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Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0845)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We will start this morning with representatives from the Department of Industry: Mr. Dicerni, Mr. Davies, and Mr. James.

Gentlemen, you have the floor. We will then go on to our normal rounds of questioning.

Mr. Richard Dicerni (Deputy Minister, Department of Industry): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am accompanied today, on my right, by my colleague, Mr. Davies, Assistant Deputy Minister for Industry Canada's Regional Operations Sector. He is responsible for part VII of the Official Languages Act, as well as being Official Languages Champion. On my left is Bill James, the Director General of Human Resources, and he is responsible for official languages program management.

I want to address three things. First of all, I would like to provide a general overview of the department's mandate, of what we do. Secondly, I would like to give you some data on Industry Canada's workforce. Thirdly, I would like to specifically discuss the commissioner's recent report.

Industry Canada delivers a wide range of programs and services. Basically, our three-fold mandate is to firstly develop and administer what we call framework policies, secondly to foster the knowledge-based economy, and thirdly to support small- and medium-sized businesses to promote competitiveness and productivity. Our program areas include developing industry and technology capability. They also include fostering scientific research, promoting investment and trade, and promoting small business development.

Now, let's move on to the data. The department has about 5,800 indeterminate employees, 78.5% of whom are based in the National Capital Region. Our workforce is spread out among 29 different occupational groups. Many of these people work in different areas, and include commerce officers, patent examiners, and measurement inspectors.

About 3,400 of our employees are in bilingual positions—representing 60% of the department's total population. Of those bilingual employees, about 2,400 provide service to the public. The other 1,000 employees hold management positions or offer corporate services within the department. Ninety-seven per cent of depart-

mental employees meet the language requirements of their positions. The number of employees requiring language training has gone down about 25% over the last five years, due in part to an increase in persons meeting the language requirement of the job at time of appointment. Moreover, all of our 230 executives meet the language profile required, with the exception of one who has reached the exemption level. Recently, 32% of our executives, including the deputy minister, have cited French as their first official language.

Thirdly, I want to discuss the commissioner's report. The department's overall rating fell to a "C" from "B". In recent months, departmental officials have met with representatives from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. They have sought to understand why we received that rating and to discuss where improvements are required.

Now, let me turn specifically to the four parts of the act. I will do so in English.

•(0850)

[English]

Part IV of the act deals with service to the public. Industry Canada has about 65 points of service across the country, and 59 of these are bilingual. There are six major areas where we offer services: Spectrum, Information Technologies and Telecommunications, where we do inspection and certification; the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy; the Competition Bureau; Corporations Canada; Measurement Canada; and FedNor in the north of Ontario. To a large degree these services are accessed by specific client groups. There are few programs in the department that cater to the broad general public, as compared with, say, Passport Canada or Canada Border Services Agency. We have a targeted clientele who want specific services. The Spectrum group, for example, certifies radio operators and does investigations when there are antenna-related issues. Measurement Canada inspects the accuracy of measurement devices in gas, weights and measures. The Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy licenses trustees

[Translation]

when people go bankrupt.

[English]

As far as our performance on in-person service is concerned, we received the following ratings: active visual offer, 87% of the time; and active offer made by staff, 40% of the time, which is not good. Service in the language of the linguistic minority was available in 73% of the cases. For service by phone, active offer was made by staff or automated system 81% of the time.

For all of the above we got a rating of D, which obviously is not good. We've taken some steps since the report was done to improve. I'll give you a few examples.

The Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy had 13 regional offices where people could phone in. We've consolidated that for a number of reasons, including to provide better language service, into three fully bilingual regional service centres. That's for the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy. I'll come back to that later.

In Montreal, because we have some problems in some of the other areas of the act in terms of anglophones in Montreal, our regional director is a person whose first language is English so we can address some of the other issues.

On a more regular basis we do spot checks of our toll lines. Over the last few weeks, somewhat in preparation for my presentation and visit here, we did a further spot check of our toll lines, and have followed up with remedial action where necessary.

Overall, I think the department has the right number of bilingual positions. We have the right number of people with the right training. There are some gaps. There are some places where we are having problems. I'd point out that with Measurement Canada we still have problems in Penticton, London, and Belleville. For Spectrum, we have a problem in Sydney. We're trying to ensure that we have either phone backup or that additional staff can be recruited in those places where we have difficulty recruiting.

Overall, I think if the Commissioner of Official Languages did a further investigation survey, the rating would improve.

Under part V, language of work, again the rating fell from a B to a D. My understanding is that this decline is attributable to the results of the 2008 public service employee survey for linguistic minority employees. In particular, there was feedback by 13 anglophone survey respondents in the Quebec region. They indicated a need for improvement regarding the ability to communicate with their supervisor in the official language of their choice. Last fall we communicated directly with all senior management to ensure that obligations were well understood.

Last month we did a follow-up survey to the same community of 20 people and noted a significant improvement in communications with immediate supervisors. People were comfortable in doing that. However, we found another problem. Anglophones who wished to use English in work meetings were not comfortable. This was raised by three individuals.

We've spoken to our regional director in Quebec to implement a more broadly based plan so that person can reach out to these individuals and give me a report twice a year. I've also told him that the next time I go to Montreal I want to meet with the anglophone individuals in our regional office to have a discussion on language of work, how comfortable they are, and what else we can do.

• (0855)

[Translation]

I will now move on to part IV of the act, which deals with equal participation of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians. Here too, our rating fell from a "B" to a "D". Three variables come into play in terms of numbers and participation. First, the number of

francophone employees in the National Capital Region exceeded workforce availability by 277 employees, and this number is in our favour. The same is true in the rest of Canada, excluding Quebec and the National Capital Region: in Canada, the number of francophone employees exceeded workplace availability by 56 employees.

The shortfall is in Quebec, where the target is at 13.4% for English-speaking employees. We stand at 6%. To bridge the gap, we have taken a number of steps and plan to take more. For example, I will personally write to the presidents of all anglophone universities in Quebec and to the community colleges, like John Abbott CEGEP, Marianopolis College, and Dawson College, to share with them our requirements as an employer so that they encourage their students to consider Industry Canada as a possible employer.

Employee turnover in our offices is not very high. We must, however, do our best to increase recruitment of anglophones in our Montreal offices. In addition, as I said, we are going to give the woman hired on as regional director for the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy Canada a special mandate to encourage anglophones to apply for positions with us.

With respect to program management, our rating fell from an "A" to a "B". I have been told that it's—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Mr. Dicerni, I will give you one minute to wrap up.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes.

Our rating fell from "A" to "B". I have been told that this is largely attributable to the fact that we do not have an integrated plan for the department. My colleague Bill James and I are in the process of developing that plan. I have seen a first draft of the plan, which should be completed in May.

Finally, let me now address part VII of the act, which addresses the vitality of Official Language Minority Communities. Industry Canada received a "B" in the report. We have put in place a number of initiatives, and will continue to do so to support the economic development of official language communities. The department has created a tool called the Official Languages Filter. This filter has also been adopted by several other departments and is used to verify programs and ensure that they take into account the needs and concerns of the communities.

I will stop here, because the minute you have given me is up.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you.

We will start the first round.

Ms. Zarac, you have seven minutes.

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

Good morning and thank you for being here.

If I'm not mistaken, you are developing an action plan for part VII.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: It is a departmental plan for parts IV, V, VI and VII.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: This will be the first plan for part VII. In the past, you had a plan for 2010 to 2013 which did not take part VII into account.

Some witnesses we have heard from have indicated that they were not aware of their responsibilities under the Official Languages Act. Did you leave part VII out of your action plan because you are unaware of your responsibilities in this regard?

• (0900)

Mr. Richard Dicerni: No. The department has always had champions who are very familiar with the act, all the more so because we are also responsible for FedNor, which is responsible for economic development in Northern Ontario. In fact, minority language communities are well represented in that part of the province. We are very familiar with that. As regards the CALDECH decision, we know the program very well. We developed our Filter as a result of the Supreme Court of Canada decision in CALDECH.

The absence of an integrated program for the entire department reflects a kind of tendency towards bureaucratization. The last time the Commissioner of Official Languages assessed our sector-based plans, we received good ratings. That is why we thought we were on the right track. Following his recent report, we concluded that our problem was the absence of a department-wide program. So we are developing one, and we will take part VII into account.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: When will you be tabling the action plan?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: In May.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So it will be done in May.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: That is correct.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Could you please send a copy to the committee?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It will cover the period from 2010 to 2013, won't it?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: We will eagerly await it.

It was your department's fifth evaluation.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Pardon?

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It was your department's fifth evaluation. Many departments received incredibly low ratings, like "E", and often their excuse was that it was their first evaluation. In your case, this was the fifth one. You had already received recommendations from the commissioner. Despite that, your rating dropped. What is that due to?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I would say that it is due to a series of factors. The first factor is the integrated report. We received an "A" in the previous report. We submitted more or less the same thing, and we were told that we now needed an integrated report for the department. The evaluation criteria have become somewhat more rigorous.

As for the second factor, it's up to people at the commissioner's office to explain it. As regards employees, we received a very good rating in terms of the representation of francophones in the National Capital Region. However, there is a problem in Quebec. Our rating dropped from "B" to "D". The evaluation is rather harsh, but we accept it and plan to do better.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: One of the commissioner's recommendations dealt with the Filter. I would like you to explain exactly what the Filter is, and for you to tell us if you're going to take the commissioner's recommendation into account.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: As I said, our department developed the Filter and it was adopted by other departments. It is an analysis tool for determining how the concerns and perspectives of official language minority communities should be taken into account in programming.

In one of the programs that we developed, we gave schools recommissioned computers. In reviewing our Filter, we concluded that not enough was being done with official language communities. So we made some changes and we stepped up our involvement with these people. We have reviewed the department's programs to see where we could make some improvements. That is how we used what we call the Filter.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You also mentioned that you worked in a number of sectors. I believe you said there were 29 sectors. I worked quickly, and I did not check all of your offers of employment, however when you look at the section entitled "skills required", bilingualism is never there. Wouldn't that be an important required skill?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I don't look at offers of employment very often, but I will ask that question of my colleague, who is director of human resources. As I said, 60% of positions require competency. So perhaps my colleague can explain.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: That is what I was waiting to see him about.

• (0905)

Mr. Bill James (Director General, Human Resources Branch, Department of Industry): Yes. I'll say two things. We have a verification program to ensure that bilingualism is one of the skills required in the hiring process, and we have received a good rating.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I understand that you have a verification mechanism.

Mr. Bill James: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Wouldn't that be an important requirement for a position?

Mr. Bill James: It depends on the position perhaps and the location, but I will say that we have—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I didn't look at all of the job offers. There are a lot. Are you saying that bilingualism is required for some positions?

Mr. Bill James: That is indeed the case.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I looked several times, and I did not find it.

Mr. Mitch Davies (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister and Champion of Official Languages, Science and Innovation Sector, Department of Industry): It is more of a condition of employment. It is like a security clearance: you must have it to be hired. As regards competencies, we conduct interviews and tests on the quality and content of the work. For all bilingual positions, candidates must have the required level of bilingualism before being hired and receiving a job offer.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I will look into it.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Will you share your findings with the committee?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: If a position is bilingual, the candidate must clearly be bilingual.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you.

Thank you very much, Ms. Zarac.

Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor.

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

Good morning, gentlemen.

You know, Mr. Dicerni, I have often been told that a bilingual position is certainly filled by a bilingual person. In other departments, that is not the case. I won't accuse you of being like the others. If you tell me that they all are, all the better.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: It is 97%.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Oh, I see.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: That means that of the 2,400... In fact, 3,400 employees are in bilingual positions. Unless I'm mistaken, the vast majority of them meet the criteria. There are perhaps about 100 on language training. Those are the statistics I was given when I looked into the matter.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I know, and that is basically the rule. All the same, I believe that, when a position is bilingual, the person filling it should already be bilingual. However, you do not write the rules, someone else does. I am aware of that.

Now, part V of the act deals with the language of work. That is something that bothers me considerably, and that I find frustrating. The problem lies not only in your department, but in others as well.

The D rating that you received is completely unacceptable. It is also unacceptable because, according to the statistics, 41% of Industry Canada employees whose first language is French do not feel comfortable using French in their written communications. As for the language used in communicating with their supervisors, 36% of francophones, or those who claim French as their first language of communication, feel uncomfortable communicating in their own language, i.e., French.

If I were to experience a similar situation in a federal department, I would probably not last very long. I would immediately be sent off to some dustbin or departmental dungeon because I would speak out vociferously.

Please tell me how you encourage employees to submit their reports, documents or e-mails in French? What do you say to encourage your employees?

And how do you deal with a manager who says things like "in English please" or "Why not in English?", because having things translated takes too long? Personally, I would rap that manager on the knuckles.

Those are things that I hear. I am not just being rhetorical.

What are you doing to encourage employees to write in their own language and to discourage those types of reactions from the people receiving their communications?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I came to Ottawa in 1969. At the time, the example you mentioned occurred quite frequently. There were always blockages at one level of management or another. As you indicated, a French-language memo did not make it all the way to the top.

I have not spent my entire career in Ottawa, but when I returned five years ago I did notice a marked change in the city as well as within the Department of Industry. In the past, Industry Canada was considered to be one of the anglophone departments, along with the Departments of Finance and Human Resources and Skills Development.

You gave the example of someone who, because he does not understand French, would prevent any communication in that language and require employees to draft their memos in English. I do not see that happening at the Department of Industry. If you had information in that regard, I would appreciate it if you called me and let me know about a specific case.

Today we use a proactive approach to create an environment in which people can work in both official languages. Let me give you a few examples.

Discussions within my management committee are carried out one-third of the time in French and two-thirds in English. However, one meeting a month is held completely in French. That means that the people who are coming to give presentations or who want to attend expect that the proceedings of the management committee will be held in French once a month.

The department has leadership awards in areas like the management of financial resources or best practices. We decided to establish a leadership award for the promotion of official languages. The award will be presented to managers who take initiatives to encourage their use.

We also put up posters. We are encouraging people. We have networks that promote the use of both official languages. I know that management committees in some sectors alternate between French one week and English the next.

We have a whole series of specific measures. I do not think that there is a magic solution to get everyone to feel completely at ease overnight. That said, I believe that the overall trend is positive.

● (0910)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Part IV of the act deals with communications with and services to the public. You obtained a "D" in that regard.

What does that mean? Does it mean that people, retailers or corporations wanting to do business with the Department of Industry in French come up against a wall? Are they only being answered in English?

In the same vein, Canadian Heritage recently responded to a request by Impératif français in a letter that was solely in English. Work needs to be done. If things are so bad at Canadian Heritage, you can imagine the situation at Industry Canada, especially in a business environment that is under the American, anglophone influence.

With regard to services to the public, what barriers are still preventing you from satisfying those who want to be served in French?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I have three or four comments I would like to make. One of the things I am monitoring—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): I would ask you to be brief, Mr. Dicerni, or you could come back to those thoughts later, because there are only five seconds left in the current round of questions.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I will come back to them later. I am sure that someone else will ask me the same questions regarding services to the public. That way we can accomplish two things at once.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Messrs. Dicerni and Nadeau.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

I would like to welcome you to the committee.

According to the documentation, a survey conducted by the commissioner's office showed that 59% of francophone employees and 66% of anglophone employees at Industry Canada felt free to use the official language of their choice in their written correspondence.

That means that 41% of francophone employees do not feel comfortable doing so. Is that correct?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I think that the survey contained a range of five possible answers. Some people's answers were somewhere in the middle: Those people were not sure whether they agreed or not.

You cannot simply subtract 59 from 100 to obtain the 41% that you mentioned.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It does say that 59% of francophone employees and 66% of anglophone employees at Industry Canada reported feeling comfortable using the language of their choice in their written correspondence.

If you make the calculation, 41% of people do not feel free to do so.

● (0915)

Mr. Bill James: The 41% are divided into three categories, including those who did not answer because they did not know what to state, and those who disagreed and indicated that there was a problem to be fixed.

Mr. Yvon Godin: According to the survey conducted by the commissioner's office, 64% of francophone employees and 34% anglophone employees at Industry Canada reported feeling free to speak with their immediate supervisors in the official language of their choice.

You said earlier that you wanted to go to Montreal to meet with anglophones there. Is that correct?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: That is all relative. There are two types of surveys. In some cases, the office of the commissioner used the results of a survey that was conducted among all public servants. For example, the sample in Montreal was made up of 20 anglophones, of whom 13 responded. Out of those 13, three or four indicated that there were some problems.

As public servants within a department, we believe that all sources of data should be validated in order to ensure that—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, that is normal procedure.

Where will you go to validate the results pertaining to francophones? You did not mention the francophone region you would visit. Where will you be going?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: According to the commissioner, that explained in large part why our rating fell from a B to a D. I first wanted to set priorities and target those areas with the most significant problems, as identified by the commissioner.

With regard to usage, we could ask managers to continue strengthening—

Mr. Yvon Godin: That was not what I wanted to know. You said that you would be meeting directly with employees on the ground to ask them why they feel the way they do.

Where will you go to meet with francophones who expressed similar sentiments?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: That is a good question. What would you suggest?

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are the one who said that—

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I know, but if you are aware of any—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Allow me to give you an example concerning Industry Canada. Part VII of the act refers to the promotion of French and English. Let me quote section 41: 41.(1) The Government of Canada is committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

Your department has the same objectives, no? You are subject to part VII, including the duty to foster recognition. We met the francophone community in Newfoundland. When people at Industry Canada must deal with ACOA, they have to turn to people in Moncton in order to obtain bilingual service, because there is no such thing in Newfoundland.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: What programs are you referring to?

Mr. Yvon Godin: There are Industry Canada programs for francophone communities. Part of their mandate is to advance official languages.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I believe that ACOA is responsible for those programs.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is ACOA not part of Industry Canada?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: ACOA is similar to FedNor and those types of programs.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes, but ACOA has its own minister and deputy minister. I have no responsibility over ACOA.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Does Industry Canada not fund ACOA?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Very well. I will rephrase my question. Although ACOA does not fall under Industry Canada, your department must nevertheless foster the advancement of French in Canada. What are you doing for the francophone community in Newfoundland?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: That is a question of primary responsibility. Our department deals with linguistic duality and the program we share—

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are confusing things. I am talking about Industry Canada. Your department does not only have offices in Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa and Montreal. It must also have an office in Newfoundland, is that not so?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes, although our presence on the ground, in Newfoundland, is rather modest. Our work there is pretty much done by Measurement Canada, which is responsible for monitoring gas pumps. We also have an office dedicated to bankruptcy cases. Our presence focuses on specific programs and legislation.

With regard to cultural and economic development, the Government of Canada has mandated the economic development agencies to target specific regions of the country. We have FedNor, which targets northern Ontario.

● (0920)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): There are about 12 seconds remaining.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Now what is FedNor doing for francophones in Kapuskasing, Hearst, Timmins and Sudbury?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: My colleague Mr. Davies can give you an overview of that during the second round.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are a fast learner.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): That is true.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is why we get two rounds of questions.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Boucher, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Good morning gentlemen and welcome to our committee.

From what I have read, you received a C overall, but as you said earlier, your results fell in a number of categories, in particular with regard to part IV of the Official Languages Act. With regard to the observations on active offer, the Commissioner of Official Languages noted that a visual active offer was available at your department in 87% of cases, between January and April 2010. That is pretty good. However, an active offer in person was only available in 40% of cases. I would like for you to explain that. In a country that is supposedly bilingual, where much is said about linguistic duality and the fact that French and English should be on an equal footing across the country—at least, that is what we francophones believe—how come an active offer is only available in 40% of cases?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I have a few comments to make in that regard. Clearly, a number of adjustments need to be made. Since the report was published, our managers have made greater efforts to remind office employees of the duties under the act, for example, on how to answer phone calls. I conducted a survey over the past two weeks. The quality of service offered today is significantly higher than that noted in the report. As such, improvements have been made since the report was released.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Could we have a copy of your findings?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes, I can submit that to the committee—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, I think that would be important.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: There are some very independent organizations that work within Industry Canada. We are not an integrated department where everyone does the same thing, as is the case with the Correctional Service of Canada, which focuses exclusively on inmates. We have people that deal with bankruptcy, we have people working at Measurement Canada, and each of these organizations have offices and fairly specific activities.

Moreover, I asked my colleagues for some explanations when I verified the list that includes the 60 service points. We discovered that of these 60 service points, Measurement Canada had 20, where, in 10 cases, services were provided, but in the case of the 10 others, these were simply offices equipped with a computer where inspectors would keep their suitcases. In actual fact these service points should not have been included on the list because they are not there to provide client services. As I was telling you, the inspectors go there to work on the computer once they have completed their inspections. Given that we indicate that services are provided at these locations, and this list is in the public domain, we will have to clean it up somewhat.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Because if you do not provide service there —

Mr. Richard Dicerni: These locations should not be included on the list. We will have to clean it up. In some of these offices, the people are simply tenants. They are not providing any services.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Your department is not the first one where this has occurred, and this bothers me. We are talking about active offer by the clerks. In my mind, the clerks must be fully bilingual. We are talking about locations where there are only unilingual anglophones, but we realized that this was not accurate in many cases. French should be on an equal footing with English.

You then talked about Montreal, where the reverse problem occurs. Anglophones represent 13.4% of the population in Quebec. I have asked many people the following question: What criteria do you use to determine whether or not a person is bilingual? When I arrived in Ottawa, I knew how to say "yes", "no" and "toaster". Knowing how to say the word toaster did not make me bilingual. I now am able to express myself in English without being embarrassed

Do you feel that we still have people who are embarrassed to speak the other language? When we hire people, should we not be telling them that it is incumbent upon them to serve citizens in their language?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: As you know, the powers that be in the field of education established the standards such as BBB, BCB. These standards define the linguistic competency that employees must have. In our department, approximately 3,000 positions have been defined as being... Approximately 3,000, right?

• (0925)

Mr. Bill James: There are 3,400 positions that have been designated bilingual.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: They each have a bilingual designation, in accordance with the requirements of the position. As I said, this goes back to the early 1970s, when the Official Languages Act was passed.

As for encouraging people to feel comfortable, telling them to not hesitate to speak both in French and English, managers—and first and foremost myself—can play a significant role. This is why I mentioned going to Montreal to encourage people. Recruiting staff is a challenge for us, but given all of our relationships that we have with community colleges, CEGEPS and universities, we should be able to broaden our recruitment activities.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you very much.

We will now begin our second round, and everyone will have four minutes.

If I may, before we begin, I would like to ask Mr. Dicerni a brief procedural question.

In response to one of his questions, you invited Mr. Godin to call you if he had any examples of...

Mr. Richard Dicerni: No, this was an answer to Mr. Nadeau's question.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): An answer to Mr. Nadeau. Does that mean that we can call you directly without having to go through the minister's office?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: If you need to do something, yes.

I recently spoke to Mr. Nadeau. Mr. Vincent, from the Bloc Québécois, called me once about some concerns he had. Mr. Julian called me last week.

If you need to do something, and you think that there are problems in my department, you can call me. Obviously, if you are dealing with issues that are a bit more political, I can skate well enough in order to...

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): I would like you to give this message to some of your colleagues. Indeed, I have twice

tried to call two deputy ministers on the phone. These two individuals had appeared to discuss technical issues. I did not want to ask them for anything whatsoever, and every time, I was redirected to the minister's office. I would therefore be grateful if you could ensure that this message gets to your colleagues.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: You know, every...

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Mr. Murphy, you have four minutes.

[English]

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

[Translation]

I have a few specific questions in French and in English about the language of work, specifically I have questions dealing with sections 34 to 36 of the Official Languages Act.

[English]

You have 59 of 65 points of service across the country that are bilingual. I would take that to mean that services are offered in both official languages.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: If we had it all, then we'd get an A.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Right. I'm more concerned with the back office.

[Translation]

I'm referring primarily to administrative issues. The language of work is a matter of survival for employees.

• (0930)

[English]

It's really more about services back to employees so they feel comfortable in getting assistance with EAP, leave applications, anything to do with the administration of their own jobs.

Are you confident that you're meeting the requirements under part IV? You have 65 offices across the country. Is there anywhere in your organization where you have designated a region as unilingual English or French in any of the regions of the country? Do you have any regions where there is a unilingual designation administratively?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Maybe one of my two colleagues knows, and they can contribute.

One fact I do know is that we have 3,400 employees who are occupying bilingual jobs. Of those, 2,400 have some contact with the public. The other 1,000 tend to be focused on either supervisory jobs where they have to deal up the food chain of decision making, or are providing corporate services, which would be in HR.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I only have four minutes and my question was quite precise.

Do you have regions? Are you separated by a regional office for...

Mr. Richard Dicerni: We have a multiplicity of regional designs. Not everything is five regions or ten provinces. The office of—

Mr. Brian Murphy: I'll cut to the chase. Do you have a regional office in Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: We have one.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Is it called the Atlantic regional office?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Is it designated unilingual anglophone for administration?

[Translation]

Mr. Mitch Davies: The office is bilingual.

[English]

Mr. Brian Murphy: And that's appropriate given the number of French speaking, bilingual, Acadian, etc., people in the region, is it not?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes.

Mr. Brian Murphy: It seems sensible.

I also note that all but one of your 230 executives meet the language profile required, and I compliment you on that.

Executives also have an administrative function downwards to provide direction to their employees. That aids in your compliance with section 34 of the act, doesn't it?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Yes.

Mr. Brian Murphy: That's all the questions I have.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Mr. Nadeau, the floor is yours.

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

Mr. Dicerni, we left off on the issue of service provided to the public and on the fact that you had received a score of D. I found this to be unacceptable, at the very least, and I asked you what the problem was, where the solution lay.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: As I was saying to Mrs. Boucher, there are a certain number of things that we can do. We will start by cleaning up the office list so that it is perfectly clear and transparent because some of these offices do not really provide services to the public. If someone from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages were to knock on the office door, he or she may find that the person inside is unilingual, but that should not pose a problem because this employee is not there to provide service to the public. This office is purely and simply administrative. So that is the first step.

As for the second step, we have emphasized the importance of complying with the Official Languages Act to our managers responsible for service delivery. Over the past few weeks we did a brief poll or follow-up investigation in conjunction with Measurement Canada inspections and bankruptcies, and this poll showed that we were able to provide service in both official languages, with three or four exceptions, as I mentioned, namely in Belleville, Penticton, London and Sydney, where we noted recruiting problems. We are currently trying to determine what we can do to enhance service to the clientele in both official languages.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Fine.

From what I understand of this process, an organization, business people or citizens can deal with Industry Canada in order to obtain specific information pertaining to the department.

When people contact you, and for all kinds of reasons you cannot reply in the requested language of service, in French, for instance, do you have any mechanism that enables you to put this individual on hold and then transfer him or her to someone else in this office? I do understand that this office may be located in the regions, in the Prairies, the Atlantic provinces or elsewhere. Do you have any mechanism that enables you to provide an adequate response in a reasonable period of time?

● (0935)

Mr. Richard Dicerni: My answer is yes, but I would make two other small comments. I follow up on the complaints fairly religiously. Either last year or this year, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages received only one complaint, testifying to the fact that not everyone who contacts the department is served inadequately.

Secondly, I told my counterparts that I would be sending a copy of today's testimony to our managers, once the minutes are available, so that they would be made more aware of the questions raised by the members and the concerns of the people. This is a good way to...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Good for you if you received only one complaint, Mr. Dicerni, but you know as I do that people simply switch to using English, knowing that they are immediately confronted with a lack of services.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: That is a...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We know what happens.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Nevertheless, I know that the opposite is also true. If we had received 50 complaints, things would not be very pleasant today. As I told you, by sharing the transcript of my appearance today with the people who provide service to the public, this will make managers, assistant deputy managers and all of the employees aware of how important it is to comply with the legislation.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you. That is a good initiative.

Mr. Gourde, the floor is yours.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for coming here today.

I will continue on the same topic pertaining to services to the public. When Canadian citizens want to receive services from the department, they often dial 1 800 O-Canada. They connect to Service Canada, which can direct them to the appropriate department. Do the Canadians who call you often use this route? Furthermore, it is more likely that business people would be dealing with Industry Canada and not necessarily the citizen who works at Tim Hortons.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: In relative terms, few of our clients are part of the general public. My mother would not call the Department of Industry.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Unless she wanted to talk to you.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: She may do so if she wants to speak to me, but she is not part of the clientele served by the department. She would call Passport Canada.

Of the 6,000 employees in the department, between 1,000 to 1,200 work on patents. So we communicate with a very specialized clientele.

The same thing applies to people who inspect antennas, to determine whether or not there has been a violation because someone has installed an illegal antenna. So we intervene in a very specific, precise manner.

We have 1,800 lines for various services, such as bankruptcy trustees, and as a result of recent verifications, we are able to confirm that the services provided are bilingual.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You said earlier that Industry Canada verified the weight of commercial weigh scales. How do you make sure that violation reports are submitted in the proper language when the owner of the weigh scale lives in an anglophone zone but has a francophone name more or less?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: We have not had any problems. Indeed, a bill aimed at improving this act has just been approved by the Governor General. The matter has been studied by numerous parliamentary committees, including a Senate committee, and this type of problem has never been raised.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Is the inspection report written in both languages?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: It is written in the client's language. We have forms enabling us to verify that the gas pump indicates the quantity of litres that has really been pumped.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: That is easy, but if you are in Westmount, is the clientele francophone or anglophone?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I have noted your question about the way that we conduct our inspections and I will report on the matter to the clerk. In all honesty, I do not know how the work is done.

• (0940)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Fine, thank you.

I have finished, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

We will now turn to Mr. Godin.

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

Mr. Richard Dicerni: My colleague would like to respond with respect to FedNor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You have a good memory.

[*English*]

Mr. Mitch Davies: FedNor is responsible for delivering the economic development initiative, which is under the road map for linguistic duality, \$4.45 million over the life of that program. In the last full fiscal year they delivered \$1.9 million of projects 100% in francophone and minority communities for community and economic development. For example, in Thunder Bay through the FedNor program we provided business development support for francophone women.

Mr. Yvon Godin: My question is on the administration of that program. Do they have francophones to administer it? Are they bilingual?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mitch Davies: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am referring to the administration, clients.

I went to Edmonton, Alberta, where I met with a group of francophone entrepreneurs. They said that they were able to deal with one organization in order to obtain funding, whereas the anglophones had to deal with about four organizations, for example community organizations financed by Industry Canada or by programs such as FedNor or ACOA. It would therefore appear that francophones had to knock on only one door whereas the others had to knock on four.

Are you aware of this?

[*English*]

Mr. Mitch Davies: The commissioner's report makes reference to the need for those working in economic development to understand the needs of the communities, particularly the minority language communities. Last fall we held national consultations with anglophone and francophone minority language communities, where we had all the regional agencies. In the case of western Canada, Western Economic Diversification staff were there as were organizations representing the folks in the community who want these agencies to understand their needs to ensure there is appropriate outreach, appropriate research.

We've undertaken research projects to develop a better understanding of the economic development needs of those communities. We are sharing that with all the regional agencies. One of our responsibilities in the department is to improve that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: The commissioner noted that Industry Canada is currently preparing an official languages action plan for 2010-2013. This will be the first time that the department has had such a plan for all of the sectors and divisions with respect to parts IV, V and VI of the Official Languages Act.

Has the plan been finished? Have you submitted a draft to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages? Could we obtain a copy of this plan?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: We are currently working on this plan. We are expecting to finish it in May. Once we have completed and cleaned up the plan, we will be sharing it with the commissioner in order to ascertain whether we need to make any changes, although we do think that we have done some good work. Once this has been done, we will post it on our website and send you a copy.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Will you send a copy to the committee?

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I will send a copy to the committee vice-chair and to the entire committee.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Fine, thank you.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): You should send it to the committee clerk.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It would be better to send it to the committee clerk.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): You have 15 seconds remaining, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Did you receive an A for any category?

I am looking at the commissioner's report and your marks are all Bs, Cs and Ds. It is as though people had been misclassified and everything was going well at Industry Canada.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: There is always room for improvement. Last year, we took action and we would have a better score if we were to get another report card, I am convinced of that. We will know when the Office of the Commissioner does its next report.

Meanwhile, we will continue doing our polls and verifications. I asked the people on the official languages verification committee who work at the department to continue doing this. We will be conducting a verification.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Before thanking you, if I may, I would like to make a comment and ask you a quick question.

I have made the same suggestion to your colleague from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Mr. Rosenberg, who met with us on Tuesday. I suggested that he take a look at the action plan prepared by the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources Canada. This plan is well done. I believe that the committee members would be pleased to have a certain reference point or means of comparing one plan with another.

I am not expecting you to answer this question today. I would appreciate it, however, if you would take the time to think about it, and to send us an answer over the next few weeks when some of us may be busy doing something else. The industry sector is to a large extent based on science. Like it or not, the English language is fairly dominant in these two sectors. What is the Department of Industry doing to give greater space to French in scientific research? For example, do you have any special collaborative projects underway with francophone universities or something along that line? I would like to know how the department is trying to reposition Canada's francophone scientific presence on the international scene.

• (0945)

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I will give you a brief answer.

If you are interested in that, I would suggest a joint presentation with the three granting councils. As a matter of fact, grants to researchers and universities come from the granting councils.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): There's the National Research Council.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: Pardon?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): There's perhaps also the National Research Council.

Mr. Richard Dicerni: I will make a note of that and mention to them that you are interested in this. Perhaps, on a subsequent round, when you've had an opportunity to renew your term...

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): That's right. We are heading into contract renewal time.

Some voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Richard Dicerni: We can discuss this again later. The granting councils have the lead on this.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): All right.

Mr. Davies, Mr. James and Mr. Dicerni, thank you for being here this morning.

We are going to take a break before hearing other witnesses.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Ladies, gentlemen, we are resuming our meeting.

We have with us here in the room three representatives of Service Canada: Mr. Charles Nixon, Ms. Gina Rallis and Mr. Dominique La Salle.

We also have on the phone the senior associate deputy minister, Ms. Liseanne Forand.

I don't know whether Ms. Forand is going to be the first to speak.

• (0950)

Ms. Liseanne Forand (Chief Operating Officer, Senior Associate Deputy Minister of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, Service Canada): Yes, that's right, Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Ms. Forand, go ahead.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you very much.

First, I would really like to thank you for making the arrangements to enable me to participate in the committee's meeting today.

Before I begin with a few brief opening remarks, I would also like to begin by apologizing for the lack of precision I displayed when I appeared on March 8.

I am, of course, sorry for any confusion arising from the lack of precision and clarity.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Ms. Forand, you will have to speak much slower because the line is not very clear right now.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: All right.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): So try to speak slower and we will see how that goes.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): If you are using speakerphone, perhaps you should use the direct line instead.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Actually, I am using the direct line. I'm not using speakerphone. I'm doing my best with the little phone I have here.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Okay.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: To begin, as I was saying, I would really like to apologize to the committee for my lack of precision when I appeared on March 8. I am sorry for all of the confusion caused by that lack of precision and clarity, and I hope my comments today will reassure you regarding Service Canada's full compliance with the Official Languages Act and the rights of all Canadians.

[English]

Turning now to my opening remarks, first I would like to clarify the situation regarding the language designation of the Atlantic region by Service Canada.

[Translation]

We had four regions, which have been combined into one single large region. This had, and still has, no consequences for bilingual services. Every Service Canada centre and employee position that had been designated bilingual remains bilingual. There has been no change in any language of work entitlements of Service Canada employees. Service Canada fully complies with the Official Languages Act.

Consequently, nothing has changed. The act guarantees the linguistic rights of employees and clients and requires that federal departments and agencies ensure that those rights are respected.

[English]

Service Canada's new internal organizational structure, like the previous one, fully respects the Official Languages Act. Therefore, the same rights and privileges that are protected under the act and which existed prior to this structural and administrative change continue to apply.

[Translation]

We continue to serve clients in the official language of their choice, in accordance with the act. We also continue to respect the right of employees to use the language of their choice in bilingual areas such as New Brunswick. Nothing can diminish those rights or our legal responsibility to protect them and ensure that they are respected. In fact, we plan to increase our bilingual capacity for regional senior management positions in the Atlantic region.

There are currently 25 senior management positions in the Atlantic region, of which 60% are designated bilingual. Our goal is to ensure that 80% of senior management positions in the region are bilingual. In New Brunswick in particular, the 10 existing senior management positions are bilingual and will remain bilingual.

• (0955)

[English]

We firmly intend to fully respect our official language obligations.

[Translation]

We are committed to developing an official languages plan based on the audit report by the Commissioner of Official Languages, the details of which we provided you at our last appearance before this committee. We will consult with official language minority communities in implementing that action plan. I would also like to repeat that the commissioner expressed his satisfaction with the proposed measures and timelines.

I now reiterate our commitment to offering quality services to the public in the language of their choice. That is our mandate and our purpose. Official languages are an integral part of the cultural service excellence that we are creating across the country.

[English]

It is one the values of our organization and that will not change.

[Translation]

That concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chairman. All four of us are now ready to answer your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you very much, Ms. Forand.

We will start with Mr. Murphy.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Ms. Forand, we, committee members, are well aware of the difference between bilingual service delivery and the designation of the administration as bilingual or unilingual. You said in your appearance of March 8 that the administrative structure of the Atlantic region was unilingual. Today, you are saying that four regions have been combined into one large Atlantic region. That's quite clear. Before these changes, was there a region, New Brunswick, for example, that was designated bilingual, yes or no?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Bilingual designation is provided for under the Official Languages Act. Its provisions allow for a determination of which regions are designated bilingual in terms of service to Canadians and language of work.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Was New Brunswick designated bilingual administratively, yes or no?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: It is not the department's administrative responsibility to designate a region bilingual or unilingual. The clarification I wanted to make...

Mr. Brian Murphy: That is not a clarification at all.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ... was that these designations are...

Mr. Brian Murphy: I have a lot of questions, Ms. Forand, my time is limited.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ... provided for under the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I'm sorry, but I have a time limit.

I have another question for you. You also said nothing at all had changed. However, employees in the region are receiving petitions. We have received a lot of calls in our offices. People think that in the New Brunswick region, for example, there's been a big change. As a matter of fact, there were four regions and now there's only one. The region has been designated unilingual anglophone. The centre is in Halifax, not in New Brunswick. That is a clear change, one that is not good for bilingualism in New Brunswick and not good for Acadians in the Atlantic region. Do you acknowledge that or not?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: There has been absolutely no change to the linguistic designation of the Atlantic region, nor has there been any change to the bilingual services provided in that region by Service Canada. There has been no change to the designation of bilingual positions. All positions designated bilingual before this administrative change remain so. There has been no change in the linguistic designation of the Atlantic region.

Mr. Brian Murphy: With all due respect, Ms. Forand, I will suggest that you read certain articles on language rights in Canada. You will find that at page 534 and following of the book *Les lois linguistiques au Canada*.

I don't have much time, Ms. Forand, but on behalf of the residents of my region, I have to say that you don't appear to be very familiar with the act—more specifically, sections 34 to 36—and your obligations under it. With all due respect, I do not believe that you have complied with the act. That is not at all clear. In New Brunswick, we had a bilingual region. Now, it is unilingual and the administration is located in Halifax. It's terrible and unacceptable and I am not satisfied with your answer. It is not responsible, because in New Brunswick we had a right and now we no longer have that right. I am speaking for the employees of Service Canada. I'm not referring to points of service.

I am not at all satisfied, Ms. Forand. I will turn the floor over to the others.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Mr. Chairman.

•(1000)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Mr. Murphy.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Mr. Chairman, may I provide further clarification.

The member mentioned the fact that the headquarters of the greater Atlantic region is located in Halifax and that this has an impact on New Brunswick employees. I would just like to reassure the committee and the member. The fact that the senior management of the region is located in Halifax has had no repercussions on other management positions in the region. Our structure is not concentrated in Halifax.

Furthermore, we have management positions in all...

Mr. Brian Murphy: That's not true.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ...four provinces.

Mr. Brian Murphy: That's not true.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I just wanted to say that we haven't concentrated everything in the Halifax area.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Ms. Forand, my colleague used up five minutes and fifty seconds. I'm going to use, if you don't mind, the remaining minute to ask you just one question. Do you find it normal for a bilingual region like New Brunswick to report to a unilingual region?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make it clear that New Brunswick does not report to Halifax. Management positions in the Atlantic region are located in all of the provincial capitals. In that sense, we have a decentralized structure.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): But...

Ms. Liseanne Forand: New Brunswick employees do not report to a Halifax office.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): But it's because you just...

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Management is located in Moncton, Fredericton and elsewhere.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): This morning, you said, and I quote: "We had four regions, which have been combined into one large region, headquartered in Halifax."

My question stands. Is it normal and justifiable for a bilingual region like New Brunswick to report to a unilingual headquarters?

•(1005)

Ms. Liseanne Forand: For my part, Mr. Chairman, I was trying to explain to you that under the decentralized structure we have set up in the Atlantic Region and owing to the fact that all four provinces are represented at the management table, it is inaccurate to say that New Brunswick reports to a headquarters in Halifax...

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ... because the management positions are located throughout the Atlantic Region.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Ms. Forand. I have to stop here because my time is up. So I will turn the floor over to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to welcome our witnesses.

Ms. Forand, we talked last week, if I'm not mistaken. In response to a simple question from a colleague, you said that if a client went to a designated unilingual anglophone point of service and the person providing the service behind the counter on behalf of the Government of Canada had a French or Acadian sounding name, for example, the service provider should say to the client: "This here is an anglophone office. Please go to the following other point of service in another city for service in French." Is what I have just said factually correct?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

I remember the question well, and the answer is that an Acadian, for example, who speaks French well, has every right to speak French with the client in a unilingual office. An Acadian service provider also has the right to serve the client in the language of his or her own choice. However, I added that the service provider would also have a responsibility to inform the client that there was a bilingual office in another location if the client would prefer to go there.

What we require of our employees is simply for them to provide this information to the client so the client knows that it's a unilingual office and that service will be provided in the language of the employee's choice, but that if the client prefers, they can go to a bilingual office or communicate with the department by telephone because...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Okay, Ms. Forand. I am going to have to interrupt you. I understood your answer.

If I, Richard Nadeau, went to an office and asked for service under the mandate of Service Canada, in an office that is designated bilingual, and no one there could speak French, I would have to either speak English or get myself to another office. Is that right?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: If you went to a bilingual office, sir...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: No.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: You said bilingual in your question.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: No, I said unilingual, Ms. Forand. I am talking about a unilingual office.

I will start over with a new question. In a Service Canada office designated unilingual English, located in one of the Atlantic provinces, as a Canadian citizen, would it be possible for me to be served in French?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: At bilingual points of service...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: No, unilingual.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ...and unilingual?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Ms. Forand, I am talking about unilingual points of service.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: There has been no change.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I do not want to know whether there has been any change.

Ms. Forand, listen carefully. Suppose I were to go to a unilingual English designated office and ask to be served in French. Would I have to leave that office if I wanted bilingual service?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I wanted to make it clear that there was no change in the designation of unilingual or bilingual points of service.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Are there unilingual English offices, Ms. Forand?

I am going to start over with a third question. Are there unilingual English designated offices?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: There are unilingual English designated offices.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Good, let's stop here.

Suppose I were to go to a unilingual English office. I ask a question and I want to be served in French. Would they call the RCMP to take me away because I want service in French?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: If you ask to be served in French in a unilingual English office...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: A Service Canada office.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ... anywhere in Canada....

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Yes.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: the agent will tell you that you are at a unilingual English office and will give you the opportunity to communicate then and there with Service Canada by phone.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Or the agent will give you the opportunity to consult the Web site using the computer there and will give you information on the location of the nearest bilingual Service Canada office.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That means, Ms Forand, that I can get service in a unilingual English office. That is what you are telling me. If it is not face to face, it may be by telephone or by consulting the French Internet site. Is that what you are telling me?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: That is right.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Good, that is a bit clearer. It is reassuring to me.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you.

Mr. Godin.

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

Good morning, Ms. Forand.

On March 8, I asked you a question, whether the Atlantic provinces were a bilingual region. You answered that it was a unilingual region, with a bilingual province in it, New Brunswick. Do you agree with that?

• (1010)

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I agree, that is what I said on March 8.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Have you changed your mind since March 8?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Now, I would say that...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ah, now, something has changed. I thought nothing has changed.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Absolutely nothing has changed.

Mr. Godin, I simply wanted to confirm that you were reading precisely what I said on March 8.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am reading exactly what you said.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: It was an error on my part not to have been clearer and more precise then.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Excuse me. You say you wish you had been clearer and more precise.

In all of Service Canada's press releases these days, you talk about service to Canadians. Now, you are talking about the administrative structure. Let's stop talking about service to Canadians. Let's talk about the administrative structure.

Before the administrative structure for the Atlantic provinces was centralized, Mr. Bill Ferguson, who was bilingual, was the director of the administrative structure in New Brunswick. Mr. Bill Ferguson has retired and been replaced by Ms. Louise Branch. Do you know her?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ms. Louise Branch got a promotion and became head of the administrative structure for the Atlantic provinces. So she was in charge of the entire Atlantic region. Do you recall that?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Now, she has left and been replaced by Ms. Lynne Bruvels. Is that correct?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: No.

The management position that was held by Ms. Branch for the Atlantic region is now held by Mr. Mike Alexander on an acting basis until the position can be filled permanently.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: The competition to fill that position permanently is currently in progress.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right.

Ms. Lynne Bruvels is the director of processing and payment services for employment insurance at Service Canada for the Atlantic region. Is that correct?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I would like to ask my colleague Gina Rallis to confirm who holds the position you are referring to, because there are people in that position both provincially and regionally. So I would ask Ms. Rallis to confirm Ms. Bruvels' position.

Mrs. Gina Rallis (Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, Human Resources Services Branch, Service Canada): Thank you.

I will check and get back to you. Ms. Branch was indeed the person in charge. So it wasn't Ms. Bruvels who replaced her, it was Mr. Michael Alexander.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Is Michael Alexander bilingual?

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When we called to speak with Ms. Branch, we were told she had been replaced by Ms. Bruvels. Ms. Bruvels' title is director of employment insurance processing and payment services.

Let's turn now to Mr. Jim Wood, who was the director of employment insurance in Saint-John. He was replaced by Mr. Doug Johnson, in Newfoundland. I agree with you when you say that your people are all over the Atlantic region. Mr. Doug Johnson is not bilingual. Is he?

As for the 60 jobs lost in Bathurst, the employees told me they were dealing with Mr. Doug Johnson, who doesn't speak French. According to part V of the Official Languages Act, workers are entitled to speak the language of their choice.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Mr. Godin, I am going to ask Ms. Rallis to give you a more specific answer.

However, you are right, Mr. Johnson is the executive director responsible for processing and payment...

Mr. Yvon Godin: For the Atlantic region?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ... for the Atlantic Region. He has been receiving language training and should be completing that shortly. We have also taken administrative measures, as provided for in the Official Languages Act, to ensure that employees in New Brunswick have access to a supervisor in the language of their choice.

I would ask Ms. Rallis to add a few details in that regard.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Mr. Wood is still the incumbent. He is the director general responsible for integrity and national services throughout the region.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Very well, but why are the employees who must contact Service Canada referred to Doug Johnson, in Newfoundland, who does not currently speak French and responds by sending them letters in English?

•(1015)

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Mr. Chair, employees are not referred to Mr. Johnson. They have supervisors who are...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you want me to show you letters that Mr. Johnson wrote in English to people in Bathurst?

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Mr. Johnson is responsible for employment insurance benefits, but there are direct supervisors who are bilingual.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We are talking about the administrative structure. In the past, the Bathurst office dealt with Jim Wood. He said that he no longer holds that position and that people must now deal with Doug Johnson. But Doug Johnson does not speak French.

When I called Ms. Bruvels, the message on her answering machine said that she was absent and invited people to call Carson Littlejohn, the director of EI payment and processing, who also works in St. John's and does not speak French.

That is what the Atlantic Region has lost. So, do you agree that things have changed? When things were run out of New Brunswick and had not yet been centralized, people could receive services in French wherever they called. Today their calls are falling on deaf ears. When I asked a question about that, Ms. Forand, you were quite clear: the Atlantic is a unilingual region. Ms. Therrien, the communication director, told me that the offices are not bilingual. The administrative structure is not bilingual.

Do you agree with me, yes or no?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Are you asking me to respond?

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am asking whether those services are currently bilingual. In all of the offices that I called, the services were only in English. You confirmed that the administrative structure in the Atlantic region was unilingual.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Mr. Godin, the response will have to be very brief, because your time has run out.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Mr. Chair, as I said at the outset of my remarks today, I was not being accurate when I said that the Atlantic region was an unilingual one, because such a designation is established by the Official Languages Act. Therefore, no changes have been brought to the designation of the Atlantic region.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Ms. Forand.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: No change was made, whether regarding the language of work, part V...

Mr. Yvon Godin: You did not change anything, except for the fact that you hired an anglophone to serve francophones.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: ... or the services to the public provided for in part IV.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): I am sure we will come back to that, Ms. Forand.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Forand, thank you for meeting with us again. We will give you the opportunity to clarify everything. Which provinces are included in the Atlantic designated region?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: The Atlantic region includes Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What is its designation? Is it unilingual or bilingual?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: It does not have a linguistic designation. The designation with regard to the language of work is defined in the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Is the region bilingual or unilingual?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: New Brunswick is a bilingual province. All the rights and responsibilities related to that designation are available in New Brunswick.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What about in the other provinces?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: With regard to the other provinces, as you know, that is an issue of service to the public. We comply with the official language regulations in designating bilingual offices, locations and points of service, as is the case for example in Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia, or in all provincial capitals.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: So there are three possibilities: a region can be designated bilingual, unilingual or neither of the above. That is my understanding.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Allow me to repeat myself, sir: there is no designation per se for the region as a whole. Some areas, like New Brunswick, are designated bilingual. They were and remain so. Nothing has changed in that regard.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Could the region receive a designation?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: The Official Languages Act provides for the designation of locations, and we comply with the act throughout our region.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I will give the floor to Royal Galipeau, who will ask the next question.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Good morning, Ms. Forand. The last time you appeared before us, I like other committee members had the impression that you got tripped up in the details. Your prepared remarks today reassured me somewhat. However, in listening to you answer questions from members, I am even less reassured than the last time. Today you not only got tripped up in the details, you got tripped up in your own language.

You are no clearer in answering the questions by members of the government side than you were in answering those by members of the opposition. Regretfully, I have come to share the concerns expressed by the members of the opposition. I believe that this should be an opportunity for you to do some more in-depth soul-searching.

I have no other questions because I am not satisfied with the answers you have given in response to the previous questions.

• (1020)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Ms. Forand, do you wish to respond or react?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I would like to respond. I am trying to describe the situation as clearly as possible. I would like to thank the member for having stated that he is reassured by my statements, that you have a copy of, because that was truly the intent of the message I wanted to give you today. I apologize if I did not do that clearly.

The message that I wanted to give you was that we fully respect the Official Languages Act and we do that out of a desire to provide our staff with the work environment that they have a right to and out

of a desire to provide Canadian men and women with the services they also have a right to by law.

I wanted to send the message that we have not reduced those rights in any way, neither in terms of the language of work, nor in terms of services provided to the public in the Atlantic region.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Ms. Forand. The time that is left for this round of questions will be used by Ms. Boucher.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, Ms. Forand. I absolutely share the concerns of my colleague, Royal Galipeau, and of all my other colleagues around the table today. We are somewhat confused by the statements you have made.

During your last appearance, there was reference to an English unilingual region. Today you are stating that there has been no change but that the region has not been designated, whether that be bilingual, francophone or anglophone. The Atlantic region includes four provinces. Francophones and anglophones live there. If the Atlantic region has not been designated, will it have to be one way or another?

This is inconceivable. We came to today's hearing of the Standing Committee on Official Languages in order to shed light on an already complicated situation. Your testimony today has destroyed any certainty we may have had. Not only do we no longer know where we are going, but we are wondering if maybe people in the Atlantic actually speak fish.

I think this is rather depressing, both for the francophones and the anglophones of the Atlantic region. I hope, Ms. Forand, that you will set the record straight once and for all because right now, we are all very confused.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

That ends our first round.

Colleagues, you will recall that I was the one who proposed having this hearing today. I would therefore like to ask Mr. Godin if he would agree to take the chair so that I can have a turn asking a question at the beginning of the second round.

• (1025)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair.

Mr. Mauril Bélanger, you have the floor.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Forand, I would like to begin by reminding you of what you stated at your March 8 appearance. You stated that you had consulted organizations in Nova Scotia, including the RDEE and other provincial organizations, on the closure of some of Service Canada's offices.

We have a letter signed by Jean Léger, Director General of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse, the FANE, stating that the RDEE and other economic organizations were not consulted. Rather, they were informed of the closure of some offices. They are therefore requesting a one-year moratorium before any definitive closure takes place.

How would you respond to that?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank for your question, Mr. Chairman.

Before my appearance on March 8, I had been informed that these discussions had been held with those two organizations as well as with two other small organizations from Petit-de-Grat and Chéticamp. I had the same reactions that you have just described in the letter you have before you, that is that these organizations were not satisfied with the nature of the discussions that took place before these changes.

I did not have an opportunity to speak with the representatives of those two organizations but I did speak about this with the FCFA. Following that discussion, I agreed with my colleagues that it would be appropriate to have those discussions again with those organizations.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Ms. Forand, I must ask that you answer more quickly. I only have five minutes in all.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Fine. All that to say that I heard the same concerns that you were describing this morning. We plan to have additional discussions with these organizations before the change takes place.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Would you agree to a moratorium?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I would not choose a moratorium to begin with. I plan rather to consider the options available for services in those two communities, that is, Petit-de-Grat and Chéticamp.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will you come back to testify before making a decision?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: We will come back.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you. I have prepared another question.

During your hearing you stated the following:

In a unilingual service centre, management and oversight are carried out in one language. It could be French in Quebec or English elsewhere. The entire monitoring and management structure is in English. The employee is obliged to speak English.

Section 34 of the Official Languages Act reads as follows: "English and French are the languages of work in all federal institutions, and officers and employees of all federal institutions have the right to use either official language in accordance with this part".

Do you realize that what you stated is contrary to the act?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I will ask Ms. Rallis to comment on language of work and on the way in which we comply with language of work provisions at Service Canada.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Thank you very much.

The act is very clear on ensuring that the workplace is conducive to the use of the official languages. Furthermore, with respect to

language of work, the act is clear on the rights of employees to be able to express themselves, write, have tools and supervision that respect official languages.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Fine, but the deputy minister stated the opposite. She stated the opposite before the Standing Committee of Official Languages of the House of Commons. Do you not see the contradiction?

Mrs. Gina Rallis: I think that the deputy minister was clear on the fact that our department fully supports the act and she is here to provide that clarification. To the member, I apologize but we were also subject to the Commissioner of Official Languages audit and...

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, but you are accountable to Parliament, madam. Do not forget it. We also do our work. I must admit that I seldom get carried away, but I am starting to lose patience with your skirting around the issue.

Getting back to you, Ms. Forand, for the last time, if I have the time.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you think it is justifiable that a bilingual region, New Brunswick in this case, reports to a unilingual region? Given that you have recreated an Atlantic administrative region whose headquarters is in Halifax, the New Brunswick region now has to go Halifax.

Do you think it is justifiable to have a bilingual region reporting to a unilingual region?

• (1030)

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Sir, I would simply like to clarify once again that New Brunswick does not report to Halifax.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: To which region does it report, madam?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: There is the managing official who is located in Halifax, but the other senior positions are dispersed throughout the Atlantic region.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But explain this to me. My time is up, I am sorry. Perhaps one day we will understand.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yvon Godin): Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Ms. Forand, this is the second time you have appeared before us and I would say, as did my colleague Royal Galipeau, that the first time you got bogged down in some details but that at this point you are practically sinking.

It really is very difficult for us to understand. There is unanimity here around the table, something that happens seldom. I think something is seriously wrong in the New Brunswick region. You are going to have to take certain measures to address this.

After you appeared before our committee, a few days later, a senior official from Service Canada in the Atlantic region publicly contradicted what you had said. What do you have to say to that? Quickly, if you will.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you, Ms. Guay. I do not know which statement you are referring to.

Ms. Monique Guay: Yours. You should know it.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: No. I am referring to this statement you mentioned, that was made by an official in the region who contradicted my statement. I do not know what you are referring to.

Ms. Monique Guay: Yes. It was in your statement that you said the four Atlantic provinces were unilingual.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: That is right. And in fact, it was my...

Ms. Monique Guay: You are saying that the New Brunswick region does not report to Halifax. That is what you just said.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Yes.

Ms. Monique Guay: So, to what region does it report?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: New Brunswick does not...

Ms. Monique Guay: To whom does it report?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: What I was trying to explain to you is that we have senior positions located in all provinces. Ten of them are in New Brunswick. Some of the people holding these positions report to people who are also in New Brunswick. We have a type of decentralized management system.

Ms. Monique Guay: Then why create the Atlantic region and include New Brunswick in it if this province does not have to report to the Atlantic region? It makes no sense. Please explain.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: We have a structure that covers the four Atlantic provinces. There are four business lines and fields of work within Service Canada. We have officials for each of these work lines, business lines. Some of them are located in New Brunswick. Some in Newfoundland. Some in Nova Scotia. That is what I meant by decentralized.

Ms. Monique Guay: But it is not decentralized. You have just told us that the four provinces now comprise the Atlantic administrative region. You refer to decentralization and then you say the opposite. What you are telling us now makes no sense. And you are telling me that New Brunswick reports to New Brunswick. Come on! That makes no sense.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: We have...

Ms. Monique Guay: You just created a region called the Atlantic, which New Brunswick is a part of. It's as though you were telling me that these people report to themselves.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I am sorry that it is so difficult to explain this to you. We have four provinces.

Ms. Guay: That makes no sense.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: We are not organized on a provincial basis. That may be the easiest way to explain it. However, we have senior positions in the four provinces and we ensure respect for official languages in terms of language of work and within all channels of supervision we set up.

Ms. Monique Guay: Ms. Forand, I do not have much time left. I have colleagues from New Brunswick who still have many questions to ask you. I simply want to say this: we have our eye on you and are not going to drop this issue. One thing is certain, we are not satisfied. I can say that for the Bloc Québécois, at the very least. Again today, your responses only lead to confusion. We do not understand a thing here. Go back to the drawing board and do your homework. You will then be able to appear before us again as soon as possible to provide us with real answers.

•(1035)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Ms. Guay.

There are 30 seconds left. Did you want to respond, Ms. Forand?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Simply to say that I am prepared to do anything I can to provide a clear explanation as to how Service Canada as an agency works, regarding existing positions, who reports to whom, etc. I would very much appreciate an opportunity to do so clearly.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): I get the impression that you will get that opportunity. In the meantime, perhaps you could send us a detailed organizational chart for your department.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: With pleasure, Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you.

Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you.

I thank all witnesses. Good day, Ms. Forand.

Mr. Chairman, you just stole my punch line. I wanted to provide some comfort to Ms. Forand, who is having a rough go of it.

Ms. Forand, I did indeed want to say that the committee would be interested in receiving the organizational chart.

I consider myself insightful enough, but this morning, I am having some real difficulty following. That said, I am trying to understand. Obviously, the Standing Committee on Official Languages ensures application of the act and wants that to occur as smoothly as possible. I think that the Atlantic region is rather well defined in terms of bilingualism. We all know that New Brunswick is the only Canadian province that is officially bilingual. In my opinion, that is not a matter of debate. However, it is part of a set of provinces that are designated bilingual. It is a region which is more unilingual anglophone than bilingual. I think that is a matter of fact.

When it comes to meeting needs in both languages, your department has an extraordinary responsibility. We certainly hope to receive your organizational chart rather soon so that we may gain a better understanding of what you are trying to explain to us, and that we are not understanding. For the time being, I will focus on something else.

Mr. Godin alluded earlier to staff changes that had taken place over the last few months or the last few weeks, for obvious reasons. Some staff members have retired, others changed jobs etc., which is perfectly normal. I would like to know whether, when people change jobs, those positions are already designated bilingual, and if so, whether it would be considered normal for the people holding those positions to be replaced by people who are not bilingual? Ms. Rallis may answer.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Thank you.

As Ms. Forand indicated, we have 25 senior positions within the entire...

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In the entire Atlantic region.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Ten of them...

Mr. Bernard Généreux: ... are designated bilingual?

Mrs. Gina Rallis: No. Out of 25 positions, 10 are in New Brunswick.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Very well.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Moreover, 60% of these 25 positions are designated bilingual and respect...

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So that would be approximately 18 positions.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: Our goal is to increase this percentage to 80%.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: All right.

Ms. Forand, that is good news.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: As you can see, I am trying to be generous and be faithful to my name.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: I did not give a comprehensive answer to your question. There is another issue. Are bilingual positions ones where new hires must meet the requirements?

With respect to hiring, 96% of all bilingual positions are imperative staffing. That means that people must be bilingual to be appointed to those positions.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: They absolutely must be bilingual.

You referred to 96%, 96% of 25 positions. Let's speak in absolute terms, instead of percentages. If I understand correctly, approximately 21 or 22 out of 25 positions must absolutely be bilingual.

Mrs. Gina Rallis: I can tell you that 96% of bilingual positions are filled by bilingual staff.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: If we are quick, Ms. Forand may be able to answer me. When an executive is appointed on an acting basis, must the acting position be occupied by a bilingual individual when the position is designated bilingual?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Yes. A person who takes an acting position must meet the language requirements.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Forand, as a result of this confusion and of the reaction to your statement before the committee, especially in the Atlantic region, do you consider yourself very close to the key players in your department, your department's executives in the Atlantic region? If so, do you think that these people tell you really what is going on, what the real experience is on the ground in terms of the language issue?

• (1040)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): You have about 20 seconds, Ms. Forand.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Yes, I feel close to the managers in the Atlantic region and yes, they are very honest with me about the concerns that are important to people in that region. As I said at the beginning, I apologize for the confusion that these discussions created among the employees. I am seeking to clarify it all to the extent I am able to.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I want to do so as quickly and as permanently as possible.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you very much.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

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

In all the information that you will be sending us in order to try and explain things to us, could you clarify what the change is? Before this, each province was separate. Now, the administrative structure covers the entire Atlantic region. What is the difference between the two situations? Who reports to whom?

Why did Jim Wood say that he was replaced by Doug Johnson? Why Doug Johnson, who speaks only English with the employees in the Bathurst office? I want to know so that I can understand better. You stated that you were sorry for the confusion. But there is no confusion; you told the truth. That is exactly what is happening. Now you are backpedalling. You are trying to save face for Service Canada in light of the actions that were taken.

I would like to come back to the matter of the Atlantic region. I asked you whether that region was designated unilingual franco-phone and you stated that the Atlantic administrative region is an anglophone administrative region. What is an administrative region? What does the administration do? Why is it unilingual? What is the role of New Brunswick in this unilingual administration? Once again, your answer was that the Atlantic administrative region was an anglophone administrative region.

I don't think you came here without information, unless you were unaware of something. What were you doing? Ms. Forand, your answer was that the province of New Brunswick was not separate and that it is part of the administrative structure. But if that is the case, it must have to deal with the administrative structure and talk to people. You told us on several occasions that the administrative structure is unilingual. I even asked you if it was francophone and you stated that it is anglophone.

Please try to shed light on this for us, because it is not clear. I am not talking about services. Since March 8, every time people from Service Canada have answered questions, they refer to customer service. We are not talking about that; we are talking about the administrative structure. This is about the employees, the structure. Who replaced Louise Branch? You said that it was Mr. Alexander, but when I asked about Louise Branch, I was referred to Ms. Gravelle. And when I tried to speak to Ms. Gravelle, she told me that I should speak to her assistant, because she herself did not speak enough French. After that, when I try to speak to her assistant, I have to speak to Carson Littlejohn, who does not speak French either.

You told us that you comply with the Official Languages Act and that it was not you who designated the Atlantic region as unilingual. On March 8, you told us that it was unilingual anglophone. The people who replaced them are unilingual anglophones, and you told us yourself that the administration is unilingual. Please tell us what is going on in the Atlantic region.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

As I said in my opening statement, it was an error on my part not to have been more clear on March 8 about the changes that were made in the Atlantic region.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why did the director of communications for the Atlantic region in Newfoundland also tell me that the Service Canada administration for the Atlantic region was unilingual? Two people, one of whom is from the department, have told us that it is unilingual. So why are you telling us today that it is not?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: All I can do, Mr. Godin, is to emphasize that saying that about the region—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why did two—

• (1045)

Ms. Liseanne Forand: — was an error on my part.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why did those two people both say the same thing?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: It is completely inaccurate to say that the Atlantic region as a whole is designated unilingual.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The administrative structure is unilingual. Is that not correct? That is what you said.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: That is not correct.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ms. Forand, you said that the administrative structure was unilingual. Ms. Therrien from Newfoundland told me the same thing, that the Service Canada administrative structure in Newfoundland was unilingual.

Ms. Liseanne Forand: The administrative structure respects—

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is not what I am asking. Is it unilingual or bilingual?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: It respects the Official Languages Act in terms of—

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are not answering my question, Ms. Forand. Is it unilingual or bilingual?

Ms. Liseanne Forand: I have said several times today that we comply with the Official Languages Act for language of work. It is the Official Languages Act that designates population segments and areas of the country as bilingual or unilingual.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Ms. Forand. I have no further questions.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): That closes our second round of questions and brings committee business to an end.

Dear colleagues, I think this is a subject that we must explore further, although we may be interrupted by an election. But we will see.

Ms. Forand, if I may, I am going to make a suggestion. This morning we also heard from the Deputy Minister of the Department of Industry, Mr. Dicerri, who told us, in reply to a question put by my colleague Mr. Murphy, that the Atlantic administrative region of the Department of Industry is bilingual. You could perhaps consider this possibility for Service Canada. I will leave you with that.

I wish you an enjoyable trip to Spain. *Hasta luego.*

Ms. Liseanne Forand: *Gracias.*

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Mauril Bélanger): Thank you, Mr. Nixon, Ms. Rallis and Mr. La Salle.

This closes the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The meeting is adjourned.

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