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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(0845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Thursday, March 6, 2014. This is our 14th meeting.

For the first hour, pursuant to Standing Order 108, we will be studying the Canadian Heritage Official Languages Annual Report 2011-12 and the 2012-2013 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage, Ms. Glover, is with us today, as are Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Lussier.

Welcome.

Mr. Godin has the floor.

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

I have three notices of motion. The first motion reads as follows:

That the committee invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to appear and provide an update on the government's plans regarding the announced closure of the library at the Maurice Lamontagne Institute.

The motion is in both official languages.

This is the second motion:

That the committee invite the President of the Treasury Board to appear and discuss his Annual Report on Official Languages for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013.

The third and final motion reads as follows:

That the committee invite the Minister of Justice to appear before the end of May 2014 to discuss access to justice in both official languages during a one-hour televised hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

After the break, we will have time to discuss your motions.

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

The Chair: Ms. Glover, the floor is yours.

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good day to my fellow members. Thank you for having me here for the first time in my role as Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. I remember my visits to this committee when I was parliamentary secretary. My greetings to Mr. Godin who was a

member of the committee at that time and is one still. All the other members have changed.

So, let us begin.

I would like to recognize this committee's achievements. Your study on immersion programs across the country is an indication of your commitment to promoting our national languages. I was, however, a little disappointed that I did not receive an invitation to appear, especially given the fact that, as the product of an immersion program myself, I have often expressed my concerns regarding the changes that have been made to programs since I was in school.

That said, the vitality of our national languages is important to me both as the minister and as a member of the Franco-Manitoban community. I am honoured to work in both Saint-Boniface and Ottawa toward the advancement of French and English, as well as official language communities.

As you know, in the summer of 2012, we undertook official language cross-Canada consultations. Canadians told us that we have made significant progress in key areas since 2008. However, they also mentioned that there was still work to be done to unleash the full potential of our linguistic duality and contribute even more effectively to developing our minority communities.

In its report on the previous Roadmap, your committee shared the concerns expressed by the general public and representatives of organizations in francophone and anglophone minority communities. In the budget tabled on March 21, 2013, our government committed to measures reiterating support for our national languages and showcasing their importance for our identity. A week later, we rolled out the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018.

•(0850)

[*English*]

This new strategy for official languages translates into \$1.1 billion invested over five years in education, immigration, and communities. I'm pleased to confirm that all of the road map's initiatives are now funded on a permanent basis. This is important as only three-quarters of the funding in the previous road map took the form of ongoing support. Road map 2013 to 2018 provides clear testimony of our continuing commitment to official languages in this country.

[Translation]

As I explained in the 2011-2012 Annual Report on Official Languages that I tabled in Parliament last November, Canadian Heritage oversees two main programs supporting official languages. One aims to develop minority official language communities. The other's objective is to promote French and English in Canadian society.

Our programs support the offer of minority-language services at the provincial and territorial level in sectors such as education, justice, culture and health. Our actions have tangible results. For example, working closely with the provinces and territories, we are supporting minority-language education. Every morning across our country, more than 240,000 students in minority communities go to school in their own language.

We support second-language learning. A total of 2.4 million young people are learning French or English as a second language in Canada, more than 340,000 of them in immersion classes. Our young people are among our greatest resources. That is why I am pleased that we were able to offer bursaries to 7,800 students in 2011-2012 that enable them to improve their skills in their second national language. We also created some 700 summer or short-term jobs for bilingual young Canadians. These jobs allow them to practice their knowledge of French and English.

[English]

The annual report also provides details about my role in coordinating official languages support within federal institutions. In 2011-12, Canadian Heritage adopted a broader approach to coordination to make the accounting process uniform among all institutions. For three years we've been using this approach, adopted jointly with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

Some 170 federal institutions now have the opportunity to showcase their achievements, which provides Canadians with a complete picture of national efforts to promote French and English.

[Translation]

In the interest of efficiency, we also launched a review in 2013 of our support for organizations in official language communities. Through this review, we want to ensure that our measures effectively meet the needs of communities, particularly in key areas such as youth and culture. This review is being carried out in consultation with community organizations. Our investment levels remain unchanged. I simply want to ensure that we are achieving the best possible results.

The Commissioner of Official Languages has also acknowledged these results. In his 2012-2013 Annual Report, he applauded the efforts to date of Canadian Heritage and other federal institutions with regard to respect for official languages. We will be continuing along this path. We welcome the Commissioner's report and the recommendations in it. They will be used to inform our government's actions. I want to mention here that, last year, our government renewed the appointment of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Graham Fraser, for three years. This reappointment was applauded by numerous key stakeholders in official languages. I also want to note that I agree with the Commissioner when it comes

to the importance of promoting our linguistic duality as part of large-scale events.

Let's talk about celebrations.

We are currently conducting online consultations and holding roundtables across the country to learn more about how Canadians want to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017. The consultations taking place are mindful of our commitment to promote our linguistic duality as part of the celebrations.

The Commissioner also mentioned in his report that he will be monitoring the implementation of the protocol for agreements for minority language education and second language instruction. I am very pleased that we recently renewed our co-operation with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. The protocol for agreements that we signed with the council provides for more than \$1.3 billion in federal investment over five years to support the provincial and territorial governments in the area of official languages in teaching.

we have taken concrete action to promote respect for national languages. We will continue our efforts in this regard, because our action generates results for Canadians and benefits for minority communities.

Thank you for your attention. I am ready to answer your questions.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover.

We have 50 minutes left for questions and comments.

We will start with Mr. Godin.

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

Welcome to the witnesses. My thanks to Ms. Glover for appearing before the committee. Thanks also to Mr. Lussier—this is not our first meeting, I think—and to Mr. Gauthier.

You said at the beginning that you regretted not having been invited during our study on immersion. You will certainly have the opportunity to respond to our report. You are the minister responsible, so I am looking forward to your response to the very important report on immersion that we tabled in the House. Canadians from both official language communities will be able to benefit from the decisions, I feel, if the government's decisions are positive ones.

Madam Minister, I would like to talk to you about access to justice. In his summer 2013 study on access to justice in both official languages, Commissioner Fraser states that providing access to justice in official language minority communities is a major challenge. He specifically recommends that the Minister of Justice and his provincial and territorial counterparts take concerted steps to face this challenge of access to justice for all.

As the minister responsible for official languages, have you had any discussions on the matter with your colleague the Minister of Justice?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you for the question, Mr. Godin.

I speak with the Minister of Justice often. This actually is his file, but I am really very pleased that our government recognizes the importance of the issue of access to justice in both official languages. It is recognized in the Roadmap. I hope that all members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages have had the opportunity to consult the Roadmap and to see the investments that have been made in the field of justice. There is money for training, for networking and for justice services. Funds are also available for communities.

As I said, I speak with the Minister of Justice often and I always encourage him to consider our official language minority communities.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Minister, have you championed the implementation of the recommendations made by the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Hon. Shelly Glover: That file belongs to the Minister of Justice. I have not spoken to him about it specifically, but I have certainly spoken to him about a number of other things.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can you commit to speaking to him about it? You are the minister responsible for official languages. The Commissioner of Official Languages is the watchdog for official languages in Canada and he has made a recommendation. Do you commit to speaking to the minister about the importance of the matter and about the point of view expressed by the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Hon. Shelly Glover: I repeat that I am very pleased to be the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am sure you are.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I am part of a government that believes that the 14 departments named in the Roadmap have responsibilities. They are encouraged to commit to it. I am perfectly comfortable with encouraging them along the way. However, I can assure you that the 14 ministers are fully committed to their respective portfolios. I will speak to the Minister of Justice, as I often do, to restate the importance of the matter.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do the courts in each province in Canada have a sufficient number of bilingual judges to ensure access to justice in both official languages?

• (0900)

Hon. Shelly Glover: I am from Manitoba. I try to encourage the lawyers I know there to—

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is not my question. Are there enough judges?

Hon. Shelly Glover: I am getting there. Frankly, there is a shortage of people with the skills, the legal distinction and the availability to take those positions. That is why I am always encouraging lawyers to apply.

I can tell you that we regularly ask the chief justices of the provinces to do so too. If we had more, it would be good, it would be a feather in Canada's cap. We have to encourage them but we cannot force them.

Mr. Yvon Godin: There is something I do not understand, Madam Minister. Last Tuesday, officials from the Department of Justice came to testify before the Standing Committee on Justice and

Human Rights. One of them was Michel Francoeur. He talked about sections 530 and 531 of the Criminal Code, which clearly describe the right to be tried before a judge in the official language of one's choice.

I asked the witnesses if there were enough judges to guarantee that right. I gathered from remarks by Mr. Doyle, another of the witnesses, that there were a lot of bilingual judges in Canada. I asked him to confirm that for me and he replied that it was true, that there are enough.

There is some contradiction, you might say, between the comments of certain federal officials and those of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The former say that there is a sufficient number of bilingual judges, the latter says there is not. I find it difficult to understand. I will be honest with you, I purposely made him repeat his answer three times, because I had such a hard time with it.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I cannot speak for other departments. Personally, I am not familiar with any court that has claimed to have insufficient judges for a trial to be held in a specific language. I have never heard of that in Canada. Perhaps that is what they were talking about.

As Minister of Official Languages, I tell judges how strongly we should encourage all bilingual lawyers to apply, for one thing, and, for another, encourage those who are not bilingual to make an effort to learn both languages.

Clearly, as you know, there are already free courses for sitting judges. There is also training for others working in the justice system, like police officers and court clerks, as a result of the investment our government has made.

So we are going to continue along those lines, because it helps. One day, perhaps, the time will come when we can say we have more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Gourde now has the floor.

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

Thank you for being here this morning, Madam Minister. It is very generous of you. Thank you, Mr. Lussier and Mr. Gauthier.

Madam Minister, I know that teaching in Canada is one of your great concerns. What is the status of the negotiations for the new agreements on minority language education and second-language instruction? I am talking about the 2013-2014 to 2017-2018 agreements with the provinces and territories.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you for the question, Mr. Gourde. In a way, that ties in with what Mr. Godin was saying about immersion.

Let me talk about the agreements that are currently being negotiated. The work is about half done. In the coming weeks, I am sure that you will hear announcements about those agreements with the provinces and territories. In August, one of the first things I did as Minister of Official Languages was to sign the protocol for agreements with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. That work is almost finished.

The investments we are making are in the order of \$1.3 billion, approximately \$260 million each year. That is a really significant amount. The investments are essential if we want to train bilingual people, whether they be judges, politicians or a host of others.

It is not just a question of immersion, but also of second-language learning, both for anglophone students who want to learn French, and the other way round in Quebec. These agreements will allow more students to learn both national languages. I see that as the best opportunity we can give our students.

• (0905)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Minister, what impact does Canada's linguistic duality have on you personally?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Speaking as a mother and as someone who is truly grateful to their French immersion teachers, I can say that linguistic duality has opened up doors for me. And I am certain that it will do the same for anyone who chooses to invest their time and effort in that regard.

In Canada, linguistic duality goes to the heart of who we are as Canadians. It reflects our nation's two languages, which are spoken from coast to coast to coast. It reflects all those who are deeply committed to supporting not just Canada's two languages, but also the cultures of those language communities.

Some parents wonder whether they should send their kids to a school with an immersion program. Let me take this opportunity to, once again, encourage them wholeheartedly to do so. Not only will it open doors for them professionally, but it will also elevate their zest for life, while exposing them to a whole new outlook on the world. It's the best thing that ever happened to me, and I want to thank my French immersion teachers for all their hard work. It's thanks to them that I can speak French today.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Minister, you speak with a great deal of passion.

When did you decide to learn French? You didn't speak any as a child, did you?

Hon. Shelly Glover: No. It was my parents' decision. Where I'm from, in Winnipeg, we had French-speaking nuns who promoted the French language to English speakers. My parents, both unilingual anglophones, decided to follow their lead.

It was tough. The schools didn't welcome us with open arms, far from it. Some francophones didn't even want to let us learn French, because they were worried that we'd steal their jobs, assimilate them and so forth.

But the more time that passed and the more progress we made, we became a part of the francophone community more and more. People realized that we, too, could help bilingualism flourish. As I said, I now belong to the French-speaking family. Some still think it's wrong of me to say so, but I disagree.

It's important that my children continue to learn French. As students, they were in immersion programs. And I hope my grandchildren will be as well. Perhaps one day, we'll learn a third or fourth language.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I know how committed you are to the issue of official languages. Everything you've done since arriving in

Parliament proves that. I am sure that you aspire to leave some sort of legacy when it comes to official languages, to leave behind something that symbolizes your efforts.

From that perspective, what would you like to say to Canadians?

Hon. Shelly Glover: What a fantastic question!

In Louisiana, in the States, a person who speaks French is considered a francophone. In some communities here, however, that is still a point of contention. When I call myself a francophone, some francophones whose parents are both native French speakers still tell me that I'm not a francophone. What's more, they're insulted that I consider myself part of the francophone family.

My dream, the legacy I'd like to leave behind, is for all French-speaking Canadians to consider themselves part of the francophone family. We'd no longer have all this debate about whether they were francophone or not. Anyone who speaks French, who has made that kind of commitment, who is part of the family and who is helping the language to flourish should be recognized as such.

Thank you for the question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. St-Denis, go ahead.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): I am going to try to illustrate the difference between theory and practice. We have impressive programs, but what is really going on?

Last night, I attended a dinner put on by the Forum for Young Canadians. It was part of an event where young people from every province come to Ottawa for a week. I was at a table with some young Quebecers. They said that 90% of the week's activities had been held in English. Participants from Montreal spoke more English. But the young person from my riding told me her English wasn't great and she found it difficult. She wasn't able to take full advantage of all the activities.

So we have something of a contradiction. We create programs like Forum for Young Canadians and they look great on paper and in reports, but they aren't actually doing what they're supposed to.

When it comes to young people, are we really doing enough to promote the benefits of speaking both official languages? The young people I had dinner with yesterday didn't seem to think so.

In other words, is the program subject to any follow-up or verification? Speeches are supposed to be given in both languages, but the workshops held throughout the week were in English only.

• (0910)

Hon. Shelly Glover: Ms. St-Denis, thank you for your question.

I am very proud of our government for investing not just in programs like Forum for Young Canadians, but also in programs such as Explore and Odyssee. As the roadmap clearly demonstrates, we have many exchanges. And it's important that we offer our youth those kinds of opportunities, opportunities made possible by our government's investments.

Coming back to the Liberals, I want to point out that I was in Montreal last week for the Montréal, Cultural Metropolis event. It was wonderful. Hundreds of people were there. And you know what? Participants told me that the Liberals held their convention in Montreal and that Mr. Trudeau gave a speech and only 7% of it was in French. A speech was given in Montreal and only 7% of it was in French. I couldn't believe it.

We all make mistakes. I realize that and it is understandable, but we have to make things better together. I would never single out one person, because the problems are common to us all. But I encourage each and every person to make every effort possible to speak to young people in English and French.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: As we speak, which French-language cultural industries funded by the federal government are in danger of closing their doors for good because of budget cuts?

Hon. Shelly Glover: On the contrary, we—

Ms. Lise St-Denis: The first example that comes to mind is Radio-Canada's presence in the regions. Budget cuts were made and French-language radio stations in the regions have practically been wiped out. That isn't the case in Montreal, obviously. That is one consequence of the budget cuts.

• (0915)

Hon. Shelly Glover: First of all, I would say that our government has focused on cultural investments. Canada is the only G7 nation to have kept up its direct funding for artists, following the global recession. We have also kept up our direct funding for museums, sports and official languages. Not a single cut was made in the area of official languages.

But there is no hiding the fact that the global recession resulted in a deficit, as it did in every other country around the world. We had to find ways to protect jobs. Canada's arts and culture sector generates 630,000 jobs and contributes nearly \$50 billion to the economy every year. It's a major driver of economic growth. And that is why Prime Minister Stephen Harper is so committed to supporting arts and culture, and our government will continue to do that.

Turning to CBC/Radio-Canada, I can tell you that the corporation has a budget of over a billion dollars. That money comes from taxpayers because the broadcaster is important to our society. It manages its money as it sees fit. Hubert Lacroix and I met a number of times, and he told me that he was willing to do his part after the global recession. He said he had enough money to carry out his plans for 2015. We work together, yes, but CBC/Radio-Canada makes its own decisions.

You should be asking Mr. Lacroix your questions about CBC/Radio-Canada.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: You mentioned grants that you give out. Your report lists dozens upon dozens of small programs. You hand out grants for activities involving three people, and no follow-up is done to ensure accountability. You measure neither the direct nor indirect effects of the funding you give out to numerous small groups of individuals, small programs. Are these small programs making things better for francophone groups? Or is the thinking that it's better to run them even if they don't do much?

Don't these programs warrant better evaluation so you can determine which ones are really making a difference for Canada's francophonie?

Hon. Shelly Glover: First of all, I'm not aware of any cultural programs that target just three people.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Look at volume II.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I don't know of any.

The cultural program *Juste pour rire* has a budget of about \$1 million. Another event we support is *Montréal en lumière*. I was there last week. It attracts thousands of people. Funding for the festival comes from our department and the roadmap, obviously, as well as the Canada Council for the Arts. Thus, we support opportunities that enable people to take part in activities in the minority language, and that applies not just to English in Quebec but also to French in the rest of the country. Both the QCGN and ELAN receive funding as well.

I repeat, Canada is the only G7 nation that did not make cuts in the area of official languages, and we should be proud of that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bateman, go ahead.

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

I want to thank the minister, who hails from Manitoba, for appearing before the committee. I would also like to thank our witnesses, Mr. Lussier and Mr. Gauthier.

Ms. Glover, ever since you became minister, you have stressed the importance of focusing on young people. You feel very strongly about that, as do I.

I quite liked the answer you gave Mr. Godin. You are a product of French immersion programs. I have two children in immersion. I see it as a valuable investment for young people.

What is your department doing to help young people outside Quebec, those in the rest of the country, learn the French language and culture? And I'm not necessarily referring to your investments in French immersion. No doubt, you have many other programs.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

We have exchange programs that immerse our young people in everyday community life so they can practise their second official language. *Explore* is one such program. Students leave their community to spend time in another region. We also support SEVEC, a tremendously important initiative. Parents who aren't familiar with these programs should take the time to learn about them and to sign their children up to take part. Feedback from the students is always positive.

We also provide support to *Parlement jeunesse*. And as you know, one is always held in Manitoba, but students are also brought here to Parliament. The goal, of course, is to get them involved and educate them.

We also help fund the Jeux de la francophonie canadienne. The games benefit students tremendously, giving them an opportunity not just to use another language, but also to connect with people and make friends while being active and healthy. Competition during the games can be intense, but that's good for young people right across the country.

I want to tell you, Ms. Bateman, that your French is incredible. Congratulations. You are someone who really seized the opportunity to learn their second language. Your French has come such a long way since we first met.

• (0920)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Yes, definitely.

Hon. Shelly Glover: That's wonderful. You are living proof that investing a bit of time, seeking out help and practising speaking French works. Congratulations.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you.

On the topic of the Jeux de la francophonie canadienne, could young Manitobans, for example, participate?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes. I'm not sure which teams participated the last time around, but any student who speaks French is eligible, whether they are taking immersion or learning French as a second language.

In fact, participating in the Jeux de la Francophonie outside Canada really drives young French speakers to excel at the sport they have chosen. Time will tell.

I urge the committee to attend the Jeux de la francophonie canadienne and cheer on our young people. It's really a golden opportunity.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: How many young people participated in Explore? You may not have the figure with you, but—

Hon. Shelly Glover: I believe I referred to 7,800 at the beginning of my presentation.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: That's remarkable. And that's for the entire country?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you, minister. My hats off to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bateman.

Mr. Williamson, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Minister, it's great to see you. You can always tell somebody who is excited about their job and enjoys it. You are just overflowing with that today, so I salute that. It's great to see.

I have a question regarding the 2012-13 report from the Commissioner of Official Languages. In that report he commented on a weakening of the application of the law on official languages and linguistic duality, but made no mention of the evidence he relied on to reach this conclusion. In his report he implied there is or has been an erosion of bilingualism in the public service because of some of the consequences of our move to balance the federal budget. I'll cite the paragraph from the report so you're aware of it:

Although the federal public service is going through major changes, budget cuts and subsequent massive job cuts do not justify ignoring Part V of the Act. In these difficult times when federal employees are feeling particularly vulnerable, it is important for senior executives in all institutions to lead by example and make it clear that employees who have the right to work in the official language of their choice can continue to feel free to exercise that right.

Those are his words. I think he overstates the changes that have happened in Ottawa. Could you speak to this and perhaps reflect on the evidence, if he has any, that he was basing this on?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much for the question.

I have to say that I think the official languages commissioner does his very best in the circumstances that he finds himself in. There are so many requests of his time, and I understand that. I did meet with the official languages commissioner very close to the time he released the annual report to ask him about this very statement that he made in his annual report, because there is frankly no evidence to suggest this hypothesis that he includes in the annual report. I was quite disappointed actually, because he admits it is a hypothesis only. He indicated very clearly that he has no evidence to suggest this but said that there will be a survey done and that he and his staff are embarking on looking for some evidence.

I just said to him, I think it would be better that you find the evidence first before you make the statement. It confuses the issue when that happens. I've also heard from other people who thought that this suggested somehow that francophone immigration was also being negatively impacted, which wasn't said directly, but you see how it dominoes. I have suggested to the Commissioner of Official Languages that this may be a better way to proceed in the future. When we look at francophone immigration, for example, it's a myth that's perpetuating. We had a third party expert come to the federal, provincial and territorial Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie in Winnipeg. He indicated very clearly how he was seeing francophone immigration. If you might allow me, I'd like to read a quote from his presentation. I have it in French.

• (0925)

[Translation]

He found that reforming Canada's immigration system would have a positive effect on the country's francophone communities across the board and that the communities would have to adapt.

[English]

Again, there are two different issues at heart that I've just answered to, but this is why we have to myth bust.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. John Williamson: I would agree with that. I think Graham Fraser does very good work for the federal government. It's rare to see him talk about issues without support, so that's why I was curious to ask you about that.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. Godin, over to you.

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

Minister, I have noticed that you have all kinds of ways to say how well your government is doing, but I think we need to tell it like it is.

Under Stephen Harper's Conservative government, a unilingual English-speaking auditor general was appointed, something that hadn't happened in years. It even necessitated a bill being brought forward to prevent a similar appointment from being made in the future and to ensure that all agents of Parliament were bilingual. Under that same Conservative government, two unilingual judges were appointed to the Supreme Court.

On February 22, the newspaper *Le Soleil* published an article entitled "Communications dans les ministères fédéraux: «Anglais. Sorry »". In response to the article's findings, you defended the government. Calls were placed to ministers' offices and staff answered only in English. We are talking about ministers' offices. No legislation is being violated, but, as minister, you defended the government.

And there's another thing. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was using English-only business cards. The official languages commissioner had to step in, and it took the minister in question a year before he got rid of the offending unilingual cards. I would point out that the Minister of Foreign Affairs travels all over the world to promote our official languages.

I am going to ask you a straightforward question. This is the third time I have sponsored a bill that would ensure Supreme Court justices were bilingual. Federal courts are bilingual. Appellate courts are bilingual. All the legal experts tell us it makes no sense for things to be any other way. Francophones should have the same rights as anglophones. They should have the right to be heard by a judge who speaks their language and who doesn't have to rely on interpreters.

Minister, will you support the bill this time around? In 2010, when the government had a minority, the majority of members supported the bill on the appointment of bilingual justices to the Supreme Court. The Conservatives in the Senate, however, dragged their heels until an election was called to kill the bill, when Parliament could have taken a stand on the issue once and for all.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage, are you willing to support Canada's official languages? Are you prepared to support the bill on the appointment of bilingual justices to the Supreme Court, to finally give Canadians equal access to justice in both official languages, once and for all?

That is the question I put to you, minister, with all due respect.

• (0930)

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you for your questions. I will start with the first one.

Regarding the article you mentioned, you were wrong. I did not defend the departments that were unable to serve Canadians in French. I defended myself in this article, since I was attacked, first as the minister in charge of official languages, and then as member of Parliament for Saint-Boniface. I was told that my official website was not available entirely in French. I have been a member for Saint-Boniface for almost six years, and I have constantly made efforts to provide services to my constituents in both languages. My website is

provided entirely in French and in English. In addition, two bilingual people work in my office.

The journalist told me that, when he clicked on "Passport Applications" on my website, he was taken to an English site. I told him that all he had to do was click on "French", in the corner. He said that was one click too many. That's ridiculous. That's what I told him, and he put that in the article. I told him that we sometimes need to see the glass as half full. When native anglophones like myself make an effort to improve and use both official languages, they should be congratulated, instead of always being criticized. I am being criticized for one click too many, even though my website is available entirely in French and in English. As a member of Parliament, I do not have to have a bilingual website, but I do have one because I strongly believe in that.

I'm sorry, but you cannot make false statements in committee. I did not defend other ministers. I encourage them to make sure they are complying with the Official Languages Act. That's what matters.

I will now answer your second question about the judges. In English, we say that

[*English*]

timing is everything.

[*Translation*]

Regarding justices, it would be wonderful if that were the current situation in Canada, but the pool of judges is not large enough. In the west of the country, for instance, the pool is not....

Mr. Yvon Godin: But who is at the source of the problem? Who appoints the justices? The government does.

Hon. Shelly Glover: The pool of applicants is not large enough. That's why judges must be selected based on their qualifications, their excellence in legal matters. I want to reiterate that we are investing in language training at the Supreme Court. Everyone can receive services in both official languages, and that will continue. The pool is still not large enough, but it may be some day.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Godin.

I now yield the floor to Mr. Daniel.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Minister, once again for being here.

Arts and culture is obviously important to any developing country, community, and so on. It's undeniable that the prosperity of arts and culture in Canada helps support both official languages, particularly in the minority language communities.

Following the recession that hit so many countries, many G-7 countries had to cut their funding for arts and culture. However, Canada, under the direction of the Harper government, committed to maintain it.

Can you help us to better understand the commitment that has taken shape regarding our national languages?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Daniel.

This is an important economic driver, as I said in an answer to a previous question. There are 630,000 people employed in the arts and culture sector here in Canada. This is almost \$50 billion that comes into our economy every single year. Not only is this an economic driver, but it is also something that we as Canadians hold near and dear to us.

Our culture, our arts make us who we are. It's about where we came from, who we are today, and where we're going. All of that is typically reflected in our arts and culture, and that's how we celebrate who we are as Canadians. That's why it's so invaluable. That is why Prime Minister Harper continues to invest substantially in arts and culture.

As you indicated, we are the only country in the G-7 to maintain that funding. We're very proud of that fact.

Funding was also maintained for official languages programs. Yes, we did have to tighten our belts in a number of areas, but where we tightened our belts and where we saw changes was really in the back-office elements, trying to find efficiencies within my department, for example.

That's where we were able to do our part to try to alleviate the deficit and return to a balance, but we should be very proud of our record. This government has done more for arts and culture investments than any previous government, in terms of the level of investment.

In budget 2014, we also did something that's very important for predictability, something that the arts and culture community has been asking us for some time. We made many of the programs that sunset permanent so that the arts and culture sectors in both languages—because we have applications in both languages that are treated equally—now have predictability. They don't have to worry as the sunsets are coming about whether they are going to have funding to continue.

This was well received across the industry. It was rarely talked about in question period. I continue to wait for that all-important question from the opposition, but I'm going to tell you here and now. It's one of the first things I did as minister and one that I'm going to remember for the rest of my life because it was the right thing to do.

Thank you.

• (0935)

Mr. Joe Daniel: As a supplement to that, this covers the whole range of arts, not only painting and things like that, but also artistic performers, plays, songs, and everything else.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I'll give you an example of how the artists get their direct funding.

We have the Canada Council for the Arts. We give them \$181 million to ensure there is no political interference in providing those funds, and the Canada Council for the Arts determines who benefits from the \$181 million provided by the federal government. As I say, that is direct funding to artists.

We also have a number of programs within our department. There is the Canada Media Fund, and the Canada book fund. We have a number of programs, festivals, under the building communities

through arts and heritage program, through the Canada arts presentation fund. There are a number of different portfolios. We support 1,100 festivals every year, such as Festival du Voyageur in my own backyard, which contribute enormously to our economy and to our joie de vivre in Manitoba.

As I said, little pots in different places do exactly what you're suggesting, Mr. Daniel, which is to support arts and culture and help us celebrate who we are as Canadians.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you, Minister.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Perrault, go ahead.

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to briefly go back to the roadmap. I know that your predecessor announced, last year, that the roadmap would not contain any accountability measures.

In light of that announcement, Commissioner Fraser recommended, in his 2012-13 report, that a management framework be established for the roadmap. Has that recommendation by Commissioner Fraser been followed?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you so much for your question.

In fact, that was the second matter I discussed with the Commissioner of Official Languages when we met just before his annual report was published. He said in his report that the government cut an envelope of about \$30 million that was intended for accountability and the coordination of departments, but that is false.

As Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, I am responsible for a large part of the programs' management. In the previous roadmap, money was set aside for governance and coordination. However, during the consultations we held across the country in 2012 regarding the next roadmap, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne asked us to remove that envelope from the roadmap because francophone and Acadian communities were not directly benefiting from that money.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Has an external audit been conducted to ensure the transparency of the roadmap?

• (0940)

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes. The audit report should be published soon.

However, I want to point out that this was a mistake made by the Commissioner of Official Languages. He admitted his error, but his annual report had already been published.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Was an external audit of expenditures carried out?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes. Coordination was assessed, and the relevant report should be published soon. There, you will find the information you are looking for.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Earlier, my colleague from across the table briefly talked about youth. I just want to clarify that all the committee members feel that youth is the future of a country. So I don't understand why the current roadmap contains no programs or initiatives targeting young people.

Hon. Shelly Glover: If you look at your roadmap, you will see under the heading "Education" the funds allocated to all the exchanges and summer projects. They are the following: Music Showcases Program for Artists from Minority Official language communities.... Sorry, I'm looking at the previous roadmap.

Ms. Manon Perreault: I will move on to another question. I just want to know....

Hon. Shelly Glover: You don't want me to answer your question?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Yes, but you can answer all my questions at once.

I would like to know whether the programs currently listed in the roadmap have all begun.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I will begin by answering your first question.

I want to be very clear. What you said about young people not being part of the roadmap is not true. Young people are well served. Under the heading "Education", the following programs are listed:

[English]

support for minority language education, support for second language learning, summer languages bursaries, official language monitors, Exchanges Canada.

[Translation]

Most of those programs are targeted at young people.

There are also some programs for youth under the heading "Communities". For instance, the Music Showcases Program for Artists from official-language minority communities can be used by young people. And the list goes on. The translation program for book publishing encompasses the translation of books for young people.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Are those programs currently in place?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes.

Ms. Manon Perreault: But have all the programs begun?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Most of the programs planned in the roadmap are in place, with the exception of a few new programs that are undergoing adjustments. The stakeholders who are directly affected have been informed of the delays.

Ms. Manon Perreault: So some of the programs have been delayed.

Hon. Shelly Glover: A few of them have been delayed, but not those targeting young people. The programs you talked about are usually related to economic initiatives in the regions.

Ms. Manon Perreault: I want to go back to what my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst said earlier.

I have with me an article published in the newspaper *Le Soleil*, where you said that, ideally, the members of the Conservative cabinet should be able to provide services in French, but that you

work with the existing legislation. I see a bit of a problem with that. Ministers have a duty to improve things, including legislation. As for the whole bilingualism issue, our politicians cannot hide behind the fact that this requirement is not set out in the legislation. They should work on making it part of the law.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Perreault.

Minister, you may answer the question.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Let's put this in context. That is exactly what I said when I was told that not all members' offices in regions across the country provided services in French and in English. Of course, it would be ideal if those services were provided in both languages, but that is not a legal requirement, and I work with the legislation we have.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

[English]

We'll suspend for five minutes to allow our witnesses to depart. Then we'll reconvene to discuss committee business.

• (0945)

(Pause)

• (0950)

The Chair: We'll now continue with our 14th meeting.

We have two items to discuss.

First of all, we have had a notice of motion from Madame Perreault.

[Translation]

Can you move your motion, Ms. Perreault?

Ms. Manon Perreault: Yes. It's the motion I gave notice of at the last meeting.

I know that the Yukon visit has already been made. However, I think it's unfortunate that the government did not allow the tabling of the report because of the elections. I think that each province and territory has the right to equal treatment. I feel that the work that has already begun should be completed. So I think a new visit should be made.

[English]

The Chair: The motion is on the floor.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Sorry, I did not read the motion right away. It reads as follows:

That the Members of the Committee travel to Yukon as part of the study of the economic situation of the minority official-language communities.

I have already explained my reasoning, so I won't go over that again.

The Chair: So the motion is before us, and we will debate it.

Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

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

I understand Ms. Perreault's enthusiasm about the idea of going to Yukon. However, as this would be a relatively long study and we would have to meet with a number of witnesses from various provinces and territories, I think it's too early to make this kind of a decision.

If we were to visit all the witnesses who are inviting us, we could well end up with some 40 trips to make. If we had an opportunity to make two or three trips, we would prioritize places with major issues where the committee could make a greater contribution.

All to say that we will vote against this motion today.

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

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think that's unfortunate. This is the second time.

The motion concerns the study on the economic situation of official language minority communities. This is a major issue in Yukon. It's true that some local witnesses have appeared before the committee and that we cannot visit all the places we are invited to. However, this is the only region whose community situation has never been covered in a report tabled in the House of Commons.

When we travelled across the country—from Moncton to Vancouver—all the provincial communities appreciated our presence. When we went to Whitehorse, in Yukon, and to Yellowknife, the community was really appreciative. Those people are still waiting for the report to be published.

There may be another way to produce a report. That may even be possible with the new committee composition. Despite the time that has gone by, we still have the same analyst on the committee. She has all the information. If you are concerned about the report, she could perhaps show you what has been done on the ground to restore your confidence. This is not a report that criticizes the government, but rather a background on the trip made by the committee's former members.

During this study on the state of economic development, we heard some wonderful things, but it would be a good idea to go out into the communities.

It would be unfortunate if the government voted against this motion. Perhaps it could consider the report again. We spent over \$100,000 on our visit to this region, and its people have the right to see their situation reflected in a House report. That was the reason for the trip. If the decision is based on the fact that most of the committee members are new, the solution is to go back to the region.

This motion is for a study on the economic situation of official language minority communities. If you refuse it, we could try again later by moving another motion for a comprehensive study, be it on education or other considerations.

That being said, I would appreciate it if the government would support this motion. We are talking about a remote region. Life is not easy for people living there. They work hard, as they said during their testimony. It would be a good idea to visit those people where they live.

I will definitely vote in favour of the motion, as this is an NDP initiative we truly believe in. We must treat all Canadians equally.

We cannot ignore the great north. The people who live up there often feel ignored, as if they did not exist, and that's not right. We should visit them out of respect, and our trip would also contribute something to the House and the government. This would help show that the Standing Committee on Official Languages does not concern itself with only one part of the country, but with the country as a whole.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. St-Denis, the floor is yours.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: When the notice of motion was given last week, everyone thought it was very funny, as that was an indirect way to point out that you did not have a majority and that the opposition would have won had the vote been held at that time.

I will not make any comments beyond that, as I do not want to express direct opposition. However, it seems to me that any decisions regarding trips should be made in a broader context. We should determine which communities we would benefit the most from visiting.

Of course, I would like to go to Yukon, as it's very nice up there and I have never been.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: I'm a little confused. I thought there was an NDP line in the sand that no travel was going to be proposed for committee in light of a disagreement on another committee. I'm not sure what's happened to this line in the sand, or if in fact this is the one exception to the NDP rule.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, the line will be there until the Conservative government makes a decision about travelling on the study of the bill on unfair election changes.

This motion is just to put it on record. They will make the decision when the trip can be done, if it passes. It's just that this committee has the sole responsibility to do things. After that when it comes to the House leader, etc., they'll make the decision when the trip will take place and all of that. That doesn't take away that preparation for the future, hoping that the Conservative government becomes reasonable one day, and when it becomes reasonable, it'll say that Canadians have the right to meet their parliamentary committee on the election bill, because it's an important bill.

But it doesn't stop us putting in the bank a motion saying this is what we'd like to see for the future. We didn't say we want to travel next week. We'll say we've put it there, and we can make that decision, with all respect, Mr. Williamson, and then at that time, if it passes, I hope that one day parliamentarians will be able to do their job on everything, without taking away the most democratic right of parliamentarians and parties that Canadians and all parties should have input when you change the law on electoral reform.

It has never been seen in the history of our country where a government wants to change the electoral law by majority and without opening it to all parties. We're supposed to be one of the most democratic countries in the world, and right at home we're doing the opposite. That is pretty bad. I support 100% at this time that nobody travel, but at the same time I repeat that in the committee we still can propose trips for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Chair, I don't know when we are supposed to finish this study, but I know that in the second week of September, there is the Arctic meeting in Whitehorse, so every member of Parliament can attend that meeting. I think you can use the travel points there. It is an opportunity to participate on the Arctic, and also to have interaction with the French community in Yukon. I don't know what the timing is to finish the study, but in this way we would be able to save money and save also the purpose of this meeting.

•(1000)

The Chair: The timing—

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I'm just telling you about this opportunity.

The Chair: The study is going to take a number of weeks. We have approximately 50 different witnesses, so it will take at least 12 meetings for the study to be completed, to answer your question.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: In September they are not sitting. It is after the summer break.

The Chair: Unless we get more witnesses, I expect the study will be completed before summer.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: This is an opportunity, just in case.

The Chair: Yes.

Is there any further debate on the motion?

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Perreault, for presenting and speaking to the motion.

I understand we have a budget for the study. Would someone be prepared to move the motion for the budget for the study?

Go ahead, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: I'd be more than happy to move the budget motion on the study.

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

We have a proposed budget for the study of the economic situation of Canada's minority linguistic communities. The budget is for a total amount of \$27,600. I'd just like committee members to know that this is a high estimate for the budget. I don't anticipate that we'll use more than about \$15,000, but because our witness list is so big, we decided to err on the side of caution.

Is there any debate on this budget?

Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, a while ago, we talked about groups of witnesses. We said that, instead of inviting them all, we would try to have one representative per group. I don't recall whether we were talking about RDEE.

[English]

The Chair: There were a number of groups that we were going to group together, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: So we will group them together. For instance, we would hear from all of them at the same time during a two-hour meeting.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So they wouldn't be removed from our witness list, but they would be invited to appear at the same time.

The Chair: Exactly.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay, thanks.

The Chair: Ms. St-Denis, go ahead.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: In the budget request, it says that a certain amount of money is earmarked for a 20-person visit to an unspecified location.

Oh no, sorry, these are witness expenditures.

The Chair: Yes, that's for witnesses.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: So that's for witnesses who are invited to appear. Okay.

[English]

The Chair: Any other further questions on the budget?

Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to make sure of something. We will hear from the government's development agencies at the same time. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Great. Thanks.

[English]

The Chair: If there's no further debate, I'll call the question on the motion in front of us.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Finally, I just want to let committee members know that we received the estimates from the House, and the end of the supply period is the 31st of May of this year. Unless committee members tell me they don't want to review the estimates and vote on them, we have tentatively set aside an hour on May 6 to review and vote on the estimates. The Commissioner of Official Languages has indicated to the clerk that he is prepared to be here to answer questions about these estimates at that time.

Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: I'd just like to point out that there are a lot of witnesses who we're going to be hearing from. I just urge the chair and researchers to try not to overload our days with witnesses. I've been in committees where we have six or eight people in groups, for example. I'd rather spend a little more time. I'd rather we be a little more judicious in our selection of witnesses and not load so many on that we don't have adequate time to both digest and also ask questions of witnesses.

Thank you.

The Chair: I think what we'll try to do with respect to the different economic development agencies that we have asked to appear is have them appear all at once, but not give them 10 minutes each to give their opening remarks. Otherwise they're going to use 50 minutes to an hour to give their opening statements and leave very little time for members to ask questions of the witnesses. What I'm going to ask them to do is to present a single statement of 10 minutes and then allow members to ask questions for the balance of the time.

Madame Bateman.

●(1005)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I think it's reasonable to have time for questions, but I think it's very important to note there are very different realities for various regional agencies. For example, Western Diversification is funded probably less than one-quarter of what ACOA is funded. For them to have a unified voice.... They're singing from different song sheets, different realities.

The Chair: How do you suggest we do it then?

Ms. Joyce Bateman: I just think maybe we could limit their time but have each group speak. FedNor has a different reality from ACOA. The new federal agency from southwestern Ontario has a very different reality. Maybe we could give them three to four minutes to give their remarks or framework. I'm just thinking that because it's not homogeneous.

The Chair: We'll figure it out, but we'll ensure that there is lots of time for you to ask questions, because I think that's what you want to do.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Yes, fine.

The Chair: Is there any further guidance for the chair? No, okay.

Thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

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