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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this 41st meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

This morning, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), we are discussing the 2009-2010 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which was referred to the committee on November 2, 2010. We are continuing the meeting with the agencies reviewed by the Commissioner of Official Languages.

[English]

This morning we have the pleasure of having with us the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, Mr. Don Head.

Welcome, Mr. Head.

We also have with us Mr. Fraser Macaulay. He is assistant commissioner of human resource management. I invite you to begin with your opening comments, and then the members of the committee will have some questions for you.

[Translation]

Mr. Don Head (Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the latest results of the Correctional Service of Canada's performance report card on official languages.

I'd like to start by sharing with you a quick overview of the Correctional Service of Canada. On an average day, the Correctional Service of Canada is responsible for approximately 13,800 federally incarcerated inmates and 8,700 offenders in the community. CSC employs approximately 17,400 staff across the country and strives to maintain a workforce that is reflective of a Canadian society. Just over 47% of our staff are women; slightly more than 5% are from visible and minority groups; approximately 4% are persons with a disability; and over 7% are individuals of aboriginal ancestry.

Two occupational groups, for the most part exclusive to the Correctional Service of Canada, represent over half of all of the staff employed in—

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'm trying to understand, but I don't have access to French interpretation.

The Chair: Please wait a moment.

[English]

If you would please wait, we'll make sure the system is working properly.

[Translation]

Mr. Don Head: Should I start again?

The Chair: No, go on.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Two occupational groups, for the most part exclusive to the Correctional Service of Canada, represent over half of all staff employed in the operational units across the country: the correctional officer group comprises 39% of staff, while another 16% of staff are in the welfare programs category, the group that includes parole and program officers who work in the institutions and in the community.

The remainder of the Correctional Service of Canada's workforce reflects the variety of other skills required to operate institutions and community parole offices, from health care professionals, to electricians, to food service staff, as well as staff providing corporate and administrative functions at the local, regional, and national levels.

All staff work together to ensure that the institutions operate in a secure and safe fashion and that offenders are properly supervised on release, with specialized initiatives and approaches for aboriginal offenders, women offenders, and offenders with mental health needs.

CSC also benefits from the contributions of over 9,000 volunteers active in our institutions and working with our community parole offices. Correctional Service of Canada volunteers are involved in activities ranging from one-time events to providing ongoing services to inmates and offenders in the community, including tutoring, social and cultural events, faith-based services, and substance abuse programming.

CSC also supports the involvement of volunteer citizen advisory committees at the local, regional, and national levels to provide citizen feedback on CSC policies and practices.

In relation to our official languages obligations, let me state from the outset that CSC is fully committed to having a public service that promotes Canada's linguistic duality, both nationally and at its nearly 200 points of service across the country. We take the 2009-10 results very seriously, and the decline in our overall rating, as well as most of the individual elements, was cause for great concern for me as commissioner and for my entire executive committee, which is the leadership team for the organization.

Under my direction, we have already begun to look at ways we can improve our results and service to Canadians in a substantive way, as was intended by the legislation. For my part, this includes personally engaging Mr. Graham Fraser, the official languages commissioner, so we can work together to continuously move the yardsticks forward.

I'd like to note that this year in particular, CSC made significant efforts to improve the response of in-person active offers. Although our rating for part IV, "Service to the public", regressed, the Commissioner of Official Languages did recognize our efforts in this regard in the 2009-10 report card. Since the release of the report card, we have undertaken a rigorous self-audit throughout the organization, as well as a daily verification through the staff in my office, to test our ability to actively offer services to the public in both official languages.

We are currently updating our action plan to fully integrate both official languages into our daily work practices to cover the period 2011-2014. The updated plan has a clear focus on enhanced communications, monitoring, regular reporting, and accountability. It will of course target key concerns identified by the official languages commissioner in the report card.

I'd like to provide you with some key examples of where we are placing our focus. The 2011-2014 action plan features two components. The first component addresses CSC's obligations under part IV, "Services to the Public"; part V, "Language of Work"; and part VI, "Participation of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians", of the Official Languages Act.

The activities within this first component will be organized under the following three overarching themes: management and leadership, employee capacities, and service to the public. Of course, our main focus will be on increasing awareness of the Official Languages Act obligations for both managers and employees.

● (0855)

The second component addresses CSC's obligations under part VII of the act and will include action items to raise awareness, enhance consultation, communication, and coordination, and reinforce our accountabilities in light of the CALDECH decision. As you are aware, this is the Supreme Court decision that mandated that services to the public be of equal quality, and which all departments in the federal public service are required to implement. In short, Mr. Chair and committee members, I am not here today to dispute the findings of the Commissioner of Official Languages. Rather, I want to reiterate our commitment to continuous improvement. In fact, since the report card was released, we have been putting significant pressure on our weakest areas and we have realized some gains. Under my leadership, we will continue to do so.

CSC recognizes it has a long way to go before we can consider our performance as fully meeting the intent of the legislation. I welcome the findings of this report card so that CSC can better target its efforts and resources to making a significant difference in how we respect the linguistic duality of the country we live in and the people we serve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the report card's findings with you today, as well as highlighting some of our remedial actions. I would be happy to entertain any questions you may have for me at this time.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Head.

Who is the champion of official languages in your agency?

Mr. Don Head: It's my assistant commissioner of health care services, Leslie MacLean.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

[Translation]

We will start the first round without further delay.

Mrs. Zarac, the floor is yours.

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

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

You gave some statistics, but I'd like to know what percentage of employees are bilingual. You didn't say.

Mr. Don Head: Pardon?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You gave some statistics about your employees, but you didn't say how many of them are bilingual. Do you have that number?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Yes, I do. In terms of the number of positions within the correctional service, we have 3,180 positions designated bilingual. That includes BBB, CBC, and CCC positions. Right now, 3,149 people occupying those positions meet their language requirements, and 31 are in the process of language training or are about to go back.

As a subset of that 3,180, 190 of my executives across the country are in designated bilingual positions: 10 of those are designated at the BBB level; 122 at the CBC or CCC level. Of that 132, currently seven are not meeting their language requirements or their period has expired and they're going back to language training right now.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Speaking of training, some services have explained to us that they don't have enough budget to provide their employees with training. Is this your case or do you have enough resources to ensure that adequate training is given?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: A very good question. If I go back a little bit in history, around 2005 to 2007, just in terms of providing contracts to provide the language training services, we were spending just over \$400,000 a year. Since I became commissioner, I've made an investment in language training. We're now spending between \$1 million and \$1,100,000 just on contracts alone. That doesn't include the costs we make available to backfill the people who are off on language training. We have doubled the moneys available to send people off on language training.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So that's not a problem. Okay.

[Translation]

You mentioned in your presentation that meeting with the Commissioner of Official Languages is one of your duties. Have you met with him already?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Yes, we had the official languages commissioner come to our executive committee meeting a couple of years ago. I had a meeting scheduled with him a couple of weeks ago, but I ended up being ill that day. We are meeting again on February 17 to go over not only the report card results but our action plan that our executive committee went over in great detail two weeks ago.

I personally have some specific questions I want to get guidance from the official languages commissioner on in terms of how we deal with certain situations that my staff and managers have faced across the country; more particularly, how we can fulfill our obligations, particularly in relation to part VII. We have some questions as to how we best do that, given the location of some of our facilities, which are in remote communities.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I hope you're going to hold this meeting as soon as possible. I think it's important that you acknowledge your responsibilities. In my opinion, a discussion with the commissioner will make that possible.

The commissioner accused you of not handling complaints in a timely manner, among other things. I'd like to know how many complaints you receive, if you have an internal process for handling them and, if not, what exactly you do. I'd also like to know what you intend to do about the situation that the commissioner pointed out.

• (0905)

[English]

Mr. Don Head: We last year received 14 complaints, four from staff and ten from offenders. The four from staff were in relation to issues of the language profile for positions that were posted. The other was just the...getting access to their personal information in the language of their choice. There were four of those. Three came out of the Atlantic region and one came out of the Ontario region.

In terms of our ten complaints from offenders, two came out of the Atlantic region and eight came out of the Quebec region. They were in relation to access to the programs we offer in the language of their choice and access to staff who are engaging them who are able to provide services in the language of their choice. For example, there

was a complaint by an anglophone offender about announcements made in French only, in one of the institutions in the Quebec region.

So that's the nature of the complaints we've received, and the number. In terms of the process...

Oh, I'm sorry, Madam.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I'll come back to the nature of the complaints a little later if I have time.

I'd like to know why you took so long to provide the documents.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: That's with regard to delays in providing the documents?

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: The commissioner noted that you were not always timely in providing the documents required to handle the complaints and that, sometimes, there were delays.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Oh, okay.

Yes, part of the problem was the process that we had in place for responding to complaints that were brought to our attention. We have put a lot of effort into realigning the manner in which complaints are brought to our attention, information is collected, and we respond to the complaints.

Part of the problem we had was that when the complaints came from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages to our regional coordinators, they would start some work, but our managers were not necessarily engaged to ensure that things were being done in a timely way. So we've focused on that.

As well, the role played at NHQ by my staff, by Mr. Macaulay's staff, has been enhanced so that we're on top of complaints and are ensuring that we're responding in a timely way.

So yes, the notation was correct, but we've taken some specific actions to rectify that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do I still have a little time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Thank you, but your time is already up, Mrs. Zarac.

We will now go to Mr. Nadeau.

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

Good afternoon, gentlemen.

Mr. Head, you are assistant commissioner, in this case, an executive with Correctional Service of Canada. Do you have a CBC linguistic profile?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Yes, I do.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You said that 32 senior public servants no longer meet the bilingual requirements—I imagine it's a CBC or required linguistic profile—and that they must go back and take courses to become bilingual again. I have a lot of difficulty understanding that. Where I come from, we learn French and pick up English. I don't understand how people who have worked for a long time in the public service, regardless of the department, agency or Crown corporation, get a bilingual rating, then lose it and have to get it again. It's not like losing a scarf and having to go and buy another one. Explain this to me. I don't understand it.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Part of it is particularly in the regions, when individuals are occupying positions that have been deemed or identified as being bilingual. They may not necessarily be using their second language on a regular basis in order to keep it up. That's just partly because of demand—for example, individuals in the prairie region or the Pacific region. When that occurs, the five-year period for assessing them goes by. When it's time to do the re-assessment, it may be determined that they need a month to be refreshed so that they can, for example, pass the oral exam, or they may just need some refreshing in the writing skills so that they can pass that exam.

I just want to correct the number. When I mentioned that there were 31 individuals who did not meet the language requirements, that's all staff, not just the senior staff. So it's all staff at all levels. It was seven at the executive level.

● (0910)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: There are prison services almost everywhere in Canada. If I understand correctly, if a member of your staff is working in a region where French is spoken, so in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick or another region designated under the Official Languages Act, and must leave Prince Albert to move north of Montreal, for example, he will have to take this course again once he gets there. Is this person required to be bilingual before obtaining a senior executive position?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Sorry, sir. The expectation is that they would meet the language profile before they go into that new position transfer. As you may be aware, the language grades last for five years. They have a five-year shelf life, and if individuals are within that five-year period and there is no other indication of issues or concerns, then they're deemed to meet the language profile.

We do make efforts for people to keep their language refreshed at times. For example, at our national headquarters in Ottawa, there will be brown bag lunches that are offered in the second language for people so they can keep practising.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: On a different topic, Mr. Head, there's something that really jumped out at me in the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. It's on page 27 of the French version and involves employees being able to write to their supervisors in their own language. At CSC, 36% of Francophones don't feel comfortable writing something to their supervisors in French, even though they're entitled to. I know that this is looked

down upon in other departments. The documents have to be sent to translation before they are given to senior executives. Sometimes the translation doesn't reflect the meaning of the original. What do you do to ensure that a Francophone or an individual who wants to write in French can do so without being reprimanded or humiliated? That includes everything from emails to more serious, more substantial reports.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: That is a very good question. We have, as part of our approach to addressing the issues that have been identified in the report, reminded supervisors and managers of their obligations and their obligations to staff who chose to correspond with them in their language of choice. We have reinforced that. We have identified some gaps that we need to address in terms of helping prepare people to be able to respond. One of the things, as an example, that we're encouraging people to do is to show some leadership. For example, when staff write directly to me—and line staff do on occasion—I always respond to them relatively immediately in the language in which they have written to me.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Do you understand that the idea is to be able to write the message yourself? I know what I'd like the answer to be, but people need to know that they won't be looked down on and that it won't put their career in jeopardy. They might be afraid that not writing everything in English won't help them "because Canada is in English" there.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: *C'est vrai, monsieur.* This is one of the things again that we're reinforcing with the managers—that the employees have that right—and as well reinforcing with the employees that they have the right to choose the language they wish to correspond or engage their supervisors or managers in. We know that this is a gap, it was pointed out in the report card, and we are putting effort in there to remind everybody of their obligations, as well as their rights.

● (0915)

[Translation]

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

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

The Chair: Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

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

I'd like to thank our witnesses.

You've almost set a record. You got D, D, D, E and a B. Surely, the Commissioner of Official Languages is making this public. You mustn't be too thrilled that it's going to be public.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: To be honest, I'm not thrilled at all. I would say—and I'm not going to be defensive. As I've indicated, I'm not going to contest his results. Part of the grading is a result of changing the cut-off scores for the lettered grade.

I'm less concerned in terms of the letter grade as to the actual content that the official languages commissioner has pointed out. So absolutely I'm not satisfied with the result, regardless of what letter you place on it. We have some work to do. We've identified a plan to move forward and to respond to the deficiencies.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: When we go to school, we can write tests and give answers to test questions, but a D gets us nowhere.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Exactly—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: A little earlier you said...

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I have no disagreement with you, and as I—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: You reminded your supervisors and the people there of their obligations. If you got a D, that means there wasn't only one case. The commissioner's report indicates that the performance is not good. You said that you reminded your supervisors. Usually, when a supervisor does not carry out his or her responsibilities, action is taken. But nothing has been done, and it's continued for all these years.

I'll tell you something. A number of years ago, I visited a few prisons with the former solicitor general, Andy Scott. People were already complaining about this at the time. I went to Renous. The people were complaining. They couldn't keep anything in French on the bulletin board. It was pulled off and removed. What are you going to do with that?

How many prisons for women are there in the Atlantic Region?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Just one.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: There's only one. Is it totally bilingual, very bilingual and does it respect bilingualism? Is it still in Nova Scotia?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I can get you the exact numbers of how many positions are in there. It's not fully bilingual.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I know about a francophone from Tracadie-Sheila who doesn't speak a word of English. She filed a complaint because she was mistreated for not speaking English. The service she received was pitiful. Lawyers from Nova Scotia told me about the situation. Is that acceptable? Can we do anything we like because a person goes to prison? Is it normal to take away all a person's rights, especially those ones? This didn't just happen yesterday, either, but three or four years ago. The commissioner only just did his review and you got a D. There's a problem in your department. How do you plan to rectify it?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: As I pointed out, there are several things that we've done, including starting with the issue of enhancing the

awareness of supervisors and managers, setting performance objectives in people's performance agreements so that we're moving the yardsticks. We've set very specific goals. Although I've indicated that we're doing work in terms of increasing the awareness of people, that for me is not the end-all and be-all.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: There's a problem. The Department of Justice or Correctional Service of Canada are always there to impose penalties on people who break the law, when those same organizations, which are there to represent the population, commit offences. These are violations of the act. Don't you agree?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Yes, as I've indicated, we recognize the deficiencies and we're working on them. We have a very specific plan to address the gaps.

The problems, as you've pointed out, have not developed overnight. But I'm pushing the—

• (0920)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm going to ask you a bilingual question. Who was asleep at the switch *pendant tout ce temps*? The Official Languages Act has been around for 40 years. There's only one prison for women and only one officially bilingual province in all of the Atlantic region, but we get complaints about a person not being served in their own language.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I'd be glad to get the information on the specific complaint so that we can action it.

I have to point out that 10 years ago there was only one prison in the entire country for women. Part of the reason for building the regional facilities at that time was to recognize the needs of women from different parts of the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: How many bilingual people are there in the prison in Truro?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I can get you the information this afternoon.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: How many bilingual people in Miramichi?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I can get you the numbers for—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to know this. For all the prisons in the Atlantic region, what is the ratio of bilingual people and who are the persons responsible? I'd like to know if, among those persons responsible, there are bilingual supervisors and what percentage they represent.

Mr. Don Head: Okay.

[English]

I will provide the committee with the breakdown of the positions for each of the institutions in the Atlantic region.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you include official languages in your departmental reports?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Could we see the report?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: The report to the Clerk of the Privy Council? Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: You said that people have filed complaints.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you will be able to come back to that question on the second round.

Mr. Gourde, it's your turn.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

In his review, the Commissioner of Official Languages no doubt saw that there were some deficiencies at Correctional Service of Canada, but after that observation, which you just quite candidly acknowledged, did you put an action plan in place? Did you look into the problematic nature of the situation? What steps are you going to take to improve things?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: As I mentioned earlier, we've taken this on at the senior executive table within the organization and looked at the work we need to do in relation to parts IV, V, VI, and VII of the act.

Just to give you some examples, in relation to providing active offer to the public, our score several years ago was absolutely dismal. It was 0%, when we go back to 2005-06. The following year it went up to only 4%, and then to 32%. I've set a very high-level goal that's intended to get us to 100% in the next three years. I've established very specific targets for that. We've also implemented a self-audit regime so that sites and managers can audit their own performances.

As well, through my office on a weekly basis, every work site that has a public phone number is contacted to verify whether the active offer is made, whether the individual is referred to somebody who can assist them in the language of their choice, how long it takes them to get somebody on the line that they can talk to, as well as the quality of the service that's being provided. That has been put in place.

Some of the other items that were identified in the report were in relation to providing health care professionals who were bilingual to provide services to offenders. I've set very rigid targets to ensure that we have the right capacity across the country so we meet our target. We're up to 50% this year, 80% next year, and 100% the following year.

We are starting to engage in activities that will help us with part VII in terms of the advancement of English and French across the country in the communities. As I pointed out, I'm going to be

engaging the official languages commissioner specifically on this for his advice and guidance as to how our organization can best do that.

As a starting point, I've asked that all our managers across the country ensure through their citizens advisory committees that they're reaching out to the other official language community in the community where they're located.

I should mention that we've also sent out materials to about 140 different communities in the other official language than the one they are deemed to be in, inviting people in the community to engage us and help us in discussions as to how we can advance the minority language community in the area we're located.

We will continue with our investment of moneys in language training for staff, and ideally move to be proactive. One of the challenges that has been identified for us is that individuals do not need to be bilingual or deemed to be bilingual in order to advance within the organization. So we need to do some proactive language training assignments to prepare the next wave of leaders to come within the organization.

● (0925)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Let's talk about what might be at the root of the staffing problem, and please correct me if I'm wrong. If there are 70% anglophones and 30% francophones in a prison, how do you respect the bilingualism criteria among staff? Could you have a prison with 95% anglophone employees and only 5% of people who can provide services to francophones? Do you follow some kind of ratio? How do you do it?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: It is one of our challenges for some of our more remote locations, remote institutions. As an example, at Grande Cache, Alberta, our penitentiary located there, there is no significant francophone community. We have to look outside. The nearest communities are places like Hinton and Edson, and then four hours away, Edmonton. So we do have challenges.

We look to encourage bilingual staff to move there, even if it's for a two-year assignment, to try to provide that service. We look to make sure that we have a capacity, one way or another, to meet the needs of individuals who are requesting services in the other official language, whether it be English or French, depending on the location of the facility.

We know the breakdown of the offender population for each of the institutions, for each of the regions, and that is factored into our human resource planning and staffing document. We take that into account and strive to ensure that we're hiring staff with a bilingual capacity. Where it is difficult, we're making additional investments in language training so individuals can learn the other language and have that capacity within the facility. We're trying to tackle this the best way we can, given the challenges associated with some of our remote locations.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

We'll now start the second round with Mr. Murphy.

• (0930)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Head, I have a few questions for you about your official languages champion, Leslie MacLean.

[English]

I have a simple question: why isn't she here?

Mr. Don Head: Originally she was going to come when we were first scheduled to be here. It's just that our schedules haven't been able to match up for this day.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I'm newly new, or I'm renewed here at this committee. Almost every other time we've had a department in to talk about this, we had the champion here, and it's important because they're the champion. For instance, they might be able to answer questions better than you. I am from Atlantic Canada, as you know, and I'm also a lawyer, as you also know. In the CALDECH case, the Supreme Court of Canada found that the northern Ontario development agency needed to consult minority populations and provide services. This is a positively mandated legal duty on governments—particularly the federal government, because of the strength of the federal official languages statute compared with some of the provincial statutes.

So consulting minority communities in Atlantic Canada is something I would ask you about if you were the champion. I realize you have a big operation to run. But when did you meet with, say, Jean-Marie Nadeau. Do you know who Jean-Marie Nadeau is? Have you met with him, and those kinds of stakeholders? You have?

Mr. Don Head: My regional deputy commissioner, Atlantic region, has been working closely with the federal council down there. As a matter of fact, in the Atlantic region, she and one of her counterparts actually received an award for the work they're doing to advance official languages within the Atlantic region.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I might drill down on that and ask how many times you have met. I mean you as a group, not you as a person. How many times have you met with minority language communities in Atlantic Canada? Are there documents that have sprung from those meetings?

Mr. Don Head: The short answer is that we have not met enough. That's why part of our plan is to find an approach that is, for lack of a better word, more aggressive, more intense, than we have taken in the past. Part of my personal discussions with the official languages commissioner will focus on hearing his suggestions on what we can do to advance this cause even further, given some of the communities we're in.

Mr. Brian Murphy: As for making benchmarks, which we're all interested in, can you provide the committee, maybe through Ms. MacLean, the length, breadth, and results of the consultations with minority language communities? I'm particularly interested in Atlantic Canada, but this is a national body. It shouldn't be too difficult to put that in a letter form. Then, when and if you're back here in a year's time, we might find that you've doubled the number, length, breadth, and reportage of your meetings. It makes sense to me. Is that possible?

Mr. Don Head: I'd be glad to provide that information to the committee. If you have me in a year's time here, I'm quite confident you'll notice a significant advancement in terms of the commitments I'm making.

Mr. Brian Murphy: My other concern is where the champion is. I'm using the other side of my brain on the corrections issues. I'm also from the land of Ashley Smith and Bernard Richard. I've met with Howard Sapers more than I've met with you. I kind of know what you've got before you in terms of treating offenders who have mental health issues. It's a gargantuan task, and the mental health issues—correct me if I'm wrong—are under the domain of the health section of your group headed by Leslie MacLean. Am I right? I would see that as one of your biggest challenges aside from the onslaught of customers you're going to get from Conservative legislation. That's another issue. The mental health issues have to be number one on your desk right now. It seems to me—correct me if I'm wrong—she would be fairly knee-deep in that as well and she's the official languages champion. Why was she chosen as champion if someone else could be champion, somebody who could come to meetings? Do you think she's overloaded? Is mental health a priority for you?

Mr. Don Head: The answer to the question of why Leslie MacLean is the official languages champion is partly that she volunteered, which is always a good approach for anybody who wants to be a champion of anything. She has taken on that role very seriously. I would indicate quite adamantly that it is at no cost to any part of her other job. She's very active in terms of engagement with the regions particularly as it relates to the Atlantic region. My regional deputy commissioner there, Thérèse LeBlanc, is very, very active on this file. I would almost declare her to be the second champion or unofficial champion as well in that part of the country.

In terms of your last question, yes, mental health is a significant priority for the organization.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Murphy.

[Translation]

Thank you.

We'll continue with Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): It's Mr. Nadeau's turn.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, you're up.

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

Mr. Head, I presume you're familiar with hockey. Surely, you've seen a game or two here or there on television. Can you imagine a coach taking part in a major tournament without bringing the goalie? It's as if you didn't bring your goalie today. It's extremely important for us that your comments be credible. It's clear that your official languages champion is a key person. You're the assistant commissioner, and it would have been good for the commissioner to be here too because what we're talking about here today is very important.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I am the commissioner.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You're right. I didn't read it correctly. I apologize.

So, mister coach, you forgot your goalie. It's too bad because we have very important questions.

I have a lot of difficulty accepting what you're saying. In fact, the situation is appalling. You're going to meet with the commissioner, or at least people from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, on February 17, 2011. Has your action plan already been prepared or are you waiting to meet with the commissioner? Are you just telling us things to lull us to sleep and make it all sweetness and light? Clearly, in light of your comments and given the results we got from the Commissioner of Official Languages for Correctional Service of Canada, I don't have the impression that you are on a path that the committee is satisfied with. Have you already established an action plan to respond to this appalling official languages situation?

I didn't write report, we all know. The commissioner answers to parliamentarians in the House of Commons. Do you have the report? Could you get it to us right away so that we know what direction you're taking or if these are only ideas, good ideas, leads. We know that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but it remains nonetheless that the path isn't exactly satisfactory. Do you have an action plan?

Mr. Don Head: I understand.

[English]

We have our action plan. It has been drafted. It's a plan I want to discuss specifically with the official languages commissioner. He's the one who's going to be grading us, so I want him to understand the efforts we're making to help us identify whether there are still gaps that we need to address; to identify for me whether the targets that I set, which I briefly mentioned earlier, are appropriate, whether they're aggressive enough, and whether there are some other things that I need to take into account.

To be honest, Mr. Chair, regarding the analogy, hockey's not necessarily my favourite sport—I have others—but I understand the comparison you're making. But as the coach, ultimately, I'm responsible for the team, so I didn't see the comparison you're using about me needing to put my goalie up to defend me.

As the commissioner of the organization, I am responsible for this. I'm taking very serious ownership of this, and making my executive committee—my senior leadership team—take very serious ownership of this. And through my personal direct engagement with the official languages commissioner, I'm taking our plan, which our committee spent significant time going through, and strengthening it to get his comments so that we have a good, strong, viable plan that ultimately will pass the test.

I'm quite comfortable, after my meeting with the official languages commissioner, with providing a copy to this committee so that they can see that our plan is not just good intentions but concrete actions that my organization and I are going to pursue over the next couple of years.

● (0940)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

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

Now we'll move on to Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou): Good morning, Mr. Head and Mr. Macaulay.

I'm a little confused. I'd like to know if, before you read the Commissioner of Official Languages' evaluation, you had an action plan to help people in an official language minority situation. It's now 2011, and I'd like to know if you had taken measures previously to fill in the gaps. When you hire someone you describe as bilingual, do they have to be 10% bilingual? 25%? 50%? How do you evaluate that person's bilingualism? In my case, I speak English, but I don't consider myself bilingual. I still have trouble with verb tenses. If I say "I go", "I will go", or "I went", I'm going to the same place as you, but perhaps at a different time. I'd like to know what type of criteria you apply when you hire people.

Do you use a pool of passably bilingual people? Maybe you know that you can find bilingual francophones in a lot of areas. Can you tell me what you did and what you were doing before your evaluation? It seems a bit shady to me.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I'll try to answer. You had several questions in your comment.

In terms of the plan question.... Yes, we had a plan that was covering the period 2008-2011. It very clearly outlined some steps that the organization was to take and it identified some specific roles and responsibilities for various managers within the organization. But it's very clear that the plan was not aggressive enough and was not necessarily being owned by managers right down to the local level within the organization.

The results of the official languages commissioner's report has pointed to those gaps. That's what has caused us to step back and put in place a much more stringent action plan with specific targets, as well as putting in place an official languages accountability framework, for which we are in the final stages of publishing. It's one of the things I'll be talking to the official languages commissioner about.

It terms of your question regarding the level of bilingualism of staff, we defer to the normal public service testing processes to determine whether people are meeting the BC levels, the exemption levels. We do not make any arbitrary decisions. Those are based on the standard testing tools and testers for all of the federal public service.

● (0945)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So it's quite recent. If I understood correctly, your first action plan is from 2008; that's three years. Before that, you had no plan. Is that right?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I would say that the plan was not robust. There was a plan. It was very loose.

An hon. member: Busted.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I will share the rest of my time with Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): May I have the full 30 seconds?

The Chair: Your estimation of time is right on, Mr. Lauzon.

[English]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thanks for coming.

I'll be very brief. There are a couple of things. Obviously this report was a wake-up call. I think we can sense from your answers and your comments that the commissioner got your attention. I don't think there's any question about that. I think there is some hope here because I understand that you're starting to correct some things.

I'd be interested to know.... On page 5 you say that you do a daily verification through the staff in your office to test your ability to actively offer service to the public in both official languages, which is very unique and very innovative. Can you just explain how you do that?

Mr. Don Head: Very quickly, staff members in my office will phone the public phone numbers for our institutions, our parole offices, our headquarters across the country, and depending on where those facilities are located, they will begin the conversation in what would be seen as the second language for that area. Then they start to gauge the response to the query.

I'll be blunt and honest. The initial results are showing some promise—we have made some movement—but as a result of one call, the individuals at the facility asked my staff member to speak in English. He continued to speak in French. They told him to speak in English again, and then they hung up on him. That immediately prompted a call from me to the regional deputy commissioner of that region to take accountability measures. Those are the things that we're not going to accept.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Very good. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

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

You know, he's the former chair of the caucus, so I'm giving him a bit of leeway this morning.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Chair, we don't have the victims—

The Chair: Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I am the former chair of this committee.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Be careful, Guy. We were talking about aspirations just now.

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

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

I have other questions on the 2009-2010 departmental performance report of the Correctional Service of Canada. This report was approved by the Honourable Vic Toews, Minister of Public Safety, and was submitted to the House of Commons. Do you recognize this report?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: *Oui.*

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: There is no mention of official languages in the report.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: The format for completing those reports has changed over the years. There are all kinds of hyperlinks to other supporting documentation behind that. As we go forward, for example, the future reports will have more information. There will be direct links to our action plan, plus my report to the Clerk of the Privy Council will be—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you ready to indicate in the report how you deal with official languages? Are you ready to add that?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I see it as my obligation to do that, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's fine.

A little earlier, Guy Lauzon said that the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages was a wake-up call. Do you agree with that?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you telling me that the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, who is responsible for Part VII of the Official Languages Act, have never sent you that wake-up call? Yet the roadmap has been around for a long time.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Again, it's the responsibility of deputy heads like me to ensure that we're meeting our obligations.

● (0950)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am just trying to understand. We have spent millions and millions of dollars on this roadmap. The department was supposed to warn everyone and introduce the roadmap by specifying that the official languages had to be respected.

Mr. Head, you have just told us that the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages was the wake-up call for you. Perhaps I am being a little harsh, but when the grade for the language of work is a D and for service to the public is also a D, that's just outrageous. It seems we believe that a person who is in prison deserves everything they get. I wouldn't want to be there. I would not have wanted to be that lady from Tracadie-Sheila who ended up in a prison in Truro, Nova Scotia, and who didn't speak a word of English.

Mr. Head, you also talked about the west. You said that, out west, if we know that a francophone is in an anglophone jail, you assign someone there for a year. How many people do you send? Is it just one person? Is there service for eight hours a day, five days a week? And during the two months or one month that person is off, is service provided? Could you please explain that to me because I think it's very serious?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: As I've indicated, we're taking all the elements that have been pointed out in the report card very seriously. We have an action plan. I'm discussing the elements of the action plan with the Commissioner of Official Languages.

As it relates to the points you've raised about the offenders, as I've indicated, we've received 10 complaints from offenders. We've—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but sometimes—

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Excuse me, sir, if I can just finish my thought, we've responded to 10 complaints. It's not in any way to diminish anything, but in terms of 22,000 inmates on any given day, the number is small. Having said that, I recognize our obligations, and that's why we're putting additional effort into correcting the problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Head, perhaps I watch too many movies on TV, but I don't think I would want to be the person in prison who files a complaint against the people in charge.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I'll be honest with you—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is not really up to them to file complaints. The Commissioner of Official Languages reviewed your work, Mr. Head. You got Ds and Es and you are saying that it's up to them to complain. I'm sorry, but it's your responsibility. It is the job of the Department of Public Safety to provide services in both official languages.

When did your action plan start? Was it when the Commissioner of Official Languages carried out the investigation or was it before? How long has the commissioner been reviewing your department for?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: As I've indicated, we've had a plan before. We were modifying the plan. The report card—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can you submit your plan to the Standing Committee on Official Languages? Can you send us your plan?

[English]

I'd like to see the plan from before.

Mr. Don Head: Do you mean the 2008-2011 plan?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, and I'd like to see the one for 2007-08. I'd like to see all the plans you had.

Mr. Don Head: I'll submit those to the committee.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Head, how many complaints have you received exactly?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: We have four from staff and ten from offenders.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you. That's the end of our second round.

Mr. Bélanger, I believe you had a comment.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, Mr. Chair, if I may.

[English]

I have two comments, one an unrelated one to Mr. Macaulay.

Sir, it's an honour to see you here today. I want to congratulate you as a public servant for your past involvement with the RCMP, particularly related to a very difficult case that Parliament has dealt with, as related by my colleague Mr. Wrzesnewskij in his book. I think you know which book I'm talking about. I'm sorry I haven't heard you talk this morning.

For Mr. Head, I have a suggestion, sir. You may want to consider involving your senior deputy commissioner, Monsieur Marc-Arthur Hyppolite, in these efforts. I remember handing him a prize in 2005, the Public Service Award of Excellence in official languages, when I was the minister responsible.

It's just a suggestion for your consideration, sir. Thank you.

Mr. Don Head: Mr. Hyppolite is actively...very much so.

[Translation]

The Chair: That brings us to the end of the first part of our meeting. I would like to advise the members of the committee that we are going to continue the meeting in camera. I extend my thanks to the witnesses for coming to meet with us this morning.

If you have documents to send us, I ask that you send them to the clerk so that he can forward them to the members of the committee. Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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