



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

---

LANG • NUMBER 072 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, March 19, 2013**

—  
**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Tuesday, March 19, 2013

• (1530)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** Welcome to the 72nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, March 19, 2013. We are here pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111 to study and discuss the certificate of nomination of Graham Fraser to the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, which was referred to the committee on Wednesday, March 6, 2013.

Mr. Fraser is appearing before the committee today. Welcome; the floor is yours.

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

[English]

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, honourable members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you for considering the certificate of nomination extending my term as Commissioner of Official Languages.

The past six years have been marked by important events, including regular meetings with members of this committee. I hope that I will have the privilege of continuing this relationship for another three years.

[Translation]

I would like to underscore the commitment and professionalism shown by the senior management and employees at the Office of the Commissioner during the past few years. You have no doubt gotten to know some of the members of my executive committee who regularly accompany me to our meetings.

[English]

But today it's only you and me, just like our first meeting in 2006, the purpose of which was to consider my application for the position of commissioner. Some of you will no doubt remember that, on that occasion, I repeated the question posed by the Laurendeau-Dunton commission 50 years ago this year.

[Translation]

Can English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians live together and do they want to do so? If the answer to this question is still yes, then a results-based official languages policy must be implemented. This is what I said to you six years ago and I still believe it to be true.

[English]

The government must continue to make choices and take actions that will allow Canadians to obtain services in both official languages; allow public servants to work in the official language of their choice; allow official language communities to fully contribute to Canadian society; and allow people in every part of the country to learn Canada's two official languages.

[Translation]

I am also judged by the results I obtain as a deputy head. Canadians who file complaints expect effective resolution within a reasonable timeframe. Our interventions with federal institutions must be judicious and lead to lasting changes.

[English]

Our partners in official language communities and bilingualism promotion groups count on our support. Our promotional campaigns must reach their target audience. Moreover, the organization must be well managed and must ensure respect for employees and citizens who fund the organization.

[Translation]

The Office of the Commissioner will continue to modernize itself. We are moving ahead with the implementation of new information management systems that will allow Canadians to file a complaint online, and we are now present on social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

[English]

We now have a facilitated complaint process that's used to handle more than 60% of the complaints we've received. Moreover, we will soon be under the same roof as Elections Canada, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, and the Office of the Information Commissioner. This proximity to other agents of Parliament will strengthen our independence and eventually allow us to share some services.

[Translation]

These administrative changes will allow the Office of the Commissioner to tackle upcoming challenges more effectively. I am thinking not only about the program that, I hope, will replace the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality, but also about the many upcoming important anniversaries and events during which Canada's linguistic duality will play a starring role.

•(1535)

[*English*]

My staff has worked closely with the organizers of the 2013 Canada Games in Sherbrooke. They are also already cooperating with the organizers of the 2015 Pan American Games in Toronto. This is to ensure that we apply the lessons learned during the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.

[*Translation*]

Celebrations in 2017 for the 150th anniversary of Confederation will include the inauguration of the new Canadian Museum of History, and will be preceded by many commemorative events, for example, for both world wars and for the 200th anniversary of the birth of John A. MacDonald. These anniversaries serve as the backdrop for a national conversation about our common history and their values.

[*English*]

We need to highlight those historic moments, while recognizing that they were, at the time, a source of bitter and polarizing debate. It would be counterproductive to try to mask the disagreements because we still feel the after-effects today.

[*Translation*]

Since it was elected, the Parti Québécois government has been concerned about forces that are endangering the status of French. These dangers are very real. In the scientific, international trade and entertainment communities, the dominance of English often reduces the space that francophones have to express themselves. But these dangers do not come from Quebec's English-speaking communities or from federal institutions. This is a message that I will continue to spread.

[*English*]

This is only a glimpse of the work of the office of the commissioner and what the federal government must do over the next few years. Also on the agenda are the following: the vitality of official language communities; issues related to immigration, which is the past, the present, and the future of our country; access to justice in both official languages; and the critical need to improve access to French-language learning. We also need to keep an eye on the changes within the federal public service, both in terms of services and in terms of language of work and support for official language communities.

[*Translation*]

The Office of the Commissioner will examine these issues as part of four main priorities: first to promote linguistic duality in Canadian society, specifically by encouraging the government to play a more visible role in and improve access to second-language learning; second to ensure that language rights are protected, specifically by monitoring the impact of budget cuts and the use of 2011 census data to determine the language designation of federal offices, while continuing to monitor federal institution performance;

[*English*]

third, to enhance official language community vitality, particularly with respect to immigration; and fourth, to ensure sound management of the office of the commissioner during a period of change.

To meet these objectives, the office of the commissioner will continue to use every tool at its disposal: the work it does with parliamentarians, studies, audits, investigations, meetings with the heads of institutions, promotion and information initiatives, and of course, legal remedies.

[*Translation*]

We will also continue our work with federal institutions and linguistic minorities and majorities, while providing advice in the areas of health and education, the private sector and the media, as needed.

With your permission, I will continue to be a cheerleader and a nag.

Thank you for your attention. I would now like to take the remaining time to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We have about an hour and a half for questions and comments.

Let us start with Mr. Godin.

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

First, I would like to give notice of the following motion:

That the Committee invite the CEO of the Translation Bureau of Public Works and Government Services Canada, Ms. Donna Achimov, for a two-hour public and televised meeting about official languages in the federal public service between now and June 14, 2013.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin. You may continue.

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

Thank you for joining us, Mr. Fraser.

These days, it is not usual for the Prime Minister to renew someone's appointment. Enough said.

We have some questions for you.

If your appointment is confirmed...

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Mr. Chair, my colleague Jennifer Stoddart has also been reappointed to her position for three years. So other officers of Parliament have also been accorded the privilege.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Was she tougher when she came back the second time?

If your appointment is confirmed, what will be your priorities in the next three years?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I mentioned several of them in my statement.

Certainly, one of our priorities will be to monitor the changes, the transformations, in the government as a result of the budget cuts. There are also the preparations for major sporting events such as the Pan-American Games, and a series of historic events and commemorations in which, I feel, it is very important for linguistic duality to be on display.

● (1540)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** As you know, several departments have been hit with cuts. The government is patting itself on the back for not having made any cuts to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

You said you wanted to make changes to the technology in your office to the tune of about \$6.2 million. In an appearance before this committee, you said that it would affect the work of your office.

Do you feel that it affects your work, yes or no?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I believe we have succeeded in absorbing the costs. Thanks to the professionalism of our managers, we have indeed succeeded in making our complaints processing system more efficient. For example, in one year, we have reduced the processing time for complaints in our facilitated process from 7.6 months to 3.7 months. That cuts the time by about half. For investigations requiring a formal process, the processing time has gone from 11.4 months to 5.9 months. So we can say that those technological changes have made us more efficient.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Let me give you some examples.

One of the complaints was about the library at the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Seriously, in the time you were investigating the complaint, the library had already been closed.

The Canadian Forces recruiting centre in Bathurst is very important. People from as far away as Madawaska go to that bilingual centre for recruiting purposes. I registered a complaint on April 12, 2012. It is now March 19, 2013 and your office has not yet rendered a decision. That is dangerous, because, in the amount of time it has taken to deal with the complaint, the government has already closed the offices. And all that is said is that the government should have consulted.

I remember when they wanted to close the offices in Bathurst and move them to Miramichi, you said that the government did not hold consultations and had broken the law. You are doing the same thing this time too.

How can you say that the situation is improving when that is what we see? It is not a major complaint. You have to find out whether the Bathurst office is really going to close. We know it is, it has already been announced. Francophones from Madawaska are going to have to go to Fredericton. But we are still waiting for an answer. I do not know all the complaints that your office receives, but I am bringing up one that was easy to deal with and it was registered a year ago.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I cannot comment in detail on the processing of complaints. That is one of the fundamental rules of my role. I am making a note about the examples you are giving me. Actually, the rule that guides me is that I can comment on situations before complaints happen—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I do not want you to comment on the complaint itself. I am saying that it is taking some time to deal with it. Before the answer is ready, the offices are closed and it is too late. That is what happened at the library at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Could you have done anything retroactively?

How many times have you taken the government to court? That is one of the powers you have. You can comment on that.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Yes, indeed, that is one of my powers. We are in court about Radio-Canada and Air Canada. We participated as an intervener in the FCFA's case against the government's budget cuts and the elimination of the Language Rights Program. That led to the creation of the Language Rights Support Program.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Earlier, you mentioned the danger posed by the cuts in the public service. You saw that I gave notice of a motion to have the director appear.

In today's papers, we read about the cuts at the Translation Bureau, where a large number of positions have been eliminated. That affects translation directly. People are telling us that they are writing their documents in English now. They would never dare to complain to the government for fear of losing their jobs. Everyone has received a letter saying that there will be layoffs. So, if they are good, they stay, if they are not, they go.

Have you started an investigation into that, or do you need complaints to be sent to you directly?

● (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you. Mr. Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** We have not begun a formal investigation into the matter. But I have had some conversations with Ms. Achimov. As it says in the paper, I have an appointment to meet with Mr. Poirier from the union so that he can brief me on the situation. I find it troubling. Without confirming or dismissing the facts as presented in this morning's paper, the situation does present some pressures, often unspoken, on francophone employees to not exercise their right to work in French.

Sometimes, there is the body language in meetings. It may be the fact that the manager never uses French in meetings. It may be a phone call from a political staffer. If the political staffer is unilingual and wants to see a document, he has no need to spell out the fact that he wants to see it in English. In some departments, the culture is such that English predominates to such an extent that francophones are very reluctant to write briefing notes in French and to use French in meetings.

That is why I have always stressed the importance of leadership. It is important for managers, senior managers and executives in the public service to not only tolerate the use of both languages—accepting it is not enough—but to actively promote the use of both official languages and to encourage francophones to use French in the workplace.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Your turn, Mr. Galipeau.

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

As I understand it, the official opposition will support the government's decision to renew Mr. Fraser's appointment to his position.

**The Chair:** Do you have a question for Mr. Fraser?

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Six or seven years ago, a prominent journalist wrote a book called *Sorry, I don't speak French*. You wrote the book as a professional journalist to really present your vision of our country's linguistic duality to Canadians. In those six years, during which, I assume, you have had more access to the realities of the linguistic duality, given your position as commissioner, how has that vision evolved?

In Orleans, for example, I can tell you that the only bilingual people used to be the francophones. But the situation has changed a lot. However, I do not want to distract you from the question I asked.

Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I often go back to the book's conclusion to see whether my ideas have changed, but they have remained the same. I continue to promote the same ideas. I sometimes get the impression that I am doing a promotional book tour, a tour that has lasted six years.

• (1550)

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** It is not sold out yet?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** If I was writing the book again, I would be tougher on DND. The documents I used and the books I quoted dated from before the closure of the Royal Military College at Saint-Jean. I feel that closing that college had a very harmful effect.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Which year was that?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** It was in 1995.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** That is what I thought.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** But there is one area where I am more optimistic than I was when I wrote the book. I would say that linguistic duality has many more allies in the public service than I thought when I did the research for the book. In addition, for the last six years, if we have given a bad grade to a certain department, a new deputy minister now decides to fix the problem, to make improvements and to develop an action plan. You can see progress when a deputy minister or an agency head comes in with the will to change the culture of an organization and to instil greater respect for the official languages.

The other thing that I was delighted to discover since I have been in this position is the vitality of official languages minority communities and the way in which they differ from one area of the country to another.

[English]

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Fraser, I might get cut off pretty soon.

I'm probably one of the least important parliamentarians on the Hill, but in three years I'd like you to get a new mandate as Commissioner of Official Languages, but let's assume you don't. What would you see as your legacy after nine years?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** My hope would be that we will have had a series of achievements that are publicly acknowledged and recognized in which the presence of both official languages in Canada's public space is such that all Canadians, even those who are not bilingual, will have grown to have a sense that the other language belongs to them, even if they do not speak it.

I had an experience recently. I was talking to a former Conservative member of Parliament. He told me that he had watched the Olympics with friends in Toronto, and the people in the room were surprised at how little French there was in the opening ceremonies. He observed that 20 years earlier those same people would have been surprised if there had been equal treatment of English and French at a public event.

What we are now seeing is a gradual evolution. People are taking for granted that national events need to have the presence of both English and French in order to be fully recognized as national events.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** You won't be surprised to know that last Wednesday I was at the airport here in Ottawa to welcome the French prime minister. Of course, all kinds of French diplomats and bureaucrats were there waiting in the Billy Bishop room. This was at the same time the Pope was being elected at the Vatican, so all the TVs were tuned into CNN. I had to fight to get them on RDI. Of course, nobody knew how the TV worked, but in the end, it worked.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

We now move to Mr. Dion.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** That story is no laughing matter. It is a problem in every hotel in Canada.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** I do not deny that, Mr. Dion, but I took action.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** It was good that you did.

Mr. Fraser, one of the few interesting things that happens in this committee is our occasional meetings and debates with you. I appreciated your first mandate very much. My party and I are very much looking forward to working with you in your second mandate.

But allow me to offer one criticism. I find that you have succeeded very well in boosting people's confidence in the face of a lot of negativity. But, as the price for a certain clarity, I find that your annual reports contain too much sweetness and light. A lot of things are going on.

I was looking at your list of priorities and they are the right ones. But we have to have numbers in front of us and Statistics Canada gives us more numbers than you do. I am sure you will say that that is what they do, but I would like to see them in your reports. If you really want to promote linguistic duality in Canadian society, we have to see the real state of the linguistic duality.

Let me give you some worrisome figures. The last time we spoke, you told me that I had to look at numbers, not at percentages. Fine, but, with all the people coming from all over the world, the percentage of francophones is going down. But let's talk about the numbers. How is it that, in an educated country like Canada, we have gone from 2,561,000 outside Quebec able to carry on a conversation in French to 2,584,000 in four years. That is an increase of about 20,000 people in four years. We are standing still, and that is extremely troubling.

Let's talk about the young people, those whom we are counting on to be our great hopes for the future. I am going to talk about young people outside Quebec, because, inside Quebec, of course, the anglophones are very bilingual and the francophones are learning English at a rate that, while not yet high enough, is at least increasing. Outside Quebec, according to Statistics Canada, registrations in immersion programs are up by 23% but the number of students in regular French programs is down by 23%. In real terms, that means that the percentage of Canadians learning French as a second language outside Quebec has gone from 53% to 44% in 20 years. There is a huge problem and the commissioner has to address it directly.

I will stop there because my time is running out and I would like to hear your answer.

It is all very well to boost people's confidence, but they have to be done to face up to the challenges in front of them, and that has to be done as clearly as possible.

• (1555)

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Thank you very much for your comments.

Yes, indeed, it is one of the great challenges I see in the continuum of second language learning in Canada. The immersion program is generally recognized as a great success, but the dropout rate is a real concern. There are also school boards that still limit access to immersion. In British Columbia, people are still spending the night lining up to get their children a place. As a way of allocating places in a school system, I find that to be absurd.

I have even heard cases of school counsellors advising students to drop out of immersion programs in order to get better grades. They tell them that universities look at nothing but grades. One immersion student told me that his teacher had told him not to do the exam for the immersion course, but to do the one for the basic French course. That would give him better marks, which is all universities are interested in. I see that as encouraging mediocrity.

That is also why, after one of the studies we did, I continue to promote the idea that it is up to the universities to send the message to high schools to give more weight to students who have chosen a more demanding, more difficult, program. It is extremely important for universities to send that message. They also have to provide opportunities for second language learning at university level, partly because the Government of Canada, the biggest employer in Canada, needs bilingual employees.

In almost every province I have visited, I have been to universities in order to push that message. When I talk to federal agencies, I tell them about the importance of their role as recruiters in universities.

Of course, I also have meetings in high schools where I push that message too. It is extremely important.

• (1600)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Since we are going to have a second round of questions, I will talk about more specific budget matters later.

You understand where I was going with my first comments. People's confidence needs to be boosted. In that respect, you have been very good. But what my party and I expect from you in the next three years is the same excellence in focusing on the major trends, the big problems and making forceful suggestions to this government about the solutions to those problems. Annual reports do that. They start from the four priorities you have set for yourself. They are good ones that I will not go over now because I do not have the time. They also tell us where we are at the start of the year, where we are at the end of the year, where the shortcomings are and what needs to be done.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I hope you'll be interested in the annual report that we are currently producing and that will be tabled in the House in October. It makes a kind of list of what we have been able to observe during the first mandate. You can see where there has been progress, where the setbacks have been and where there have been major problems.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** I will read it carefully and I hope my comments today will help you as you write it.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Trottier, you have the floor.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here with us again, Mr. Fraser.

Could you share with the committee the reason for a three-year mandate? Normally, it could be for more years. So why a three-year mandate? Are you able to share that with us?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I must say at the outset that I did not ask for an extension. But when I was asked if I was open to the idea, I said that I would agree to one if I was asked. That is when I suggested a three-year extension. My reasoning was this: one year is too short and two years would put me right in the middle of the 2015 elections. That is why I said that, if I was going to accept an extension, it would be for three years.

There are other positions where people are appointed for 10 years, in the form of a five-year renewable term. As I said to the member for Acadie—Bathurst, my colleague Jennifer Stoddart, who had a mandate for seven years, was given a new mandate for three more years. The auditor general has a 10-year mandate. So I told myself that there is some logic in going from seven years to 10.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** In any case, I do not consider you a lame duck at all. You are going to do good work, I feel, and perhaps you may be open to accepting another new extension after this one.

In your brief, you talked about immigration and education. Explain to me what you can do in the area of immigration. In your opinion, what are the current pluses and minuses? How can the government improve the official languages situation in immigration?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I think that there is a kind of consensus in official language minority communities now that immigration really is the key to their future. In those communities across the country, the diversity is amazing. Members of a community may come from the Maghreb, from Africa or from France. I feel that it is very important to have support programs available to help people like that to integrate into the community. The services are often available when it comes to helping people to integrate into an anglophone majority, but there are fewer of them for francophone immigrants. There are some, though.

I was very impressed by an organization in Winnipeg called Accueil francophone. It is a branch of the Société franco-manitobaine. They meet immigrants and refugees at the airport, they take them to temporary accommodation and they help them register their children in French-language schools. New arrivals are looked after for three years.

Some hosting organizations are not sensitive to the reality that there is a minority. They tend, quite naturally, to direct immigrants, especially those whose first language is neither English nor French, to anglophone hosting organizations. But people like that often have French as their second language. People from Senegal, for example, whose first language is Wolof, speak French rather than English. But if the hosting organization is not sensitive to the reality of the minority community, they will all be directed to anglophone institutions.

In clinics and community institutions in Hamilton, people told me about coming across immigrants who had discovered the existence of institutions dealing with health and education after a year or a year and a half. They said that, if they had known about them beforehand, they would have enrolled their children in francophone schools and taken them to francophone clinics. But they were not going to do so now because they already have a doctor and because their children are already in their second year at an English-language school.

So it is very important for hosting organizations to be aware of the importance of directing francophone immigrants, with French as their primary working language, even though it may not be their first language, to minority institutions.

• (1605)

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** Thank you.

You also brought up health services. That touches on the question of the relationship between your office and the provinces who actually provide the services in the second language, the minority language.

Can you describe for us the relationship that you have with the provincial departments that provide education and health services?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** There are two elements to consider, you might say.

First, I have met with ministers, and often with premiers, in almost all the provinces. I have also had meetings with officials responsible

for francophone affairs. That exists as a service in almost all provinces. The context is basically one of sharing information.

But one thing impresses me. Even with a small community, there is still an impressive commitment on the part of the provincial government to have an office responsible for relations with that minority community, such as in Newfoundland and Labrador or Prince Edward Island. In that province, an assistant deputy minister who reports directly to the premier is responsible for the action plan and for reviewing the French Language Services Act.

So relations are cordial. However, clearly, I have no investigative powers over the activities of those departments.

The federal government also plays a role in the health networks funded by the Roadmap. In that area, I maintain more direct contacts with community groups and organizations that draw their funding from the health networks. I can think specifically of the Community Health and Social Services Network for anglophones in Quebec or of other networks that receive their funding directly from the Roadmap.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor.

[English]

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Fraser, for appearing in front of our committee. I would like to ask you pointed and very short questions.

In your opinion, what will the major challenges and issues facing linguistic duality be in the next three years?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I think the challenge will be to ensure that as the federal government goes through a process of cutbacks and restrictions, institutions continue to recognize and to respect their continuing obligations under the Official Languages Act. For example, it's not because there's a budget cut that they don't continue to have those obligations.

• (1610)

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** In your opinion, what measures should be taken in the next few years to ensure the future of Canada's linguistic duality? In a way, we have two issues: one is we have Canadians who are unilingual, all French or all English, and the other is we have 250,000 immigrants coming into this country yearly. At the end of your mandate in three years, that will be 750,000 people, and the probability that they will be bilingual is very remote. In the context that we are a country of immigrants, how are we assuring that the dynamic of the duality of languages in the country will be maintained?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** There are a number of things that are important. One that I recommended in my most recent annual report is that the government invest in exchanges for students so that there would be a significant increase in the number of exchanges and opportunities for students to study in their second language.



In terms of the arrival of newcomers to Canada, which is something that I welcome, I think this makes it all the more important that the government engage in public education about the history and values of the country. It is one of the reasons that I think the changes happening to the Museum of Civilization, and the various anniversaries for which there are plans for celebration, are extremely important as an exercise in public education for Canadians who did not go through the school system and are learning as adults about the history of the country and the values that shaped the country.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** Okay.

Finally, Mr. Commissioner, can you tell me three achievements you are proud of in the seven years you have been commissioner?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I will take it chronologically.

Shortly after I arrived, there was the abolition of the court challenges program, and the report we did on the 118 complaints we received was the basis before the courts for the court case, which resulted in an out-of-court settlement and the creation of the language rights support program. The fact that the report we did was the only piece of documentation in the court case that resulted in that out-of-court settlement is something I'm proud of.

I'm also proud that we were able to engage in a constructive way in the planning for the Olympics. In many ways the Olympics were a huge success in terms of linguistic duality, with only one failure, and that was the opening ceremonies. We were able to produce a handbook that is now being used by the organizers of the Canada Games in Sherbrooke and also by the organizers of the Pan American Games.

I'm proud of the ongoing work we've done in terms of investigations, complaints, and audits, which I think has had a greater impact than is often publicly recognized or realized in helping institutions to realize the problems that exist and in leading to the corrections.

I'm also proud of the fact that we've been able to use our study on post-secondary learning opportunities as a continuing evergreen document that I can take across the country and use as a basis for discussion with federal councils, with provincial governments, and with university presidents and department heads about the importance of the continuum of language learning.

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Benskin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is always a pleasure to see you, Mr. Fraser.

I would like to go back to the questions of immigration, integration and the official languages.

Last week, the National Metropolis Conference was held, with "Building an Integrated Society" as its theme. There were discussions and round tables on topics like immigration, integration

and so on. At one of the round tables, the main topic was how to study the immigration question without any data

[*English*]

How do we study? How do we do? Is it feasible to do a study when we don't have the information? This is directly in response to the cutting of the long-form census, which gave us a lot of detailed information and helped government target where the support was needed. To continue the discussion on immigration without that information, how is your department going to be able to target where support is needed, where there are deficiencies in the integration of immigrants into our society, as well as continuing to be able to watch over how both official languages are faring in minority situations?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** That's a very good question. When the long-form census was done away with, we received complaints and did an investigation. I expressed my great concern about the loss of information that would represent.

What became clear in terms of the investigation that we did was that the institution was not at fault. Our investigative powers stop at the cabinet door, and as the resignation of Munir Sheikh demonstrated, this was not a decision that was made by a federal institution. It was made by federal cabinet.

I'll say just a word about the National Metropolis Conference. I have attended two of them and would have attended this one, except I had a planned holiday out of the country that was previously booked, unfortunately. I had hoped to be back on time. There was an event on the Wednesday night that marked the 50th anniversary of the launch of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Part of the tradition of the Metropolis Conference is to consider language issues as part of the pre-conference. Language has certainly been one of the continuing themes of those conferences, and I was sorry to miss that one.

Despite that, I think we will continue to be able to monitor the activities of the department. We're going to be doing an audit. It will be one of the institutions we will be looking at in detail in the years ahead, and we have certain capacity ourselves to conduct studies and to do investigations, even though, obviously, the lack of information that would have been there from the long-form census is unfortunate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** Thank you.

What do you see as the two major challenges facing anglophone and francophone minority communities?

•(1620)

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** These days, I believe that the anglophone community in Quebec is affected in a number of ways. First, there is a general lack of understanding of how fragile the community is, especially with regard to established anglophone communities off the island of Montreal. The francophone majority tends to see Montreal as the one and only centre of the anglophone community and to compare the services provided in Montreal to those provided to francophones in Sudbury or Saint Boniface.

If you make the comparison with the situation of anglophone communities in Sherbrooke, Quebec City or the Gaspé, you get a much more balanced picture. In a qualitative study done by Statistics Canada in 2006, it was even discovered that people in the anglophone community in Quebec were rather pessimistic as to their future, even with the significant institutions and services at their disposal. On the other hand, people in minority communities outside Quebec were more optimistic, even with fewer services and institutions, or ones that were just beginning to develop.

I think that the explanation lies in the path the anglophone community is on. If you compare the size and economic strength of the anglophone community today with the situation 50 years ago, you clearly see that there has been a transformation. By contrast, since 1982, the establishment of francophone schools, school boards and health services all across the country has given people in the francophone community the feeling that they have made progress. They are more optimistic than anglophones.

The two groups have common challenges, especially an aging population. There is also an exodus of rural young people to the cities. However, I can attest to the fact that there are young people who left the Gaspé or the Magdalen Islands to go to university or into the military and then, as 30-somethings, they decide to move back home to start families.

The anglophone community on the Magdalen Islands has an organization called the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders. Two members of the board are young women who came back to the islands after university. They are now financial advisors for financial institutions. I know that is a little anecdotal, but there is a visible change in terms of the leadership of those communities.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Your turn, Mr. Galipeau.

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

Before I yield the floor to our colleague, Mr. O'Toole, I would like to clarify something about the long-form census. It has not been abolished. A greater number and a greater proportion of Canadians than ever filled it in during the last census.

[English]

In any event, the question of language was dealt with in the short form.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. O'Toole.

[Translation]

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation today, Mr. Fraser.

Talk to us about your priorities in terms of access to justice in both languages. By that I mean

•(1625)

[English]

the federal courts versus superior courts provincially, and what your priorities will be in that domain of access.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** We have conducted a study jointly with my provincial colleagues, the Commissioner of Official Languages in New Brunswick, and the French Language Services Commissioner in Ontario, on the language capacity of federal courts. We've had a great deal of collaboration from the chief justices in the six provinces that we've looked at. We have a preliminary draft of that study.

I gave an initial presentation to the winter meeting of the Canadian Bar Association in Mont-Tremblant in February. We will be presenting the final report to the Canadian Bar Association in Saskatoon in August.

We are basically looking at the following: What is the process used to evaluate the capacity of nominees to the judiciary to be able to conduct a trial in the minority language? What should those criteria be? What is an appropriate level for designation? It's a study that looks at how the language skills are evaluated for those judges who play a critical role and how the judiciary evaluates its own linguistic capacity.

**Mr. Erin O'Toole:** Has any consideration been given within that agenda or that priority area to assisting minority-language communities in understanding their legal rights, either in the criminal process or civil process, apart from trial, essentially, understanding their legal rights ahead of a court setting?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** That was not part of the study. A few years ago the Criminal Code was changed to ensure that those accused were made aware of their language rights at the very beginning of the process. That was a positive change in terms of an obligation to make clear to the accused that they have language rights before they go before the courts.

I will take under consideration the idea that it's a promotion campaign we could consider. I have to say it's not something we have considered until now.

**Mr. Erin O'Toole:** My final question stems from your remarks about potential sharing of services among other officers of Parliament. What is the timeline for that possibility and what is the scope? Is it administrative? Is it beyond that?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** The various officers of Parliament, including Elections Canada, information, privacy, and ourselves, are moving to the same building at 30 rue Victoria in Gatineau. The move is happening on a staged basis. We are scheduled to make the move in December. That assumes all the other previous moves have happened.

What we have already looked at is there will be a common reception for all the agents of Parliament and a common mailroom. We are in the process of looking at what other shared services we could engage in.

One of the messages we've heard loud and clear from Treasury Board and other federal institutions involved in the whole shared service exercise is that you should embark on a process, otherwise you will be shared, as it were. It is something we are looking at carefully, but it's the beginning rather than the end of a process at this point.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lapointe, you have the floor.

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Quickly, on behalf of my colleague Pierre Dionne Labelle, I would like to give notice of the following motion:**

That the Committee invite the Minister of Industry to appear regarding Industry Canada's report of March 8, 2013, entitled Language of Work in Federally Regulated Private Businesses in Quebec not subject to the Official Languages Act, for a two-hour public and televised meeting between now and June 14, 2013.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your notice of motion.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Fraser. I am going to stay with the same subject. I would like to talk about that report that was tabled as a reaction to a New Democrat bill.

The report on the language of work in Quebec was done without anyone even being informed of the process in place. Do you support that method of preparing a report?

On the same matter, do you find it normal that the language rights of 135,000 workers are unprotected?

On the same matter, do you not believe that there is a principle of law here, whereby 100% of the people affected should be able to be protected? I say a principle of law, not something to be handled in terms of satisfaction rates, a kind of political calculation, as the Minister of Industry seemed to indicate it was.

Thank you.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Thank you for your questions.

I have to say that I was out of the country during the Metropolis Conference. I was also out of the country when this report was tabled. We are in the process of studying it.

Just before it was announced, I found out through the grapevine that this was the process that had been adopted. However, given that I have not had the opportunity to do an in-depth analysis, I hesitate to do so now and to say whether it is appropriate or not. What is important, actually, is the quality of the report. But I am not in a position to comment on the quality of the report.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** So you cannot reject or support the report's conclusions at this time.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** We have not yet examined it. I feel that it is important for us to know more about it. I have flipped through it, but we have not had the time to analyze it.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Great. We will eagerly wait for your conclusions, then.

My honourable colleague, Mr. Dion, pointed out the occasional tendency to paint somewhat of a rosy picture. Sometimes, it's important not to wear rose-coloured glasses so as not to influence the conclusions. I heard a contradiction in your comments today, and it leads me to believe that the rose-coloured glasses may, in fact, be on. In your brief, you say that "the dominance of English often reduces the space that francophones have to express themselves. But these dangers do not come from...federal institutions." Then, five or six minutes later, you turned around and said that the anglophone culture of departments was so strong you had to remind them that they had to do more than simply tolerate French, but actually promote it.

How do you reconcile the assertion that federal institutions do not contribute to the problem in any way and your comment about the departmental anglophone culture being so strong that you had to—

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** When I mentioned the anglophone culture of departments, I was referring to the situation here in Ottawa, in the National Capital Region.

Furthermore, anglophones are under-represented across federal departments in Quebec. When you examine the challenges faced by anglophone public servants working in federal departments in Quebec, you see the exact same problem that francophone public servants here in Ottawa face, just flipped around. Anglophones in Quebec are reluctant to speak in English during work meetings because it's the minority language. They want to use the language of work chosen by the group. They are reluctant to use English when writing reports.

Personally, my observation has been that anglophones are under-represented in federal institutions in Quebec. It's more or less the mirror image of what we see here, in Ottawa.

• (1635)

**Mr. François Lapointe:** In a committee meeting, the official languages minister recently said that centralized oversight of the departments was ending and that monitoring of the quality of French would be decentralized going forward. What mechanisms do you intend to put in place to monitor how that decentralization affects the quality of French-language services? Basically what the minister was saying was it would be up to every colleague, minister and department to make sure the quality of French-language services was acceptable. What measures have been put in place to ensure that decision doesn't have any negative consequences?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I've already voiced my concerns about the significant staffing reductions at the Centre of Excellence for Evaluation at Treasury Board. I believe the number of employees has gone from 56 to 13. So it's becoming more and more difficult for the people at Treasury Board to ensure a high quality of French and its use within the departments. The overall trend is to shift responsibilities to the departments, and that applies not just to official languages.

Shared opinions on that phenomenon do exist. Language training no longer falls under the responsibility of the Canada School of Public Service. It is now up to each department and, in turn, falls on each manager. Language training is supposed to factor into every employee's training program. On the one hand, that can be seen as positive in that the language training will be more tailored to the terminology and nature of each department. On the other hand, it becomes extremely difficult to evaluate where things stand. We are in the midst of studying the language training situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Bateman, it's over to you.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today and for all the work you've done over the past seven years. Like Mr. Dion, I hope that your appointment will be approved for another term.

This isn't in the biographical notes that the analysts prepared for us, but I heard that you were from Manitoba.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** No. I've visited a number of times, but I'm from Ottawa, one of those elusive few who live in Ottawa and were born in Ottawa.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** That's life.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I spent my teenage years in Toronto. I went to high school and university there. I got married in Toronto and our sons were born there.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Pity, pity!

Mr. Dion touched on the issue of immersion programs. The reason I am able to speak French as fluently as I do stems from having two children who went to French immersion. I am proud of their hard work and their ability to speak both official languages, but I started learning the language after they did.

•(1640)

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Congratulations. I'd say you've learned a lot.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you, commissioner.

Education, as you know, is a provincial responsibility. But the federal government still invests heavily in immersion programs and education in general. How are hiring practices within the public service affected by this pool of young people who have taken French immersion?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** A few years ago, the Secretary of the Treasury Board at the time told me that 40% of new public servants were already bilingual when they were hired. I would assume, then, that a significant portion of those new employees are the product of immersion programs, but not all.

Myself, I am not the product of an immersion program. If there's anything negative about the success of immersion programs, it's the misconception that they're the only way to learn French. Clearly, that's not the case. I know many people who are perfectly at ease in both official languages and who did not go through immersion programs. They learned the other language later in life, as I did.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Mr. Fraser, have you observed a decrease in the cost of learning programs as far as language training for public servants goes? I'm speaking in relation to that 40% of people entering the public service with bilingual proficiency. That's a significant proportion, after all.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** As I said, one of the disadvantages of decentralizing the language training responsibility and shifting it to managers, is that it becomes very tough to monitor the costs.

When the Canada School of Public Service administered French training at the Asticou Centre, the number of instructors across the public service was known, as was the number of students, regardless of level. At the same time, an analyst, say, in a specific department would take French training after the staffing process. As things stand now, it's pretty difficult to determine the costs because they are so scattered across the public service.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Treasury Board doesn't have that information?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** We were told that it's pretty difficult to get those numbers. I am hoping that, with the study we're doing now, we will at least be able to arrive at a cost estimate under the new approach.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** I hope so, given that 40% of employees are already bilingual, which did not used to be the case. That's why I am a bit confused about one of your main priorities.

I am absolutely in favour of promoting linguistic duality, enhancing the vitality of official language communities and ensuring the sound management of the commissioner's office. But given the statistic you cited—the fact that 40% of new public servants are already proficient in both of our country's official languages—why are you so concerned? Why did you again decide to focus on the impact of the budget cuts? The reality is that both languages will come out stronger. That's not in line with the overall vision your other three priorities fit into. Could you kindly clarify?

•(1645)

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** If, as a result, institutions serving minority language communities close, if closures diminish the champion network, if the cuts mean less money for translation, if they create an atmosphere—

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** That isn't the case, as you know.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:**—where respect for both languages in the workplace is deemed too costly, that concerns us. Mr. Dion already mentioned my reluctance to use percentages. It is not necessarily the percentage of people who have gone through language testing that matters but, rather, the use of both official languages in the workplace.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Ravnat, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Fraser.

As a native Franco-Ontarian, I don't necessarily share the rosy outlook I am sensing you have. I am 40 years old, and a large chunk of Franco-Ontarians of my generation have assimilated. I know them; they are my friends. I worked on official languages at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The research points to a serious assimilation problem in the Franco-Ontarian population. One of the biggest struggles in Franco-Ontarian history has to do with the public service and the importance it gives to French.

Something you said worries me. You seem to be holding the francophone public servant accountable for not asking that their language be respected. However, that person isn't necessarily given the tools they need. You spoke with managers, but managers are managers. A culture is in place. You even talked about it. How do we give public servants the tools they need to stand up for their language and make sure their manager respects that choice?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** If I gave the impression that there weren't any challenges surrounding the French language, I did not explain myself clearly. I think I said the challenges were very real in the scientific, entertainment and international trade communities. Those challenges are real.

Furthermore, I hope I didn't say that I put the onus solely on public servants. What matters is leadership. I have noticed that when leadership changes—

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat:** Forgive me for cutting you off, Mr. Fraser, but what happens when that leadership isn't in place? Because that's the reality now. We can't wait for leaders to just wake up one day. Bilingualism has been the reality in our country for years, and we still have problems with culture and leadership in the public service.

To my mind, we need to take a different approach. We need to give public servants who aren't managers the tools, if not the ammunition, they need to ensure their rights, their language and their culture are respected.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Tools exist. Those public servants have every right to file a complaint with our office. Under part V of the act, we conduct investigations into whether the right to work in French is respected.

I have learned that the process of investigating, evaluating or auditing an institution regarding an official languages matter has a real impact. Senior public servants are pretty competitive people. They don't enjoy being criticized publicly by anyone. It's—

•(1650)

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat:** Fine. Thank you, Mr. Fraser. That's what I wanted to know. Please understand that I have a limited amount of time.

You submitted your report in June 2012. The Privy Council Office was supposed to respond, obviously. The deadline was nearly five months ago, and we have yet to hear a response.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** You're referring to the report on the appointment of the Auditor General?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat:** Precisely.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** We received the Privy Council's response at the end of February and are now in the midst of reviewing it.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat:** However, the response was submitted five months after the deadline. Is this attitude toward your report a concern for you?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Let's say that I am never happy when responses to reports are late.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat:** Did you let them know?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I raised the issue with the clerk, and then we finally received the response. We are currently analyzing it and drafting a final report.

**The Chair:** Mr. Ravnignat, do you have any other questions?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat:** Yes.

Setting aside the additional \$3.3 million that was allocated to fund the move, if we compare 2013-2014 with 2012-2013, we see that the budget for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages will remain roughly the same.

Given the transformation the government is going through and the extent of the budget cuts in a number of sectors, do you think you have sufficient resources to ensure that the government meets its responsibilities under the Official Languages Act, especially with regard to the vitality of minority language communities?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** So far, I think our budgets have allowed us to fulfill our obligations. That's all I can say.

As you mentioned, we have received funding for the move. I think that is actually a seven- or ten-year loan. We will have to pay that money back. Nevertheless, I think we have successfully minimized the impact on our daily operations so as to protect our mandate.

**The Chair:** Mr. Galipeau, go ahead.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Are we at the end? I am not ready.

**The Chair:** Do any other members of the government have questions?

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

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

Just in case Mr. Galipeau is worried, I want to let him know that we support Mr. Fraser's appointment. That being said, we want a pitbull and not a chihuahua as the official languages watchdog. We want him to strike hard. That is the responsibility of the official languages watchdog. And it's important because I don't think the government's track record is that good.

We conducted a study on immigration. We wanted to submit it in the House of Commons, but we were unable to. We could not finish it. We spent taxpayers' money. A nice study was carried out, and we could have produced a report. We toured the far north. We went to Yellowknife and Whitehorse. We met with francophone communities. We conducted a study on immigration, and we could have produced a report and presented it in the House of Commons, but the Conservative government would not allow it.

In addition, a unilingual anglophone was appointed as Auditor General, and then a unilingual anglophone was appointed twice in a row as Supreme Court justice.

Regarding the Court Challenges Program, an out of court settlement was reached. As you know, Mr. Fraser, I was not too happy with that. I think the program has changed. That program was used to help establish schools in the regions and provide communities with the tools they needed to survive. We know what has happened. So that's not a good track record.

Another issue was the Statistics Canada long form census. We could go on about that for a while. The Conservatives are saying they did not abolish it, but they did shorten it. That data was important to you, Mr. Fraser, and it has been lost.

Do you agree with me?

• (1655)

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Yes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you.

Do you think Canadians are familiar with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Do Canadians know that they have language rights and that they can file a complaint? Do you have a plan to help your office become more visible going forward?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Those are some very good questions. There are two answers.

I think that the office is very well known in minority communities, but less known in majority communities. We are currently working on a promotional campaign for the travelling public. We want to put up posters in airports to help travellers understand that they have language rights and that they can submit complaints if those rights are not respected.

We launched another initiative last September regarding our presence in social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. We are just starting out. We are continuing to figure out how to best promote our mandate by using those tools. I give interviews in all the provinces. I have also made speeches in all the provinces. However, those are more traditional ways to promote institutions, legislation and rights.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Earlier, I asked a question about the number of translators in the public service. I did not have the figures, but I do now. From 2011 to 2012, that number went from 1,238 to 1,135. Is that a concern for you? So there are 103 fewer individuals translating in the public service.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Translation as a whole is a concern of mine.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Okay. It is a concern. But what are you going to do? Do you plan to investigate or would that require official complaints?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I cannot at this time give you an official answer, since I have already planned meetings with some people who are involved in the matter. I have a meeting with the union president, Mr. Poirier. I cannot decide what actions should be taken before I meet with him.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Have you met with the Prime Minister over the past 12 months? If so, how many times?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I met with him on February 22, when he asked me to agree to an extension of my term. I also met with him in

late September, during my round of meetings with ministers and deputy ministers regarding my annual report recommendations.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Fraser and Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Allow me to clarify something. If any annual report recommendations have to do with a minister or the Prime Minister, we request a meeting to let them know. Three recommendations have been directly related to the Prime Minister, and on all three occasions, he agreed to meet with me so that I could advise him in advance of the recommendation that would appear in the annual report.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Mr. Dion, you have the floor.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fraser, I would like to come back to the issue of budgets. Ms. Bateman was very optimistic and thought that communities would make it through without a problem. I don't share her optimism. Could you tell me if you are prepared to follow up on the issue and point out the problems that may ensue?

There are many things that worry me. First, in the last four years, the government has not increased its budgets, on the contrary. For Canadian Heritage, the budget for community life was \$62 million four years ago, and now it is \$55 million—in current dollars, without inflation being factored in. Then an amount of \$176 million was earmarked for education in the minority language and now it is down to \$166 million. For linguistic duality, the amount was \$4.4 million, and now it is \$4.3 million. For second language learning, the amount was \$115 million and it dropped to \$112 million. That does not include the \$106 million in cuts that Canadian Heritage has to absorb in the next three years, or the bad news we might get with the budget.

What I am saying is that we are faced with a tremendous challenge. When I raised this issue with the minister, he told me that I was not taking into account the Roadmap money. So even the minister confirmed that the Roadmap was used to fill up the coffers after the cuts, which was not supposed to happen. Funds were supposed to be added. We don't know what amount the government will put into the Roadmap. I hope that it will be a large amount.

There is another problem. When we talk to the minister about what is happening in other departments, he tells us to go talk to the people involved. Yet he is the minister responsible for official languages. But he is not a full interlocutor like he should be.

So here are my questions. First, are you able to monitor those cuts closely, given that we know that the government is cultivating a lack of fiscal transparency? Second, are you going to be aware enough to go beyond the numbers?

Let me give you an example where I think you might have missed the boat. I am talking about the closure of the search and rescue centre in Quebec City. Your report pointed to the deficiencies in bilingualism in Trenton and Halifax. It must be said that Quebec will be divided into two; one part will be sent to Trenton and another to Halifax to oversee what is happening on the St. Lawrence River and in the gulf. However, I didn't think there was enough emphasis on how high the level of bilingualism had to be. When your clients are in shock and their lives might be in danger, they need to be able to speak their language with their accent and to receive an answer right away.

That is an example to show you that, beyond numbers, you have to be really aware. I would also like to come back to the issue of accuracy and rigour. That will allow us, our committee and Canadians in general, to be better equipped to monitor the impact of the upcoming budget cuts, in addition to those that have already been made.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** That is a very good question.

Actually, our director of finance will be in the budget lock-up going through all the figures. I have a lot of confidence in our analysts. They will be able to decipher and analyze all the data. We will see if that is enough.

I am concerned about the trends you have identified. I can also tell you that we have heard a lot of concerns about the federal-provincial agreements that have an impact on institutions in minority communities. We are currently conducting an investigation on the transfer of responsibilities in relation to the training of Service Canada employees in British Columbia where some institutions in the communities were abandoned after that transfer.

Some concerns have been expressed by anglophone communities in Quebec, because they are afraid that the Quebec-Canada agreement will have an impact on the health network, for instance, or on the community learning centres, which play a very important role in 14 minority communities scattered throughout Quebec.

If, as a result of those agreements, the responsibility of awarding money is directly transferred to the provinces, the concerns of communities will be heightened.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lapointe, you have the floor.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to summarize a situation, but I am not asking you to comment since you have agreed to examine it. I just want to introduce it to explain how concerned I am about an issue that you and I have previously mentioned, Mr. Fraser.

In my riding, someone urgently needed a drug. He contacted the Department of Health, but none of the people he talked to were able to speak French during the three-week or four-week process. They justified the long delay in responding to my questions by the fact that they had to translate my emails. We were asking Health Canada for an emergency drug and I was constantly following up with the minister, but when I talked to her about it, this is what she said:

[English]

“Don't make that an issue.”

[Translation]

In terms of decentralizing the oversight of French-language services in departments and your study of those troubling cases, could you tell me how this study will be sure to accurately measure the impact of the decentralization? What do you plan to do to reassure us? You are saying that it is not necessarily a bad thing. I wish I could believe you but, for the moment, my experience on the ground as a member of Parliament is rather troubling.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I share your concern. I am aware of the incident that you mentioned. I think it is a dreadful experience. I will keep your concern in mind when we do our study.

Thank you for sharing your concern with us.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** In terms of the study that you mentioned, who is going to tackle the decentralization and assess the impact?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** It is a study on language training, currently...

**Mr. François Lapointe:** In the public service?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** That is correct.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lapointe, you can continue.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** I would like to talk about the Marine Rescue Centre. We had a consultation where my colleague Mr. Godin was present. A former official, who specialized in improving river safety, shared his knowledge with us. He said that he was following the file everywhere. He was present at the public consultations in Trenton and he followed the issue at every stage, from A to Z.

That is when he told us a very troubling story. He said that, in Trenton, the candidates were required to have two skill sets. Let's not forget that the person who takes the full-time position will have to replace the five or six people who were working in Quebec, which is a great loss of services. That is already quite troubling. He was there when the decisions were made at the public consultations in Trenton. He told me that they were not able to find a candidate who was sufficiently familiar with the river and who had a very high level of French. It seems that the next candidate who is going to be hired will not have sufficient knowledge of the river or the appropriate French skills.

I for one see a great loss of services for the linguistic minority. The francophones, who need the river for marine transportation, deserve to get the services of someone who has both skills, knowledge of the river and the ability to provide an answer in French to someone who is panicking. We are not about to get anything like that. We will get someone who can get by in French and whose knowledge of the river will be mediocre. Thanks a lot.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** You are raising an area of great concern with respect to that change. When I was asked what my priorities were for the next three years, I said that one of the top priorities was the impact of government changes on services in both official languages. It might be the regionalization of services in the Atlantic provinces or this type of institutional reorganization, which would make it increasingly difficult to maintain the same level of services.

• (1710)

**Mr. François Lapointe:** That is the difference. There is an impact on language skills, but that is not the only thing we have to consider if we want to provide a good service to minorities. You understand what I mean. By decentralizing, we may find someone who speaks English or French perfectly, but we are reducing the number of employees where we need them. If we find someone who has the necessary language skills, but not the other required skills, we still have a problem of language services being poorly delivered. Does that make sense?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Yes, I fully understand what you are getting at. I will take note of that and we will give it some thought.

**Mr. François Lapointe:** I call on your bulldog abilities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lapointe.

Mr. Galipeau, you have the floor.

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

Thank you for your testimony today, Mr. Fraser.

After hearing questions from both sides of this table, I assume that our comments will remain anonymous, despite some small details that I have heard this afternoon.

I would like to give the floor to the vice-chair of the committee, Mr. Godin. I presume that he will introduce an appropriate motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Fraser, you have conducted an investigation on the Marine Rescue Centre. For me, it is important because it is the only bilingual institution like that in Canada and we are sending it to Trenton and Halifax. The government is telling us that one person per shift will be bilingual and that, in addition, the people will have to write their reports in English because the supervisors will not be bilingual. That is not consistent with Part V of the Official Languages Act.

Are you going to follow up on that before the move happens so that, if the services ever move—which would be the worst thing the government could do—the people will then be protected. There is a fundamental responsibility related to the safety of people out at sea and vacationers. The government was not able to show us that this will work. We even wanted to conduct a study in committee, but we were not able to do so. That is why we did our own study and we will submit the report. You have a responsibility. You did a study and there has to be a follow-up. Will the government show you an action plan that you will be happy with?

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** I agree that it is very important, in those types of cases, to follow up on the recommendations to be able to know what the outcome is.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** That is no place to go to school and learn another language. It is a question of maritime rescue. There are lives on the line. The people who go to work there must be fully bilingual.

It is important to comply with Part V of the act. That means that the people must be able to write the documents in the language of their choice, as well as speak the language of their choice. That is part of the criteria.

That is not a place where we can afford to wait three or four years before the people meet the requirements. At least that's our hope.

That being said, Mr. Fraser and Mr. Chair, I propose the following motion:

That the nomination of Graham Fraser to the position of Commissioner of Official Languages be concurred in, and that the Chair report it to the House.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Is there a debate on this motion? No.

[English]

I'll call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Without further ado, Mr. Fraser, thank you very much for your testimony. Congratulations on the extension of your term. We wish you, as a committee, all the best as you embark on the next three years. We look forward to seeing you many more times here in the future.

**Mr. Graham Fraser:** Thank you very much. I appreciate this very much.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.









Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>