Colin can attest to this—we don't really try to persuade people not to go to Quebec. People who are looking for a 100% francophone lifestyle in Canada will choose a destination in Quebec, in all likelihood. But we find that there are people looking for a somewhat different experience.

The ability to live in a bilingual environment is often attractive to them, as is the fact that their children can be educated in French. They can live in a French-speaking community and can interact in French on a daily basis, but have the opportunity to learn English as well, so that's a bit of who we're speaking to, in some ways. They are attracted in many ways to what Manitoba has to offer, and there's the fact that they can do post-secondary education in French.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Ms. Mills, you have said that the population of Nova Scotia is the oldest population in Canada.

Do you have a long-term target to attract more francophone immigrants? You have a 4% target currently. Do you have another long-term target?

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: No. In fact, 4% of the current Nova Scotia population speaks French as their mother tongue. It's not a goal or a target; that's the actual percentage. We haven't set a target in that regard as far as the percentage of immigrants landing in Nova Scotia are concerned. We are developing a new immigration strategy for Nova Scotia. We are working with our francophone partners on that. They are developing a long-term action plan and we're working with them on that.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: I'm sorry. I misunderstood. I thought your goal was 4%. So don't you think it would be a good idea to set an actual goal for French-speaking immigrants to come to Nova Scotia?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I'm not going to be able to answer that question without doing the homework. At this point, we are preparing the groundwork. We're looking at how we can build our capacity to attract and retain more immigrants overall with all our

immigrant landings in Nova Scotia. We are in our infancy in immigration in Nova Scotia. We're learning from Manitoba.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Have you concluded, Mr. Gravelle? Very well. Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. O'Neill-Gordon, I think you want to ask our witnesses some questions.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome all of you here this morning. I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate you on the work you are doing. It's probably your hard work, your organizing, and the hospitality you provide, all these of three practices, that we can attribute your success to so far.

We also were discussing here the different agreements that have been brought forth between our federal and provincial governments. We referred to the framework agreement, the provincial nominee program, and the settlement services agreement.

I'm wondering which federal and provincial immigration agreements are currently in effect in your province.

• (0945)

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Okay. We have a Canada-Nova Scotia immigration framework agreement, and that agreement has a nominee program annex. We have a Canada-Nova Scotia Acadian community agreement. I'm not going to restrict it just to immigration. If I may, I'm also going to talk about official languages federal-provincial agreements that exist in Nova Scotia. We have a Canada-Nova Scotia Acadian community agreement, which is with Canadian Heritage. We have a Canada-Nova Scotia agreement on education, again with Canadian Heritage. As I mentioned, we have the overall Canada-Nova Scotia immigration framework agreement as well.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: And in Winnipeg?

Mr. Ben Rempel: It would be the Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement, which has the general provisions and annexes that provide for funding for our settlement programs and the criteria for our provincial nominee program. We are now discussing further annexes on information sharing, temporary foreign workers, and so on, all of which allow us to continue a very fruitful partnership with CIC.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: We see in some provinces that francophone communities are located in the rural areas. I was wondering where francophone immigrants settle when they arrive in your province. Do they settle near the older francophone communities or do they create new communities? Or are they concentrated in particular areas of the province?

Mr. Ben Rempel: In Manitoba, I think right now the principal destination is our francophone quartier in Winnipeg, St. Boniface, although they do locate in proximity to that area. St. Boniface is adjacent to our downtown area.

We are encouraging more francophone immigrants to consider the range of francophone communities outside Winnipeg, and CDEM, the organization named in the presentation, has a role in that area.

A key challenge in our regions is often succession for small businesses and so forth. So part of our attraction strategy through the work of ANIM overseas and promoting Manitoba as a destination for business people and entrepreneurs is also to put that on the table.

Probably our biggest non-urban migration of francophone immigrants so far is in our agriculture sector, with people buying farms and so on.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: And in Nova Scotia?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: The numbers show that 76% of all our immigrants settle in HRM, Halifax Regional Municipality, and that is also true of our francophone immigrants. Those who settle outside the HRM in rural communities do so because they have a job in those communities.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Neill-Gordon.

I have a question for you, Mr. Rempel. Are you competing with other provinces to attract French-speaking immigrants?

Mr. Ben Rempel: I suppose it would be a measure of the success of this strategy if I said yes, but so far I think it's mostly provinces like Nova Scotia and Manitoba, and New Brunswick a little bit, that are participating in these events. I think Saskatchewan, B.C., and Alberta are getting more involved, so the competition will come.

But I've always found—and I think Elizabeth will attest to this—that when we go overseas *ensemble* we speak with a common message; we're really speaking to people who are attracted to Canada and we are presenting a diversity of choice. Immigrants stay in places they choose to go and where they feel welcome.

There is a friendly competition, and that will likely increase as more people become involved, but overall it's to the benefit of Canada and all of us.

The Chair: So you would you say that the pie is big enough.

Mr. Ben Rempel: Oh, absolutely.

The Chair: Would you say so, Ms. Mills?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I'm not sure I would say the pie is big enough, but I would agree with Ben that when we go abroad, we go as provinces in a country called Canada, and we work cooperatively.

Manitoba, which has been the leader in this regard, has been very generous with its lessons learned and with helping provinces such as Nova Scotia. I don't feel there is any animosity at all. We work cooperatively.

The Chair: Friendly competition is good.

We'll now start our second round with Madame Zarac.

[Translation]

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

Good morning to everyone.

My first question is addressed to Ms. Mills and Mr. Rempel.

Concerning the promotion you do abroad, I would like to know whether there is really a will to recruit francophone immigrants.

● (0950)

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Absolutely. Citizenship and Immigration Canada provides funding to those provinces that wish to participate and specifically target francophone immigrants. Nova Scotia, since the opening of our Office of Immigration in the spring of 2005, has participated in those immigration fairs, not just with our provincial government staff, not just with Joëlle and other staff in our office, but also with our community partners.

To go back to the question about why immigrants would want to come to either Manitoba or Nova Scotia, I think Nova Scotia is probably not the first destination of choice that many francophone immigrants would consider, but this gives us an opportunity, along with our partners, to talk about the rich Acadian culture that does exist in Nova Scotia and about the welcoming communities.

Through that opportunity, we are able to inform people better about what Nova Scotia has to offer, and yes, we are very much interested in attracting more francophone immigrants and retaining them.

Mr. Ben Rempel: It is very much the same in Manitoba. We recognize that immigration is a long-term effort. The promotion work you do likely doesn't bear results for a year or two or three. As we can all appreciate, this is sometimes a hard case to make with our treasury boards and funders, but we have been successful in doing that, showing that we will go to events in France and Belgium twice a year at least. I think we need to be engaging more regularly.

Although it is a much more expensive and logistically difficult place to work, we will go to West Africa because we know that long-term profile building, relationship building, and promotion work are what's going to pay the dividends over the long term. That 7% isn't built through six months of effort. It's built through sustained effort over a number of years, and we have support to do that fortunately, so far, in our budgets and from our governments. The will is definitely there.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So there is additional financing if you attempt to recruit francophone immigrants. Is that correct?

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: We don't have an unlimited budget in Nova Scotia, sad to say, but we do have a budget. In fact, this year our government increased our international marketing budget, which we are very pleased about.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It's not necessary to recruit francophones, the idea is to promote this abroad.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: It's to recruit all immigrants. Because we now have more money on the overall marketing side, we will be able to do more on the francophone side as well.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do you agree with me that recruitment with a minority requires greater efforts, and more funding from governments and community organizations?

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I'll take you along with me to Treasury Board next time.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Ms. Mills, I would like to put a question to you on retention. There has been an improvement there but the fact remains that 36% of immigrants leave the province.

Do you have any statistics broken down by the language spoken? We are talking about 64% of immigrants, but I would like to know the number of francophone immigrants who leave the province.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: We are using census data to find out our retention rates. We haven't done any other form of retention information because that's really the only source data we have. The 2001 census data said that our retention rate was 37%, almost 40%. The 2006 census says it is 63% or 64%. I don't have the numbers with me now, broken down by language, but I will check to see if Statistics Canada has done the breakdown. I think they have. I would be happy to provide that to you.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, please. Thank you.

You've probably analyzed why you are losing immigrants in your province.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Well, first of all, 63% is a pretty good retention rate. It's very good. As Ben said, the outcomes for immigrants who stay in Nova Scotia, like those in Manitoba, are much better than the national average. Those people who stay are doing better economically. The number one reason why they do not stay is that they're not able to find employment or business opportunities in their areas of expertise.

• (0955)

[Translation]

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Welcome to all of you.

I'd like to continue in the same vein as Ms. Zarac.

Ms. Mills, you say that immigrants leave the province, that they can't manage to find a job. If you recruit francophones so that they

can come and settle in a province that is for the most part anglophone, I think it is extremely difficult for them. They can't work in their language. Clearly, they have to learn English. Am I right?

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: They learn English from the outset. Moreover, clearly you can't offer them the same quantity of services that anglophones can access in Quebec.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: No, because people access a variety of services: banking services, transportation services, and investment services. Not all of those services are available in French.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: To my way of thinking, wanting to receive a greater number of francophones is more of a dream than a reality. If these francophones arrive in your province with their family, from whichever francophone country, and they only speak French, it is going to be extremely difficult for them to integrate and succeed. They are going to have to learn the second language. As for the children, it is certain that they will face assimilation one day or the next, if only because of their friends, even if they attend a French-language school.

To my mind, to say that a francophone community is going to manage to survive is a sort of myth. It would take more tools, services, employment possibilities in French for them to really be able to continue to develop in their language. Am I right? This isn't a criticism, it's just a fact.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I would say that there is an Acadian community in Nova Scotia already. Those individuals have to speak English as well as French, but they also enjoy a very rich culture. My expectation is that immigrants who come to Nova Scotia and are French-speaking immigrants will also have to learn English, but they will be welcomed into a very rich and welcoming Acadian community.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: I'd like to hear from the Manitoba representatives.

What percentage of people leave Manitoba because they cannot work in their language, for cultural or professional reasons?

[English]

Mr. Ben Rempel: It's difficult to get numbers on why people would choose to leave the province. Our overall retention rates are positive. Our employment rates are consistently high. In fact, I think we just recently posted the lowest unemployment rate in Canada.

So employment opportunities are there, generally, for immigrants, and their participation rate in the labour market is high. We feel that our job with the francophone immigrants we attract is to make them aware and to prepare them, and in fact, to promote Manitoba to those who see a bilingual lifestyle as an opportunity, not a setback. I think our success has been built on that.

Certainly, I agree with you that services in French are critical. We have invested a lot in services for the reception of immigrants and for their ongoing needs. Employment centres, for example, offer services in French, and so forth. For the most part, most services, particularly in the francophone areas of our city, are available in French.

If you talk to our French community members, more can and must be done, absolutely, but we're on the right track. I think it's based on a common recognition that we need to have services in French if we're going to attract and retain francophone immigrants.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay: Fine.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Guay. We're going to continue with Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank all the witnesses for being here, we appreciate your presence very much.

There are three types of agreements in Canada between the provinces and the federal government concerning immigration and the protection of refugees. There are framework agreements, the provincial Nominee Program and agreements on settlement services. What I want to focus on this morning is the Nominee Program of the province. The purpose of this agreement is to facilitate the immigration of people who can particularly further economic development, as the agreement makes possible the selection of certain refugees or certain immigrants.

Is this program in effect in your province? If so, is it bearing fruit, are the efforts you make in this area successful? My question is addressed to Ms. Mills and Mr. Rempel.

• (1000)

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: First, let me clarify that we do not have a devolved settlement agreement with the Government of Canada, unlike Manitoba, which does. We do have a provincial nominee agreement and that allows us to nominate individuals who meet our labour market and economic development needs in the province. The federal government makes the final decision, though, after security, health, and medical checks are done, but it is a very useful tool to us.

As part of our agreement, we do have a clause in there that says we see immigration as a tool to preserve the French language in Nova Scotia.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Ben Rempel: Our situation, except for the fact that we have the devolved settlement agreement, is similar, in that our agreement places a priority on the francophone immigration strategy.

But absolutely, the provincial nominee program is a key pillar of our economic development strategy in Manitoba, and it has increased both in terms of success and in terms of resources incrementally every year. For a while there, I was the envy of a

number of other departments. When freezes were in place, I was getting new staff and we were expanding our programs.

That was simply because the record was showing that all of our achievements in population growth, in labour market stability—I shouldn't say "all", but a significant proportion of those achievements—were related to the successes through economic immigration that we'd experienced. That was through all categories of immigration, really.

We continue to see the PNP as a stabilizing part of our present, in many ways, a key piece of our economic future, and, in fact, a major reason why we've weathered some of the economic turbulence recently, with more economic or labour market stability than other jurisdictions. We feel it's because of that labour market growth that we sustained over a decade.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Your reply is very interesting. For a few weeks now, we have heard it said that the two pillars, as you have just referred to them, are the insertion in the workplace of immigrants, in particular in the provinces where it is possible to work in French, and education. Correct me if I am wrong. The presence of these immigrants will be a boon to the labour market in particular areas. These are very important pillars for future development. We agree with the fact that this is a forward-looking policy. People know where they come from but they want to know where they are going and how they can work to improve what they have got. Do you consider these two pillars to be very important?

[English]

Mr. Ben Rempel: If I understand the question correctly, I mean... I'll answer simply and say yes, they are. We need to find ways of attracting new kinds of opportunities, particularly for francophone immigrants, not just by recognizing the reality that we have predominantly anglophone workplaces, but by creating opportunities where they can work in French.

We are exploring an initiative, for example, to offer mentorship and work experience opportunities to graduates in France and other countries, whereby they can come here and work as teachers in our immersion schools throughout the province. That's just one example. In our health care sector, we look at francophone nurses and at where they can work in hospitals and health care centres where there are predominantly francophone patients and so on.

So I think, as you said, that with a forward-looking approach, we need to look at how we can not only meet current needs but also increase employment opportunities for them—not just to live in French but also to work in French.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'd simply like to add, somewhat facetiously, that if I had a choice to go either east or west, I would go east. I would go and see Ms. Mills and Ms. Désy. Oh! oh!

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Mr. Généreux, I am originally from the province of Quebec and I went to Nova Scotia to learn English for a few months. And here I am 25 years later; I'm still there because I love the province.

•(1005)

The Chair: When you went there, did you already have a good education and work skills? That is what people look for, Mr. Généreux.

We will continue with Mr. Gravel.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is addressed to the representatives from both provinces. Do post-secondary institutions in your provinces participate in the recruitment and retention of francophone immigrants?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Sainte-Anne University participates in recruiting francophone immigrants, especially foreign students. Authorities organize their own recruitment fairs, more particularly in North Africa and West Africa in order to recruit students. L'Université Sainte-Anne is a very small university, it is the only francophone university in Nova Scotia. It has about 450 students. Between 60 and 70 of them are foreign students. That is an excellent percentage. There are in total 11 universities in Nova Scotia. We have a lot of foreign students and we systematically make presentations in universities including the French-language one, in order to inform, to make the program known to candidates, as well as the possibility for foreign students to become permanent residents through this program. We encourage them to apply.

Mr. Colin Lemoine: It's the same thing in Manitoba. The Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface is the only francophone university in Manitoba. The college makes a lot of efforts to recruit international students sometimes with our cooperation and sometimes alone. As in Nova Scotia, we do everything in our power within the Nominee Program to encourage these students to remain in Manitoba once they have their degrees.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Does your government offer language courses to newcomers and are there special programs for francophone immigrants in your universities?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Excuse me, could you repeat the question?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Does your government offer programs to immigrants, especially francophone immigrants—special programs in schools?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: In primary schools, especially francophone ones, there are programs. There is a person who will help the students who are having difficulties because they don't necessarily speak French, children whose first language is not French. So there is help available for children.

At the university level, the Université Sainte-Anne receives funding within the framework of the Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement relating to the labour market and it offers a program which includes language classes. It is a project, there are language classes but also assistance with insertion into the workplace and placements in a French language workplace. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question?

Yes? Thank you.

Mr. Colin Lemoine: The university college receives approximately \$34,000 a year to offer French-language training. There is also funding to provide English-language tutors to the students. So

there is assistance available for both English and French, both languages.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: You referred to an amount of \$34,000 for French language immigrants in the entire province?

Mr. Colin Lemoine: No, that's just for one university.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: How many do you have?

Mr. Colin Lemoine: We have one.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: So that means \$34,000 for the entire province. It is not very much.

Mr. Colin Lemoine: It's only at the university level. There are also other programs in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Can you give us some examples?

Mr. Colin Lemoine: At the secondary and primary levels, they are mostly English programs.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: So they are programs in English.

Mr. Colin Lemoine: The francophones in schools don't have any problem learning French, and they are also going to learn English. It's fascinating. Their French doesn't really need a whole lot of improvement.

•(1010)

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

We've already reached the third round, and we are going to begin with Mr. Bélanger.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: *Merci.*

Madam Mills, I want to explore this 9% versus 4%. When I asked if I was correct in believing that your objective for the francophone portion of immigration was 9%, you said no, it was 4%. Where I got that 9% was from a report that Madame Désy wrote, in which she said that

[*Translation*]

today—this is a document you signed, Madam—francophone immigration constitutes almost 9% of immigration in Nova Scotia.

[*English*]

That document was quoted in our paper.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Yes, that's true, but it is not an objective, not a target.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What is the objective?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: There aren't any in Nova Scotia as regards a percentage.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you intend to set one?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: It's something we have discussed earlier. Ms. Mills could perhaps address that again.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you intend to have a percentage objective?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: No. At this point, we do not. We're still in the infancy of our immigration strategy overall. We are building our immigration strategy and building capacity within Nova Scotia.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I understand.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: In the same way, we are building our partnerships with the francophone communities.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But if you're building a strategy, and therefore the infrastructure to make sure it materializes, do you not build such a strategy on objectives? Do you have overall objectives?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: We will have a new immigration strategy with overall objectives, yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What would those overall objectives be?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: The strategy is not yet released, and I don't want to pre-empt our minister, who will soon be releasing that strategy.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But there will be objectives?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Within those objectives, will there be a percentage objective for the francophone element of immigration?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: No, there will not.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Would you be prepared to reconsider that? I might argue from this end that the federal immigration act requires it and, therefore, if you're planning on having an agreement with the Government of Canada, as I expect you would, that would have to be included in there. If a case for that were made to you by federal officials, would you incorporate such an objective in your strategic plan?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Well, I was not aware there was a clause in our agreement that says there is a percentage to be stated percentage as the target—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No—

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: But if that is the case, then of course, if we have a signed agreement with another level of government, we would be required to honour that clause.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What I'm saying, ma'am, is that the federal immigration act requires that whatever is done, whatever programs exist, and I suppose whatever agreements are signed with our provincial partners, the overall immigration of the country reflects the current demographic weight of the official language communities. Therefore, it would flow that there would need to be an objective, certainly of no less than 4%.

Would you agree with that? I'm putting you on the spot here. I understand that. Tell me to go fly a kite if you feel I should, and I won't take offence.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm not suggesting that there is such a clause in the agreement; I'm suggesting that there should be.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Oh.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And I will take it upon myself to have a talk with FANE to see if they're prepared to also encourage their government to include such an objective.

If I may dare to say it, since we all seem to agree in this room that Manitoba is a good example to copy, then it would flow that their objectives would also be good examples to copy. I would argue that perhaps it should be higher than 4%, as in the case of Manitoba, so that after you factored in the retention component, indeed, the relative weight of the francophone community in Nova Scotia would not be adversely affected by immigration. *Au contraire*, it would be sustained and perhaps even expanded. It's a noble objective, would you not agree?

• (1015)

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Very noble—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: —if the resources are available to support it and the job opportunities are there as well.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: We're of the view that where there's a will there's a way.

[Translation]

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

Now, we are going to—

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I look forward to bringing you to Treasury Board with me as well.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You know what? I used to be on Treasury Board. I'd love to go.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: Great. You're on.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Weston, you have the floor.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you.

Welcome. *Bienvenue. Huan ying dao wo men de committee.*

In my opinion, the most interesting question is the one my colleague Richard Nadeau asked, the “Nadeau question”. He wants to know the assimilation rate for francophones coming to Canada.

If you do not ask the right question, you do not get the right answer. If the question is how to attract francophones who want to keep speaking French in Canada, we get one answer.

But if the question is how to attract francophones who are interested in what Canada has to offer, a good environment, good education, a good economy, equality, and so on, we get a different answer.

Mr. Rempel spoke about the ability to live in a bilingual setting and about the ability to raise children in both languages. My colleague, Mr. Nadeau, asked a question about the assimilation rate.

But we can ask another question: have we really failed if francophones coming to Canada live and work in English, or have we succeeded? Because we have attracted a lot of francophones who will have an influence on the rest of Canada and will teach in the schools where my own children will benefit from their presence. If we ask that question, the answer will be different.

What do you think about that question? How do we define assimilation and what conclusion do you come to?

[English]

Mr. Ben Rempel: That's a complex question. I'll try to do justice to it.

In general, I'm not sure that assimilation and the rate thereof is the right question. I think we have to look at the reality on the ground and what we're trying to achieve. Certainly that has been the case in Manitoba.

We wouldn't be having this conversation today if we had taken the status quo in 1998 and said, "Why are we bothering?" If we'd said that immigrants weren't coming to Manitoba and they'd be crazy to, which was certainly the attitude that potential immigrants received from some immigration officers overseas, we wouldn't be having this conversation today, because we wouldn't be in the process.

You have to start somewhere. The reality for a lot of minority official language communities outside of Quebec is that you have to start with the bilingual reality first before you can talk in realistic terms about being able to both live and work in French in most areas.

We feel that with the objective we have—the 7% target—and the partnerships we have on the ground, we can transform and bring more vibrancy to communities. If we had brought them to the table today, they would probably tell you that St. Boniface today is different from what it was 10 years ago.

Whether we're talking about St. Pierre, St. Malo, or any of the other communities we have throughout Manitoba, we are seeing possibilities and an optimism that stagnation and assimilation are not the only things on the table. The potential for growth, expanding communities, and the francophone reality in Manitoba are there.

We have work to do. As we said, it means more investment in the services available across all walks of life. You started with the question of assimilation; I would start with the question of how we build on the successes we've achieved so far.

• (1020)

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I think I tried to answer that question earlier, but your answer is quite a bit more eloquent and positive than mine.

Nova Scotia is not a bilingual province. We do have the French-language Services Act, which ensures that all French-speaking individuals have access to services in French. But having said that, it is true that anyone who comes to the province will need to speak English as well as French.

We have excellent French schools in our province. I'm very proud of that. Our French-language parents have the opportunity to send their children to those schools. They are excellent schools academically and community-wise. We have a very rich and old culture in Nova Scotia, and we think that by attracting more

francophone immigrants we'll be able to preserve that culture and language much longer.

I see it as a very positive initiative, and although we haven't set targets, we are very keen and proactive in our efforts to attract more immigrants. Certainly we don't want to have their language assimilated; we want to celebrate it and have cultural diversity preserved in our province.

[Translation]

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

Now we move on to Mr. Nadeau.

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

I am coming back to the question of French schools. Do you think—either Ms. Mills or Ms. Désy—of an immersion school and an Acadian school as French schools on the same level, or do you make a distinction between the two?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: For myself, I see a major difference between the French schools that are part of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial and immersion schools. The former are wholly French-speaking schools; the latter are for students whose first language is not French.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Meaning that they are for anglophones who want to learn French. I was saying earlier that children can go to French school anywhere in Nova Scotia, inasmuch as immersion schools or Acadian schools are considered the same thing.

Ms. Joëlle Désy: There are wholly francophone schools in all the Acadian regions of Nova Scotia. Students can go to them. Transportation is provided too.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So they are all over the province.

Ms. Joëlle Désy: There are 19 Acadian schools.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So there are 19 schools in Nova Scotia for a population of about a million people?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Nova Scotia has just under a million people. Not all of them are francophone.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I am a little skeptical about all this because I am from Saskatchewan myself where we have a similar situation. I worked long and hard to get French schools and, for a population of about a million people, we have around ten schools. In some parts of Saskatchewan, it is not true that there is automatically an FFL, French-first-language, school as opposed to a French-second-language school. I know that Nova Scotia is smaller.

Ms. Joëlle Désy: That is the aspect I wanted to bring up.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: But the fact remains that, if you start off in Yarmouth to go to school in Dartmouth, that is quite a hike.

Ms. Joëlle Désy: But there are francophone schools—

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I am going to stop there, but it is still something to consider if you want to attract people. It is one of the main factors. In Saskatchewan, they wanted to bring students to the French school in Saskatoon. For example, when Atomic Energy of Canada employees moved to Saskatchewan, their first question was about where the French school was located. There was one in Saskatoon, but it was the only one. If they moved somewhere else, like Yorkton, there wasn't one.

The situations are different and I am not going to take it any further. But what you are saying is interesting.

At another session on immigration and French-speaking Canada, we were told that the Citizenship and Immigration Canada—Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee was supposed to meet yesterday. Did you have representatives at that meeting in Manitoba? In terms of the future, what came out of it?

You know that our committee is going to table a report and that it could include what we say here. So maybe we can give you a hand to get things moving forward.

• (1025)

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Nova Scotia is a new member. We have been part of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada—Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee since 2009. Yesterday, there were statistical presentations by Citizenship and Immigration and by Metropolis. They adopted three priorities for the 2010-2011 year.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: What are the three priorities? Can you tell us what they are? Perhaps Mr. Lemoine is more up to speed.

Go ahead, Ms. Désy.

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Okay.

The priorities are: to strengthen provincial and territorial immigration networks; to support the economic integration of French-speaking immigrants into francophone minority communities, as well as promotion and recruitment. They were adopted.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: But Nova Scotia is still the original Acadie. Today, in fact, we know that the deportation started in Nova Scotia. I am a bit surprised to learn that this jewel of Acadie... Nova Scotia is just starting to deal with the francophone side of immigration, immigrants it wants to attract. Did things happen beforehand or are you really starting from scratch?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: When the Office of Immigration was established in 2005, the Acadian community came to us immediately. It was part of our initial strategy. So we are not starting today. The Office of Immigration has been working closely with the French-speaking and Acadian community since 2005. It provides it with funding for francophone immigration matters.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The France-Acadie scholarships have been of great benefit to education. Are they just in New Brunswick or can Nova Scotians also apply?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: They have them in Nova Scotia as well, at the Université Sainte-Anne.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

That ends our third round. Do you want a fourth round? If not, Ms. Glover and Mr. Bélanger have asked to speak.

Okay.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, everyone. I am going to speak in English to make things quicker. I actually have several comments to make.

[English]

Premièrement, we spoke, Mr. Rempel, about some of the things that are available not only Manitoba, but in St. Boniface, and I'm wanting to know if you are familiar with the René Deleorme Centre in St. Boniface.

No? I don't mean to put you on the spot. It's because it's in the education department, so I would say to some of my colleagues, although you are giving us a wonderful presentation on the immigration portions, there are some other things happening within education that address many of the needs of our communities, our francophone communities who come to our wonderful province.

René Deleorme Centre is actually in Lavallee School. It is very much there to address the situations like Mr. Bélanger mentioned with the Congolese community. The René Deleorme Centre accepts immigrants and refugees. They're brought to the centre, where an evaluation is actually done, an assessment of what grade level they may be at, because many refugees of course have interrupted education. They assess the family needs as well, because counselling is something that many of these families require.

It takes generally about three to four weeks for these families to be assessed, for the children to be assessed, and then for them to be placed in an appropriate school, in appropriate counselling services, etc., to allow them to integrate properly. I'm very proud that the Government of Manitoba also funds this kind of a centre, but it is through education. So the Congolese community is very much engaged in that. I would suggest that we invite the René Deleorme Centre here to be heard on that issue.

With regard to education as well, we have a summer program that the Congolese community takes advantage of. It's in a school, so that they can catch up to the grade that their chronological age is set at. Through the Canada summer jobs program, they've been able to actually access some funding—and so then helped last year—and some people to help them with that.

Of course, with French language services, you talked about Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, but many French language courses are offered through organizations like Pluri-elles. So it's not the only service in the province. It's just the one you're familiar with because you're involved in the immigration area, but Pluri-elles, SFM, got \$112,00 last year specifically for refugees so that they can integrate better. There are a number of things that are involved.

I did want to make a comment as well on the census, because what Mr. Weston mentioned is so imperative for us to understand while we're doing this very topic. Because I am not counted in the census, yet I'm completely bilingual. Many of our families who are born in Manitoba, who are considered Franco-Manitoban families, are not counted in the census as being French. Many of our families speak both languages in their homes. That is how they are working. Yet there is no category, there is no definition for them, when they complete their census. So we've lost a whole sector of francophones because they don't meet the definitions.

So we have been talking previously about adjusting the definition that the census uses so we don't lose those numbers. Therefore, assimilation is not, again, the only criteria we should be looking at, because there are families like mine who actually elevate the numbers. The immersion students elevate the numbers of people who would like to have French services. I would like to be counted. I would like my children to be counted, and I think they ought to be counted, so that French services are looked at more broadly rather than just looking at whether your mother tongue or your second official language is French.

So I would ask you, what are your thoughts on a change in definition to count those people who are not counted but deserve the benefit of being counted?

• (1030)

Mr. Ben Rempel: Not being the department that in many ways would be called upon to increase the funding to those services, which would inevitably flow from that, I'd say that I'd support it very much. I think we need, minimally, a more accurate representation of our community size and extent on the ground. I think it would, as you said, tell a much better story.

My daughters both went through immersion schools and are fully bilingual. I suspect that when they have children it will be the same thing. There are elements of growth and expansion in the francophone community that are not captured in some of these data sources. I would love to see the kinds of improvements you've talked about.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

Ms. Mills.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I agree that we really do need more accurate information in order to do better planning. To set a target, you really need to know what is the reality here and what is achievable. So I totally agree and I think that it's very difficult when you're relying on statistics information only.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good.

I think that in St. Boniface that is part of why we are so successful. It's because we embrace not only the French mother tongue Franco-Manitobans, but we embrace and have, I guess, a linguistic harmony with those people who want to be a part of French culture. And we want to be counted.

We do want to be counted, because we want to help to continue this success story, which is a wonderful story. I am so proud today to hear again about how Manitoba has moved forward. Gary Filmon is actually in the building today. He is going to be testifying, and he

was the Premier of Manitoba when *le juge Chartier* put forward his initial plan to provide these services. I'm very proud today.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover, for this enthusiastic comment.

We've taken down your suggestion to have the René Deleorme Centre people here. We'll discuss it at our next steering committee.

Now, Mr. Bélanger, I think you want to add something.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I certainly do, Mr. Chair.

I would like to go back to Ms. Mills.

[*English*]

Madam Mills, I loved our last exchange, so I want to continue. This may surprise you, because I'm taking some exception to Monsieur Nadeau's line of questioning. He and I see things quite often on the same wavelength, except for the ultimate question, of course.

But I have to compliment Nova Scotia, as opposed to criticizing here. On the act that you referred to, can you tell me if it was Minister d'Entremont who got it passed?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: That's correct. It was the French-language Services Act, and we are very proud of that act. The Nova Scotia government has been working very hard to fulfill the terms of that act.

We have a coordinating committee. Each department has a French-language services representative appointed to sit on that committee. Joëlle is our representative. In our Office of Immigration, which is very tiny, we have a designated francophone position. We have a minister's advisory council made up of 13 individuals. Two of the seats on that council are francophone seats.

Each year we put together a new plan that we must submit to the House of Assembly, indicating what we plan to do that year to improve access to French-language services for persons living in Nova Scotia and what we're doing to build our capacity in our respective departments and offices.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You have one school board for your whole area. I know this is not really part of our topic this morning, but, if you have the answer, could you tell me how many francophone schools there are in the province? I am not talking about immersion, but schools.

Ms. Joëlle Déry: There are 19 wholly francophone schools.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Great! Is that number going up, or down, or staying the same at the moment?

Ms. Joëlle Déry: It is increasing, especially in the metropolitan area. We have to build a new school there soon because we have a high demand.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Have attempts been made to improve court services?

Ms. Joëlle Déry: The Association des juristes d'expression française de la Nouvelle-Écosse has responsibility for that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There is an active bar association too? Wow!

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Yes, it is really active. It also sits on the Francophone Immigration Steering Committee. It is working on it.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Assimilation is a fact. It is everywhere, even in Ottawa, believe it or not. I would even say that it exists in the Parliament of Canada, but we are working to reverse the trend. Whatever, we must not always see the glass half empty. We have to see what positive things can be done.

So I will turn back to Ms. Mills.

[English]

Madam Mills, I urge you to seriously consider incorporating into your strategic plan an objective of higher than 4% for francophone immigration. And the reason for that should be fairly obvious.

If indeed the act that you are referring to—I'm not talking about the federal act, but your act—calls for an improvement on a yearly basis, I would argue, and I would hope you'd agree with me, although we'll see... I'll give you some time to respond, with a short response, though, because I'm afraid of what you might do to me.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I would hope you'd agree it stands to reason that if indeed the objectives of your act are to be attained, it has to be measured in objectives that are higher than the current level.

And I would transpose that to immigration. If the percentage of the population is 4% and you realize yourself that you have a retention difficulty because you're still only at 60%, your objective, therefore, should be in the neighbourhood of the one in Manitoba, at 6% or 7%. Would you agree to that?

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: I think it's a very plausible argument and I appreciate that you brought it to my attention. I think it's well worth looking at, but I cannot make a commitment in this room.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No. I am not asking you to.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: The development of the strategy is not mine alone. It has gone through a detailed process. I'll certainly bring this back. It has not been finalized yet, though it is in its nearly complete stages. I will certainly bring this discussion to my minister.

But I want to say something very important, and that is that immigration is new. You mentioned why we are only starting with our francophone recruitment now. Well, the truth of the matter is, we weren't doing any recruitment before 2005, anywhere, so we started our recruitment in francophone countries in 2005 as well as in Europe and other places.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I am aware of that.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: So we are building capacity.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm aware of that and I appreciate it.

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: The other thing is that every day I have immigrants come to my office and those individuals are saying to me that they're having a tough time finding employment. So we have to focus our efforts on engaging employers so that more employers are open to hiring immigrants. That is where our focus is.

• (1040)

[Translation]

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

Mrs. Boucher has not had a chance to speak and she would like to question the witnesses.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, everyone.

Unlike some of my colleagues, I would say that the glass is half full, not half empty. I am not going to see only the negative and I think that you are doing an exceptional job. In 2009, Manitoba had an increase in francophone immigration of 260% compared to 1999 and an increase of 32% in 2009 alone. This is excellent and no one can say that it is not. It is excellent, you are always moving forward, you are looking to the future.

But our young people and the next generation are much more open to the world. So the language is not necessarily a focal point any more.

When you say immigrants, are you also on the lookout for other francophones, like Quebeckers, to help your francophone minority communities? Do you have occasion to develop interprovincial links?

Ms. Joëlle Désy: Immigration Québec has a completely different policy, and its understanding is also entirely different. There is often secondary immigration from Quebec. They are francophone immigrants who move to Quebec and then make another move to other provinces in Canada.

As for assistance, when we go to Destination Canada—the annual event held in France or Belgium—Quebec is there. All provinces and territories are represented, except Nunavut. That is another opportunity for us to have a lot of dialogue with Quebec, but there is no interprovincial exchange as such. Perhaps Elizabeth can add something.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Mills: No, I think that's accurate to say. In Atlantic Canada, we tend to work closely with our Atlantic partners: New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. We work collaboratively in that regard.

I think we tend to be closer to Manitoba than some of the other provinces.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would like to congratulate you on your work. I know how much more difficult things are in your provinces today. We mentioned Manitoba and the extent to which bilingualism is important. I was pleased to see on TV today that, in Quebec, 66% of Quebeckers would like to have access to an English school, but 61% of francophones do not have that access because they are not anglophone. That is good news. I am glad to see that people are opening up to the world more and more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

[English]

It's now time to adjourn our meeting.

I want to thank you for appearing at this committee this morning. [Translation]
You've brought us some success stories, as well as some lessons.
Finally, I want to congratulate you on your remarkable effort to
promote the vitality of the official language community in your
provinces.

Thank you all.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting is adjourned.

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