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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we will continue our study on the state of Canada's Francophonie.

During our first hour, we will have the pleasure of hearing Mr. Carol Jolin and Mr. Peter Hominuk, who are respectively the President and the Executive Director of the AFO, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. During our second hour, we will hear Mr. Normand Labrie and Ms. Florence Ngenzebuhoro from the Université de l'Ontario français.

Welcome, Mr. Jolin and Mr. Hominuk.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Chair, someone has just taken a photo. Unless I'm mistaken, it is usually forbidden to take photographs during a meeting.

The Chair: It is indeed forbidden to take photographs once the meeting has started. Thank you for reminding us.

As usual, we will give the witnesses ten minutes or so to make an opening statement. Afterwards, we will have a round of questions and comments from our colleagues.

Mr. Jolin, you have the floor.

Mr. Carol Jolin (President, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, esteemed members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you for inviting me here as you carry out your study on the state of Canada's Francophonie.

This past November 15 has been called “Black Thursday” and with reason. In its fall economic outlook, the provincial government attacked the francophonie by proposing to withdraw funding from the Université de l'Ontario français. It also proposes to eliminate the French Languages Services Commission and transfer the part of the Commissioner's mandate that deals with complaints to the provincial ombudsman.

These two decisions have led to our province's biggest linguistic crisis since they tried to shut down the Montfort hospital in 1997.

The only positive outcome of these ill-informed decisions is that it has more than ever united francophones and francophiles from coast to coast.

Over the course of the previous weekend, almost 15,000 people, francophones and anglophones alike, took to the streets in Ontario to make two points.

Firstly, they came together to celebrate with pride our French language, our culture and our heritage.

Secondly, they took to the streets to tell the provincial government that these two institutions are necessary to our survival and that we need them to protect and promote our language and culture.

We all wished to make sure that the premier was left with no doubt as to the essential role of these two institutions.

I would like to thank the people who came out. They were loud but peaceful. Our community was able to present a positive image when all eyes in the province, in the country and even in the world were on us.

It is not only the vast majority of francophones and anglophones that support us. The five federal political parties are with us, as well as the opposition parties in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the Government of Quebec, and many representatives of the big media outlets, such as *The Sun*, *Le Devoir*, *La Presse*, *Le Droit*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Toronto Star*, to name but a few, who have supported us in their editorials and columns. We are extremely grateful for this wave of solidarity that has come from all corners of the country.

The Government of Ontario has based its decision to attack two Franco-Ontarian institutions on economic reasons. This is why the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario was so thrilled to see that the Government of Canada is willing to foot the bill for at least 50% of the costs of setting up the Université de l'Ontario français.

We would like to thank all federal political parties for their leadership and their willingness to find a solution. We are nearly there.

In order to avoid irreparable damage to the Franco-Ontarian community by pushing back the timeframe in which the institution would welcome its first students, which is set for September 2020, I sent a letter to the Premier of Ontario and to the Minister for Francophone Affairs. You will receive a copy of this letter. It contains all the necessary information so that the Government of Ontario may present a request for funding to Canada at its earliest convenience.

The Government of Ontario therefore has all it needs to quickly make a request for funding to the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada has this letter and therefore has what is required to get the ball rolling.

The Franco-Ontarian and francophile communities need a Franco-Ontarian university which is managed by and for francophones in a region that has the least amount of post-secondary programs in French but which is where those communities are growing exponentially.

Let me be clear: the Université de l'Ontario français exists. It hasn't had an easy time of it up until now. You will find the university's history at tab 1 in the document that we have distributed. This historical context clearly shows how much a French-language university is needed in Toronto.

The university has had its own enabling legislation since last year which was passed unanimously by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. You can read the legislation at tab 2. You will see that the institution has all the attributes of a real university: a senate, a board, a chancellor, a president, and so on.

The University has already published its first annual report on its operations which you will find at tab 3. I encourage you to read it.

● (0855)

Finally, tab 4 contains answers to certain basic questions that will help dismiss some myths and stereotypes.

We must keep in mind the following: the Université de l'Ontario français exists. It already has quite a few employees and it will open its doors to its first students in September 2020. Unfortunately, the Government of Ontario wishes to eliminate this institution. The AFO is requesting that all federal parties act, and act quickly, to save it.

[English]

As well, Madame Joly said that she would do anything in her power to support Franco-Ontarians. The Government of Canada's position is clear. It is ready to be a partner with the Government of Ontario by funding at least half of the university's opening costs over the next eight years. In the past, the Government of Canada provided the significant funding needed to launch la Cité collégiale and Collège Boréal. The Government of Canada has the programs in place to support a project like the university. The province has simply to submit the project, and the federal government can help fund at least 50%, if not much more.

L'AFO asks that the federal government show leadership at this time of national crisis and provide, without delay, the funding required for l'Université de l'Ontario français to continue its operations for the next few years, even if that means that over the life of a five- or eight-year federal-provincial agreement, 100% of the funding in the first few years comes solely from Ottawa.

[Translation]

Thank you very much for listening. The Ontario francophonie and the official languages minority communities need you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Jolin.

Without further ado, we will start a round of questions.

Mr. Blaney, over to you.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Welcome, Mr. Jolin and Mr. Hominuk, to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Thank you so much for coming this morning.

As you know, this is the committee's first meeting on the issue that we spoke of i.e., the promotion and preservation of institutions within the Franco-Ontarian linguistic community. I would like to reassure you, as I did Sunday in Quebec City, that for us, and I dare say for all parliamentarians in the House of Commons, the promotion of linguistic duality and the preservation of institutions for linguistic communities is essential and is at the very heart of the Canadian identity.

I had a conversation with Mr. Dupuis of the FCFA, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. He made me realize that in Quebec, the state works to preserve our culture and our language, but in other provinces, it is important to have strong institutions. The Official Languages Act sets out the federal government's responsibilities for promoting our official languages.

Mr. Jolin, I would like to commend the constructive approach that you have always used, especially over the two past weeks. It is interesting to see that you have presented us with a letter which contains a solution for the very institution which is at the heart of our deliberations, the Université de l'Ontario français. This university would be alongside the University of Ottawa and the Université de Hearst.

We will perhaps talk about it in more detail during the second hour, but could you explain to me where exactly the project of establishing a Franco-Ontarian university is at? More specifically, what would be the federal government's contribution?

You spoke of possibilities which are most interesting. In the end, it all comes down to funding. You have proposed a solution in order to get the Université de l'Ontario français up and running over the next four years without dipping into Ontario's budget. We know that Ontario is faced with tremendous difficulties. Could you talk about funding for the project?

● (0900)

Mr. Carol Jolin: First of all, I would like to praise the openness shown by the Honourable Mélanie Joly, who promptly said that the federal government was ready to come on board. We know that the federal government had made funding available to the Collège Boréal and La Cité collégiale for up to of 50% of their operational costs.

Given the minister's openness, the federal government wouldn't extend funding for the university's first four years of existence per se, because the university already exists, but for its operational costs. That would give the provincial government time to put its finances in order. We know that one of the promises made by the current government is that it would get to grips with the province's finances. That period of four years would give the province time to realize its goals.

When we met Mr. Ford, he said that once the province's finances are in order, it will be able to fund the Université de l'Ontario français. Those first four years would allow the Ontario government to put its financial house in order. It could then take over funding for the four following years. We could set up a partnership and really, it's just a question of making decisions on how to go about it.

I welcome the federal government's openness to this possible solution. We have a solution. We have to get the various stakeholders together and set up a plan to get the ball rolling. Now that we know the position of each level of government, the solution is before us and it's doable. We are working to get down to the nitty-gritty in order to keep things moving along. We want the university to be ready to welcome its first students on December 1, 2020. I would be happy to invite you to their graduation ceremony a few years from now.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have a more specific question for you. To your knowledge, would the federal funds come from OLEP, the Official Languages in Education Program, or would they come from the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in our future? Have you received any information on this?

• (0905)

Mr. Carol Jolin: I do not have any information. I'm more concerned about getting the actual funding. However, I do not believe it would come from OLEP. There are more funds in the programs for official languages. I'm not sure I can answer your question.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Right. We can come back to it later.

The project costs for the Université de l'Ontario français are set at \$78 million over the next eight years. In the past, as you have stated, the federal government has contributed up to half of the costs of similar projects, as it did for the Collège Boréal and La Cité collégiale. We could probably also include the Université de Moncton or other programs.

You said that there has been an openness on the part of the federal government to finance the first four years of operation. If we divide \$78 million by two, we get \$39 million. The Government of Ontario would not have to shell out any money over the first four years and the newly born university could continue to operate. Is this correct?

Mr. Carol Jolin: Yes.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Have you worked on designing the programs that will be offered at this university?

Mr. Carol Jolin: No. Mr. Labrie, who is at the heart of it all, will make a presentation and will be happy to talk to you about the programs. He is much better placed than I to analyze the programs and the partnerships than the university is establishing to meet the needs of the market.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney and Mr. Jolin.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Jolin.

The Chair: Mrs. Fortier, you have the floor.

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You all know that I am a Franco-Ontarian and proud to be a Franco-Ontarian MP. What we experienced last Saturday is still

humming in the hearts of all those who participated in one of the rallies.

We are still hearing about it today. This morning, I spoke with people who said they were surprised but also very happy to see the wave of solidarity throughout the country. It really is incredible. I would like to congratulate all those who came together Saturday and obviously this momentum has to continue.

We are talking about a French-language university, and you have already eloquently explained that it is needed in Ontario. As to the federal government's contribution, we have to make sure that we remind ourselves of the following: we cannot let the provincial governments, especially Ontario, shirk their responsibilities. It's too easy to cut the provinces some slack, especially when it comes to public finances. The federal government has to ensure that its public finances are in order and has a certain responsibility. I think it has shown itself open to working with the Government of Ontario and looking at ways of keeping the project going. I do think however, that we have to keep these considerations in mind.

Mr. Jolin, you did not say much about the elimination of the Ontario Office of the French Language Services Commissioner. I would like to know what your thoughts are. Abandoning the project of the Université de l'Ontario français really is a huge step backward, but so is eliminating the Commissioner's office.

Can you talk to us a bit about that?

Mr. Carol Jolin: I can talk about it very briefly.

Bill 57 is still before the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. What we are requesting is simply the withdrawal, no more no less, of schedule 20, which would reinstate the Commissioner's office.

Under the current bill, the commissioner would answer to the Ontario Ombudsman. It would be a loss of independence for the commissioner as well as a loss of linguistic rights in Ontario and a blow to the way the French Language Services Act is enforced. It would be a huge blow.

The Université de l'Ontario français is an extremely important issue for us. We are testifying before a standing committee of the federal government to make people understand what all this means for the Franco-Ontarian community, and that it is indeed necessary to establish the Université de l'Ontario français and the reasons why we must go ahead with the project to be able to meet pressing needs in the Toronto region.

• (0910)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: When we talk about Canadian values, we know very well that official languages and linguistic duality are part of our DNA. Canada must not stand down; rather, it should go forward and strengthen what we already have. I applauded Minister Joly when she said last Saturday that we should never go backwards and that we should make every effort to go forward. That is something that all of us around this table are doing. We are seeking to strengthen laws and consolidate the rights of minority francophones.

I know that we are going through a period of crisis and obviously we have to look at the problem of the Université de l'Ontario français and the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner, but nonetheless, I would like to know if there are other measures that we should be taking, whether at the federal or provincial level, to reinforce minority rights.

Do you have any ideas?

Mr. Carol Jolin: The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario has already spoken about incorporating francophone rights in the Canadian Constitution. This was a priority for us, but our priorities have changed somewhat since November 15. That is one aspect.

As to what the federal government can do, many things have been said and much support has been given, for example in terms of funding and developing creativity. That's great, but the federal government could do even more. It could exercise its leadership in Ontario so that the Université de l'Ontario français may see the light of day.

Does the federal government have to wait for all of the province's requests? I think that it now has the possibility to exercise its leadership; it doesn't have to wait. It can make the first overtures towards the province. As our federal leaders, you are mandated to take on the issue of linguistic duality and to respond when there is pressing need, and the pressing need is certainly to have a French-language university in Toronto.

Each time that we set this project back, irreparable damage is caused to the young people who graduate from high school and don't really have any options in the Toronto region if they want to study at a French-language university. We know that assimilation rates are between 60% and 70% in the central southwestern region of the province.

I'm here today to ask the federal government to show leadership, to take the bull by the horns and to take on the file. The federal government could then put pressure on the provincial government.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Fortier.

Over to you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for coming today.

The first thing that I would like to do is to congratulate you for taking a stand, Mr. Jolin.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Thank you.

Mr. François Choquette: I would also like to congratulate you for fighting the good fight. You are currently leading the way for all of the Canadian francophonie and for all defenders of official languages in Canada. They were even anglophones from Quebec at your side Saturday at the rally that we both went to. It was a beautiful moment and an auspicious start. The fight is not over, far from it, but I can tell you that you set a good example. We are fighting also and we are proud to promote our beautiful language and our wonderful cultural identity.

I would like to go back to what you just said about leadership. To my knowledge, Ms. Joly had a meeting with Ms. Mulroney. What was the outcome?

Mr. Carol Jolin: We have not heard much about that meeting which was held a week ago. We met Mr. Ford and Ms. Mulroney last Thursday. Ms. Mulroney said she was very surprised to hear about the possibility of funding from the federal government in the previous 24 hours.

•(0915)

Mr. François Choquette: Really!

Mr. Carol Jolin: I very much doubt that she had spoken about it with Ms. Joly. At any rate, this is what we heard. Obviously, we were very surprised by her response. At that point in time, if it was indeed true, I don't think that they had spoken about funding for the Université de l'Ontario français.

It seems, given Ms. Mulroney's statements during our meeting with Mr. Ford, that she completely endorses her government's position which is based on economic constraints. She even declared that the Université de l'Ontario français will not be opening its doors September 1st, 2020 as long as the province's finances are not in a better state.

Mr. François Choquette: I do not want to get involved in provincial politics, but I can honestly say that the funds necessary for the Ontario Office of the French Language Services Commissioner and the Université de l'Ontario français are peanuts, small potatoes. We are talking about \$80 million over eight years; it's not as if it's just for the first year. I am the one saying this, not you. I do not want to put you in that position.

Based on what we have heard, the Ontario government will not be making any request to the federal government because, according to the Ontario government, the federal government has no money. Given that the government of Ontario will not be making a request to the federal government, it would be opportune for the federal government to ask to meet the Minister for Education and offer to fund the university. Have I understood things correctly?

Mr. Carol Jolin: There are two things to remember here.

Firstly, it was just recently that we received assurances from the federal government that it would provide funding for the first four years. We stated this in the letter that we sent to Ms. Mulroney, of which you have a copy. We have not had any response, but I believe she is looking at the possibility. As we wait to hear the position of the Ontario government, we would like to see the federal government step up to the plate and show leadership. We would like it to contact Ms. Mulroney as well as Ms. Fullerton, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We have to get people talking. What is crucial right now is that government stakeholders communicate.

Mr. François Choquette: If each party is waiting for the other one to make the first move, nothing will happen. We have to show leadership at some point, as you say. May the one who is the most willing make the first steps and ask the other party to meet and discuss what is possible to accomplish together. Am I right?

Mr. Carol Jolin: That is it precisely.

Mr. François Choquette: All right.

As I have a little time left, I would like to talk about the Ontario Office of the French Language Services Commissioner which has been in existence for 10 years now. The commissioner testified before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs of Ontario. I believe it was yesterday or a few days before, very recently at any rate. Have you seen his testimony? How did you feel afterwards?

Mr. Carol Jolin: We were not able to watch all of the testimony because we ourselves had to make a presentation to the same committee at the end of the afternoon and were in the middle of intense preparations. We do, however, know the commissioner's position.

Mr. François Choquette: How did your testimony before that committee go?

Mr. Carol Jolin: It went well. We were able to present the information on the office of the commissioner that we wanted to. First of all, the government wishes to put all of the commissioner's office under the ombudsman. If the original goal was to save money, it's a mistake, because the whole of the commissioner's office will be transferred to the ombudsman.

As to the responsibilities and the operations of each agent, we are not in agreement.

Mr. François Choquette: There is the question of independence.

Mr. Carol Jolin: You cannot be independent if you work under someone. That is what we are contesting.

Mr. François Choquette: The ombudsman's role and that of the commissioner are not the same either.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Exactly. Even if the commissioner had the same responsibilities, he would still have to answer to the ombudsman. We believe that this would have an effect on his independence. That is why at tabs 5, 6 and 7 of our document, we are asking for schedule 20 to be withdrawn because it deals with the commissioner's role. This is what we presented yesterday.

We also submitted a document on the Université de l'Ontario français. We spoke about the need for a French-language university in the central southwestern region in order to not only meet a pressing need from young high school graduates in that region, but also to offer our young people from all of Ontario and Canada the possibility to come and study in French in Toronto.

• (0920)

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

It is now Mr. Samson's turn.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jolin, Mr. Hominuk, thank you for coming today. We know that it was perhaps difficult to find the time to come and testify and we are grateful for your presence.

You have shown exceptional leadership on many issues. I would just like to remind people that the protest had been prepared within a month. We should thank all Canadian francophones for their support, but also people from Quebec, because it is rare, and I don't mean to insult anyone, that Quebec supports minority francophones. I am very pleased to see the support and it will perhaps set a precedent

that will lead to a wonderful future. I would also like to congratulate you on all the work that has been accomplished previously. We tend to forget, because we are mostly thinking about Black Thursday, but before 2012, there were complaints, work was done and an expert committee was set up. You are the one behind all those efforts and have been for a long time and I do thank you.

The second thing I would like to say is that I was not expecting Ontario, such a well-to-do province, to behave this way. The analogy that I like to use in certain instances, as is the case today, is that when there's less water in the lake, the animals gather around the lake look at each other differently. Governments sometimes do not show leadership or comprehension when it comes to their obligations towards the two founding peoples. When the economy is not doing as well as they would like, they make cuts that hurt minorities. This is exactly what has happened here and proves the lack of leadership on this issue.

I would also like to say something else. I went to school in English, from kindergarten to grade 12, because there were no French schools. Afterwards, however, I was able to study in French at the Université Sainte-Anne in Nova Scotia and at the Université de Moncton. If these two institutions had not existed, I would probably not have done my post-secondary education in French. I would therefore not have reached the goals I had set for myself, and let's not forget that I have many others to reach!

This is why I come back to the needs of students in Ontario and in the rest of Canada who will choose to study there. We are not seeking here to know if whether or not we should have a French-language university, but rather to respond to a need, a willingness. Look at school boards in Ontario, where school populations have grown exponentially, to the point that schools are being built every year. If this French-language university does not come into existence, students will go to English-language universities, they will be assimilated and they will not speak French, they will not contribute to the communities' vitality and the francophones will suffer another blow. This goes beyond the simple opening of a French-language university of Ontario. This is why this issue is so important and the refusal to go forward with this university could cause irreparable harm.

The former federal government abolished the Court Challenges Program which caused a whole lot of problems. Moreover, the census does not ask the right questions to determine the right to education in the minority language set out in section 23(b) of the Charter. Your movement is very important.

My introduction always takes longer than my questions. I am now going to ask you three questions in a row, and you may answer them in the order you wish.

First of all, you said that you have not received any response to your letter. But are there other ways to continue to exercise pressure?

Secondly, you spoke about the government's next steps, but what will be your next steps and those of the community that is following you in Canada right now?

Thirdly, you spoke of the federal government's leadership, but should you also to continue to lobby the Ontario government so that it may sit at the same table as the federal government and thereby ensure that your efforts are rewarded?

Over to you.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Thank you for those three questions.

I would also like to thank you for what you said about the Assemblée de la francophonie's commitment. We have a fantastic team which works with Mr. Hominuk and myself. We have finally been able to reap the rewards of what we have sown over the past few years, which is to say that we have coordinating committees set up everywhere in the province which get in touch with the whole community. What's more, if we were not here, we would be travelling to see the members of our coordinating committees.

Our community organizations all use the same document, which is the strategic community plan for French-speaking Ontario. This makes it easier for us, after Black Thursday, to communicate with our member organizations, of which we have about 160, both institutional and community-based, and to move forward quickly to mobilize people, which allowed us to organize protests on December 1st.

To answer your first question, we have not had any other direct contact with Ms. Mulroney since last Thursday, when we met her and Mr. Ford. However, our political analyst is in constant communication with Ms. Mulroney's team to continue our exchanges. We have always said that we are open to dialogue and this openness is also evident on Ms. Mulroney's side. We want to continue to talk about this file.

Today, we sent a letter which brings a clear solution that would allow the establishment of the Université de l'Ontario français. It is a win-win solution for the federal government and Ontario. We hope to hear back about our proposal soon.

As to the next steps, I mentioned that this afternoon, we will be holding a provincial meeting with all the organizations that are members of the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario, the ACFO, which has offices in all Ontario regions. We will be talking about strategy. We will give some information because the Assemblée de la francophonie is an organization that works from the bottom towards the top. We consult at the grass-roots level and then, by going through our coordinating committees that will be meeting Wednesday, Thursday and at the beginning of next week in Ottawa, we will ask our members for feedback. We will also ask them to be vocal in their interactions with their MLA's to see what can be done. These are our short-term objectives.

The comments and feedback that we will get from our members will inform the direction that we will take, not only over the next weeks but also the coming months. I would like the problem to be solved as quickly as possible, but I also know that this could take time. We are ready to act quickly, but if it takes longer than we think, we will continue to exert pressure on the provincial government so that we can get results on these two issues.

As for federal leadership, I believe that the federal government can get the ball rolling, if I may say it that way, and by that token put pressure on the provincial government so that it deals with these

issues, changes stance and gets down to brass tacks. This is extremely important for us. The provincial government parties have already supported our efforts. Last week, all parties adopted a motion to that end. We're not favouring one party over another, we want to work to preserve linguistic duality in the country. We have here an excellent opportunity to go forward with an initiative that is of the utmost importance for the francophone community in Ontario.

I would like to thank everyone who has been supporting us in the province and elsewhere in Canada and even abroad. This issue has gone beyond the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner and the Université de l'Ontario français. This has been seen and continues to be seen as an attack on the francophonie and francophone rights. This is why people in other provinces have been so supportive, be they francophones, francophiles or anglophones.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hominuk, do you want to add anything?

● (0930)

Mr. Peter Hominuk (Executive Director, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): I would just like to add that, over the past few weeks, we have built a structure to allow us to evaluate our options, not only on the legal and political level, but also on the community mobilization and communication level. We intend to maintain pressure on the provincial government through all these means.

I also want to tell you that our mailing lists now include 15,000 names. People who have joined the resistance movement will receive a request from the president to call their member of provincial Parliament.

We really intend to put a lot of pressure on the provincial government. When people talk directly to members of Parliament, it has an effect. We continue to call on the public and the Franco-Ontarian community to ensure that citizens speak to their member of Parliament.

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

Thank you, Mr. Samson.

We will continue with Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Carol Jolin: I would like to add a bit of information.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Since Mr. Ford's personal cellphone number seems to be everywhere, I can tell you that he has been inundated with calls from Franco-Ontarians and francophiles. We heard about it because people around us were personally called by Mr. Ford. They had the opportunity to discuss two issues of concern to us and the position of the francophone community on these issues.

So, I wouldn't want to have to look at the whole list of messages that Mr. Ford has received since Black Thursday; it must be quite overwhelming.

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Arseneault from New Brunswick, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for these four minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you for these two more minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's 12 minutes that Mr. Samson has been talking.

Will there be any time left for my colleague Ms. Lambropoulos, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay.

Mr. Jolin, I'm surprised to hear you say that Minister Mulroney wasn't aware that the federal government could be involved in such a large, enormous project, which has been under construction for so many years, since 2012, in fact.

You say that the Government of Canada ensures that it can fund the first four years of the university's existence from the outset until the financial situation in Ontario improves.

Is this confirmed? Have you had that discussion with Minister Joly?

Mr. Carol Jolin: If I remember correctly, Ms. Joly made an initial announcement on Twitter that the government was ready to commit. We approached her office. I wouldn't be moving this forward without the assurance that there is a commitment. I didn't receive it in writing, but there is a commitment on the federal side to move forward with such a solution.

Mr. René Arseneault: This is a very attractive solution for the Ontario government. The first four years of existence would be funded by the federal government in one fell swoop, if I understand your letter correctly.

Mr. Carol Jolin: We think it meets the objectives of both governments.

Mr. Ford's response is that his government will start by working to achieve Ontario's balanced budget objectives. Mr. Ford has given himself until the next provincial election to achieve this.

If we're counting properly, that brings us to that point.

I think it's a win-win solution. In other words, on the one hand, the federal government is giving a solid hand to ensure that it can meet its mandate in terms of linguistic duality and support for official language minority communities. On the other hand, it gives the Ontario government time to get its finances in order as it intends to do, and then to commit itself.

Mr. René Arseneault: I know that the letter is fairly recent; it's from December 3. Is Ms. Mulroney, who is responsible for the francophonie in Ontario, aware of this option?

Mr. Carol Jolin: I think so.

Mr. René Arseneault: What was her reaction?

Mr. Carol Jolin: She hasn't responded.

We mention this in the letter. What we are doing is establishing a channel of communication, among other things, between the two levels of government so that they can talk to each other.

Mr. René Arseneault: I hope that the communication will be very generous and that the path of communication will be very fluid.

I have a question for you. You talked about federal leadership in different ways, including in response to the questions of my colleague Mr. Choquette.

How can we improve the leadership of the Government of Canada? How can we do better than that in the immediate future?

We have confirmed the financial commitment, and we are very flexible for the first four years. How can we do better? What do you expect from the federal government?

Mr. Carol Jolin: First, we must continue the dialogue and maintain the pressure. Second, to put pressure on, you have to understand the issue, the need for the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto and why we are here. The historical background contained in the document provided to you raises many points in this regard.

Demographically, we know that the largest concentration of francophones in Ontario will no longer be in eastern Ontario in six to eight years, but in the Greater Toronto Area. We are already seeing this demographic growth. Indeed, the two existing francophone school boards open new elementary schools every two years and a new secondary school every four or five years. There are 110 elementary schools and 40 high schools in this south-central-western region. In Ontario, 200,000 youth are enrolled in immersion schools, including 150,000 in the Greater Toronto Area. It is therefore extremely important to be able to offer young people who are finishing high school the choice of continuing their studies there, because we know that they won't travel within an 80 kilometre radius if they have the opportunity to study close to home.

● (0935)

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, I understand.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

We'll now give the floor to Mr. Généreux for four minutes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here this morning.

First, I'd like to congratulate you for all the work you've done in the past few weeks. It's quite spectacular!

I have a more fundamental question. Do you perceive the attack—a generalized impression and I agree with this term—by the Ontario government on the province's francophone community as an attack on the very essence of the Francophonie, francophones or the francophone community, and not simply as a budgetary issue? I have heard several comments of all kinds on this subject and I would like to hear your interpretation of what happened.

Mr. Carol Jolin: After hearing the government's position, which is based on economic factors, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario tried to fight this position. We wanted to see exactly what that meant. Based on possible funding from the federal government, we concluded that the bill for the new university was no longer \$80 million, but rather \$40 million. However, \$40 million over eight years represents \$5 million per year. So we were able to put the issue into context and prove that this \$5 million is a very small amount of money in the college and training budget. Our objective was to ask the government if what it plans to do to save only \$5 million a year for eight years is really worth it, instead of funding the establishment, in an environment that needs it, of a university that will have an economic impact. Because we must remember that the arrival of a university or college somewhere always brings economic benefits.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Jolin, I would really like to know if you have also interpreted this as an attack on the very essence of the Francophonie, on one of the two founding peoples, on Canada's francophones. Did you or your community also perceive this as a direct attack on francophones? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Mr. Carol Jolin: I understand perfectly well.

We didn't stop at these ideological considerations. For us, it was more important to move the issue forward financially. To be able to talk to the government, you have to speak its language, and its language is the economy. So that's what we did.

People in the community have the right to think what they want. What happened was seen as an attack on the Francophonie because it was the Université de l'Ontario français and the Office of the Commissioner of French Language Services that were targeted. For us, these two institutions are important. As Mr. Blaney pointed out earlier, while Quebec has the government to defend its institutions, in Ontario, it is the institutions that defend the Francophonie. What happened was a direct attack that meant a decline in the rights of francophones. Our organization was created to advance francophone issues politically and to protect our gains when necessary, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Since you took the floor this morning, I have had the feeling—and correct me if I'm wrong—that you are defending the university more, at least before the committee, than the Office of the Commissioner. Am I dreaming or is this a strategic choice you have decided to make to ensure that the university is established, perhaps because the Commissioner hasn't lost his budget even though he has lost his independence?

Mr. Carol Jolin: Yesterday, we appeared before a provincial committee. We are conducting the two files together because they are both very important at the provincial level.

At the federal level, both issues remain as important as ever. The question of funding, however, only applies to the university. The message I'm sending you today is that we need the federal government, its leadership and creativity to move this issue forward by finding a win-win solution.

• (0940)

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

We'll now give the floor to Ms. Lambropoulos for four minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Good morning, and thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

[English]

My colleague across the way had mentioned that in Quebec we're lucky that we have institutions that protect the French language, that it's much more of a struggle outside Quebec, and that we need to push even harder outside Quebec in order for francophone Canadians to have the same rights.

Obviously, there's a minority group in Quebec as well, and it's the anglophone minority group. They don't necessarily always have the same rights, and the fact that this has recently happened in Ontario sets a precedent for what could happen in other provinces as well. If provincial governments are not on the same page as the federal government or do not feel that everybody's rights are equal, they may push for these things to happen there as well.

I'd like you to talk to us more generally about the importance of educational institutions at all levels in order to preserve a language within a given province and to give the same rights to minority linguistic groups.

Mr. Carol Jolin: I envy the anglophone minority in Quebec because they have many hospitals, three major universities, well recognized throughout the country; and that gives us motivation to work to obtain the same thing here. We have one French hospital and we had to fight 21 years ago, tooth and nail, to be able to keep it; and that was the last largest francophone gathering to keep those services. We fought hard for that. We're at the point here where it's extremely important that we can go forward with the francophone university. The need is just as big for us as it is for our anglophone friends in Quebec to have those institutions. Your institutions are what's giving life to your community, and that's why we're fighting really hard on this issue.

I don't know if I got to exactly what you were asking me.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Sure. Obviously, Montreal is well served; however, there are other areas outside Montreal that are not well served at all and they don't have any institutions, even though they're anglophone.

I think it depends on which region we're looking at.

Mr. Carol Jolin: We have the same problem in Ontario. In the larger cities, it's easier to see that the French services are there, but we have 26 designated areas that serve about 80% of our francophone population. That means that 20% of our francophone population don't even have those services. There's still a lot of work to do, and that's why we're working to have not only 26 designated areas, but only one big one in Ontario.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Across the country we have lots of work to do—

Mr. Carol Jolin: I agree with you.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: —to protect minority language groups. I know that the QCGN is a big supporter of yours as well. They're on the same page and they would like to do as much as they can to help your cause. And for the anglophone community in Quebec, it's the same across the board.

Is there anything more that they can do to help support you in this fight?

Mr. Carol Jolin: First, I really appreciate the way they've been supporting us so far. They were at one of our press conferences, and they drove to Ottawa to support us. The organization, or their members, can write letters to our government, to the Government of Quebec; and we have the support of the Quebec government as well. This has been very important because having the support of the whole community—francophones and anglophones in Quebec—puts a lot of pressure on our government. We have to maintain that pressure in all kinds of ways that we can.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

I'd like to make a comment. Several people have already told us about ways to strengthen our language legislation. One witness even suggested in the past that we should impose a minimum threshold of two-thirds of the votes required to amend or repeal a law. This is an example of the possibilities that have already been discussed. If you have any other ideas for strengthening our language legislation in Canada, feel free to share them with us.

• (0945)

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would offer an answer to the question.

Mr. Jolin, you said something that will stay with me all my life and that could help to get your arguments accepted. You said—and I think I'm quoting you—that Quebec had the government to defend its institutions, but Ontario relied on its institutions to defend the Francophonie. This is an extremely strong argument. We can only dream.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Jolin, do you have any final comments?

Mr. Carol Jolin: We will get back to you about the work to be done on the Official Languages Act, which is being done under the auspices of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne. We will have the opportunity to get back to you on this subject. We have several suggestions for you about the work that needs to be done.

Thank you for having me here today. What is important for us is to move this issue forward. The university exists, and we must continue the work.

One of my concerns is the financial aspect. The university has funds until January 15; it is important to note this. I was saying earlier that the federal government can exercise leadership by ensuring that the current Governance Council can continue its work beyond January 15 and that the issue will continue to progress so that the university is ready to welcome students, we hope, on September 1, 2020.

The Chair: On behalf of all my colleagues, thank you very much for your excellent presentation.

Mr. Carol Jolin: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

• (0945)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (0950)

The Chair: We're resuming the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing the study on the state of Canada's Francophonie.

During this second hour, we have the pleasure of welcoming Normand Labrie, Interim President, and Florence Ngenzebuhoro, a member of the Governance Council, both from the Université de l'Ontario français.

Welcome.

You know how this goes. You have about 10 minutes for your presentation, then there will be a round table during which my colleagues will ask questions and make comments.

Mr. Labrie, you have the floor.

Mr. Normand Labrie (Interim President, Université de l'Ontario français): All right.

Good morning, everyone.

Mr. Chair, Vice-Chairs and members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you for welcoming us. We are very pleased to have the opportunity this morning to come and speak to you in greater detail about the Université de l'Ontario français, the UOF, and its current needs.

For more than 40 years, hundreds of people, if not thousands, have worked hard to ensure that Ontario has a French-language university. Well, we now have in Ontario a new institution called the Université de l'Ontario français, an institution that is vital for francophone communities, for Ontario as a whole, and for the entire country. This institution was created by the Université de l'Ontario français Act, 2017. This Act gives the UOF a provincial mission that we intend to fulfill as a multi-campus university through affiliations with other postsecondary institutions that offer French-language programs in various regions across the province, as well as through any other form of partnership with these institutions.

The first campus is planned for Toronto, but the Université de Hearst has expressed interest in affiliating with the UOF, and the universities of Saint Paul and Sudbury have also expressed interest in considering some form of association or affiliation. A plan for a feasibility study has been proposed to this end.

Our university will be a magnet for francophones in Central—Southwestern Ontario, who suffer from a glaring lack of post-secondary education in French, all while French-language education at the primary and secondary school levels is growing rapidly—the president of the AFO mentioned this earlier and provided supporting figures—and is known for its excellence.

And, if I may add, French immersion programs are extremely popular with families of all linguistic backgrounds. Central-Southwestern Ontario, which already accounts for one-third of Canada's population, is experiencing the highest population growth through immigration and inter- and intra-provincial labour mobility. This region will soon represent half of the province's Francophone population.

Moreover, the region is a major centre for innovation and economic development at the national and international levels. In these few words alone, I am sure you already understand all the potential that comes with creating this new French-language university in Toronto, a university that is not only designed in sync with its time, but that also anticipates the future needs of young people and employers.

Over the past year, we have made considerable efforts to establish the conditions required to open the UOF in September 2020. Indeed, just this past November 21st, we published on our website the report of our first year of operation, of which you have a copy. While much work remains to be done by 2020, we are confident of the project's success.

According to our forecasts, the Université de l'Ontario français will begin with a cohort of 300 students, full-time equivalents, in 2020, reaching about 2,000 students ten years later. Therefore, by 2030, the UOF will reach the size of Bishop's University, the smallest of the three English-language universities in Quebec, after McGill and Concordia, which together total more than 60,000 students, full-time equivalents, enrolled in English-language programs, of which there are more than 10,000 Canadian students from other provinces and more than 12,000 international students.

While every other university grapples with the challenges of adapting to the new conditions of the contemporary world, such as globalization, human migration, cultural diversity, or digital transformations, the UOF has the privilege of starting out from scratch and distinguishing itself from traditional universities.

Created in the 21st century, the UOF has no history except for that of the political project carried out over more than 40 years by the Francophone communities who claim their own institution, governed by and for Francophones. It has no liabilities. It can therefore develop into a forward-thinking institution that can serve as a model for other universities in Ontario, as well as elsewhere in the country and around the world. It is a unique opportunity.

The UOF has designed its academic programming around three major components.

The first and most distinctive component of the UOF is a set of four transdisciplinary academic programs, specialized bachelor's programs that were developed and submitted to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities on October 1st last.

- (0955)

These programs are not limited to the traditional disciplines normally offered at today's universities. Instead they deal with objects of study that are crucially important problems for society today and that requires contributions from multiple disciplines. We need to have a clear understanding of those problems. The content of these programs has been selected based on the objects of study rather

than disciplines and on issues that face our society and that builds on the strengths of the Toronto region, such as human plurality, urban environments, the globalized economy, and digital cultures.

Those are the first programs, in which students will be encouraged to develop the skills they need to understand and analyze those problems, develop a critical approach, imagine appropriate means of intervention and improve human conditions in those sectors.

Our programming includes a second component focusing on professional programs, such as education, social work, law, and health sciences. These programs will be selected to meet the most pressing needs of Francophone communities. Since most of these programs are accredited by professional orders, it takes more time and effort to have them approved. We intend to make them available in collaboration with partner universities that already offer them and that may do so at our university in French, in partnership with us on our Toronto campus.

The first of these programs will be an alternative, part-time bachelor's degree in education, for those who hold another bachelor's degree, and will also be available to teachers who practise by means of a letter of permission until they can earn their qualifications. This program will enable them to continue working while they study on a part-time basis to acquire the qualifications they need and will thus help remedy the shortage of French-language teachers in Ontario.

The third component focuses on students enrolled in English-language institutions in the region. Of the thousands of students at the 13 universities in Central—Southwestern Ontario whose first language is French, more than 3,000 are enrolled in pharmacology, engineering and computer science. Under reciprocal agreements with nearby universities, we want to enable those students to come and take elective courses in French at the UOF, thereby retaining their language while they pursue a four-year bachelor's degree in English. We will offer them courses with French content so they can improve their language skills for professional or university purposes and feel comfortable using their language when they leave the university. Even if they have studied in English, they will be professionals who are capable of functioning in French when working in the region's Francophone communities.

What also differentiates the UOF from other universities is its pedagogical approach. Pedagogy is very important for our university, and we have adopted an approach that is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge but rather a highly inductive approach in which we take objects of study and work together with professors, other students, the community, society and employers to develop ways of directly observing those problems and reality and find conceptual, theoretical, methodological and professional explanations that we can use to address and solve those problems.

We have adopted a pedagogy that is based on collaboration among students, faculty and society at large and that is based to a large extent on digital technology. We want to offer our programs in co-modality, in other words, in person but also on online platforms that give students the option of participating wherever they may be: on an internship, in the workplace or outdoors.

We have adopted an experiential pedagogy that enables students to acquire experience in the workplace throughout their academic program. This aspect is very important. All the studies show that students who follow this kind of curriculum find jobs upon completion of their university studies. This will also be done thanks in part to an innovative initiative that we proposed and that resulted in the creation of the Francophone Hub of Knowledge and Innovation, which will involve some 15 Francophone organizations across the Toronto region, including Groupe Média TFO, which has 220 employees, and the Centre francophone de Toronto, directed by Mrs. Ngenzebuhoro, which provides health and social services, legal services and immigration assistance.

As a result, some 15 organizations will set up at the university on its permanent campus, where they will help create a Francophone living environment in Toronto while becoming an integral part of UOF's academic mission. We won't be just sharing premises. This form of partnership will be part of the UOF's academic mission in Toronto, where students may complete internships and find jobs.

● (1000)

These organizations will definitely evolve in a constant and positive way in contact with our students and academic research. At the same time, the University will remain in contact with the community throughout its development, which will definitely encourage it to develop in the right direction.

One of these hub partners, the Centre francophone de Toronto, is well positioned to offer services to UOF students in its areas of expertise, which include immigration services for international students, housing, health services, social services, legal advice, etc.

In designing the UOF, we drew on prominent studies from leading organizations such as the OECD, the Conference Board of Canada and the Royal Bank of Canada, among others, all of whom agree that university education must be transformed to adapt to the world of the 21st century. We have a duty to prepare future generations for a society and a labour market that are undergoing profound change. That's the approach we adopted when we designed our programs.

We also drew on some of the best new universities in the world: for example, Quest University in British Columbia, a private university created in 2007 with tuition fees as high as \$35,000. We at the UOF want to offer an education of equal quality but in a public institution that is accessible to all, regardless of one's financial capacity.

We were also inspired by the University of Bozen-Bolzano, created twenty years ago for the German linguistic minority of Northern Italy, which is ranked among the ten best small universities in the world. Furthermore, we were inspired by Azim Premji University in India, created in 2012 thanks to the generosity of billionaire Azim Premji, who donated his fortune to create a model university to raise the standards of education in his country.

● (1005)

The Chair: Since time is short, I would ask you please to summarize the rest of your presentation. In fact, I suggest that you do so as you answer questions from members of the committee.

I turn the floor over to Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Right off the bat, I'd like to tell you that the Université de l'Ontario français project is in very good hands because its executive officer is from Bellechasse. That's a guarantee of the project's success right there.

Mr. Normand Labrie: There are some good people in Bellechasse.

Mr. René Arseneault: Some good people come from there. We're pleased to see that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Labrie, your institution stands at the top of the education pyramid. We've talked about various academic institutions. Some, like the Université de Hearst, are francophone, and others are bilingual. However, you are really the founder of a university designed for French-speaking Ontario by members of the francophone community.

I would nevertheless offer one criticism. I think the enrolment projections for your university are very conservative. You mentioned 200 enrolments, a number that could rise to 300 in 2020. I think the number could be much larger because your project's so exciting.

As regards the programs you offer, you explained that you didn't want to create a university in the usual sense of that term but that you were aiming more for a transdisciplinary niche. In your presentation, you also mentioned the communities' needs for education, social services and health services. Could you explain to us how your university will stand out in the postsecondary education sector?

Could you also go back over Mr. Jolin's remarks on the AFO's place in the consultations conducted by members of the Franco-Ontarian community?

Mr. Normand Labrie: Thank you very much for your question.

Two years ago, when we started planning the university, we had to bear in mind that the funding framework would be different. The university funding framework established in Ontario is based on differentiation, not on duplication of supply. We had that in mind at the outset.

Some people in the francophone community definitely would've liked to have a university equivalent to McGill University operating in French in Toronto. However, McGill University has an annual operating budget of more than \$500 million. We couldn't work on that basis. We had to do it progressively.

We're striving for excellence. We're in an academic ecosystem characterized by excellence, where existing universities are world class in that regard. If our francophone university proved to be of poor quality, we wouldn't have any students. We had to join that network of excellence.

We therefore designed a small university that would grow with time. Bill 177 enables us to design programs in all fields, and we can do that, but we have to start somewhere. We thought of bachelor's degree programs that are offered at other universities. Having regard to the existing market, we targeted a specific niche we could build on.

The planning council consulted 300 persons throughout the province and across the country for 6 months and continues to do so. A student council is working with us, and some 30 volunteers signed up on our website to help us.

To develop our programs, we recruited some 100 consultants, who are among the best university professors in their fields in Canada.

• (1010)

Hon. Steven Blaney: It's a special excellence niche. As you mentioned, Ontario's university environment includes some highly reputed universities. It's reassuring to see you've adopted that niche.

The sector is currently booming. We have to admit that the financial situation of any project is often difficult, but there are some possibilities here. In recent weeks, I have taken a closer look at your plan. I was in the streets of Quebec City on Sunday. As they often say, where your heart goes, there goes your money.

Mr. Labrie, have you considered creating a foundation? There's talk of a financial arrangement. This morning the representatives of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario told us the federal government had said it was willing to provide start-up capital for the first four years. Talks on the subject are also under way on the Ontario side.

Are there any other funding sources that could be used to start setting up the UOF? I'm thinking of patronage. My colleague Mr. Généreux cited the example of Bishop's University, which you referred to. That university has a long tradition, of course, but it has nevertheless raised \$40 million.

We believe in this project, but how can we support it? Are there any funding initiatives in sight?

Mr. Normand Labrie: That's in our documents. The board of governors was established in April, and we've only been able to use our bank accounts since May. We've also requested a charitable registration number from the Canada Revenue Agency, but that process takes several months and the registration number isn't automatically assigned. However, we believe we'll soon be able to conduct a fundraising campaign to support the university.

In the meantime, since we can't yet do it, we're trying to see whether other foundations with academic missions similar to ours might work with us to raise funding for the Université de l'Ontario français.

Hon. Steven Blaney: You can count on my support. I have my cheque book in my briefcase. Keep me informed.

Mr. Normand Labrie: I'm going to go right around the table before I leave.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Now we turn the floor over to Mrs. Fortier.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I'm very proud to see you here today, and I'm glad we can have this conversation, which is so important for our communities.

That reminds me that the Franco-Ontarian community has been interested in the education continuum from early childhood to the postsecondary level for a very long time. The French-language university project in Toronto is of course part of that continuum.

What's happening is not just a direct attack on the Université de l'Ontario français; it's also an attack on all postsecondary programs currently offered by several colleges and universities in Ontario.

That's the subject I wanted to address with you today. It's important to train not only young people—we know that—but also adults. With respect to immigration, we've expressed the intention to welcome a certain percentage of francophone immigrants, particularly in Toronto. However, access to French-language training would be crucially important in that it could help encourage immigrants to settle and work in French in the Toronto area.

So there's this frontal attack on the Université de l'Ontario français, but it goes beyond that institution. I'm thinking, in particular, of postsecondary education institutions. How do you think we can protect the postsecondary programs that are offered in French across the province?

Mr. Normand Labrie: Our project is actually inclusive. We conduct a lot of consultations and we decided at the outset to establish partnerships. We intend to offer a variety of programs. I talked specifically about the alternative bachelor's degree in education, which we could offer in partnership with other universities that offer courses or programs in French. The program could be offered on an alternating basis at various institutions in Toronto, Hearst or Ottawa. We could also offer them on a co-modal basis, by which I mean we could allow students from elsewhere to enroll in our programs.

In the longer term, I would note that the legislation gives us a provincial mission. Our first campus will be located in Toronto, but we hope to create affiliations and partnerships with other existing universities. In law or social work, for example, we've had discussions with the University of Ottawa in recent months in the hope that those programs accredited by a professional association can be offered in French in Toronto. Some mechanisms like these require that we be able to rely on partnerships. I think that's essential.

•(1015)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Before being appointed to this committee in September, I had the privilege of sitting on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities as part of an exchange program. That committee conducted a study on experiential learning for young Canadians enrolled in postsecondary studies. This is a very important issue for entrepreneurs, who want to hire students while they're studying. You briefly talked about this earlier. Would you please give us your views on the subject?

I see Mrs. Ngenzebuhoro would like to answer.

Mr. Normand Labrie: I'll start and then I'll turn the floor over to her. I simply want to note that we worked on this subject in cooperation with a team of Canadian experts, including Cara Krezek from Brock University. She's the director of the Co-op, Career and Experiential Education organization, and she helped us design our project.

All our students will follow an experience-based approach and will complete work terms during their studies. We know from our current knowledge base that this is a very important way of viewing education. Consequently, we've made it a central element of our university's pedagogical approach.

I'm going to let Mrs. Ngenzebuhoro continue.

Mrs. Florence Ngenzebuhoro (Member of the Governance Council, Université de l'Ontario français): Thank you for your question, Mrs. Fortier.

I'm the executive director of the Centre francophone de Toronto, which is the largest multi-service centre in Ontario. We provide many services in areas such as mental health and immigration. However, we're constantly short of personnel. Many of the people who work in our organization are foreign graduates in medicine, social work and nursing. They are francophones who have settled in Toronto but who don't have the necessary credentials to work in their professions in Canada. We were relying on the university to help us remedy this critical labour shortage in Toronto.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: I want to continue along the same lines.

From what I understand, that investment won't be used solely to provide study programs. It's an investment that will economically benefit the province, indeed the country. It has to be shown that it will create both jobs at the university and employment opportunities for graduates at the end of their programs of study.

How do you think that assistance will help newcomers enter Canada's labour market?

Mr. Normand Labrie: On October 1st last, we filed program creation requests with the ministry. We have to establish academic and administrative policies to get those requests approved. We've begun to define our academic policies. We want the university to be open, and we don't want any barriers to entry for the students, particularly those who may have followed a somewhat different curriculum.

We've already prepared a draft policy on the recognition of credentials, admission policies and academic standards that student applicants must meet to enter the university. It's these kinds of

policies that demonstrate the university's openness or lack thereof. Once we had designed our policies, we took into account the need to demonstrate openness and the needs of the region, society and francophones.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Fortier.

I now turn the floor over to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Labrie, thank you for your presentation, which was very informative and instructive.

We've talked a lot about programs of study, but now I'd like to address the funding issue.

We briefly discussed it outside, before the meeting, but I'd like you to describe your current financial position. How much money does the university need until 2020 so it can begin operations?

•(1020)

Mr. Normand Labrie: We had anticipated operating budgets of \$8 million for the 2018-2019 fiscal year and \$12.5 million for 2019-2020.

The first instalment of \$1.5 million for fiscal 2018-2019 has been paid, but the balance is still outstanding. So once the transferred funds have been used, and after we pay salaries and rent to January 15, we'll have about \$60,000 left.

Mr. François Choquette: What will happen to the Université de l'Ontario français project if you run out of money on January 15 and the federal government hasn't reached an agreement with the Ontario government to save the situation?

The Université de l'Ontario français is already established. It's as though we've poured the foundation of a house and started to raise the walls but then stopped everything, with the house half-built, to save money. It makes no sense.

Can you explain to us what will happen? What will happen to the half-built house?

Mr. Normand Labrie: We'll need funding to continue after January 15. This undertaking has undeniable momentum. If we stop everything for three years, let's say, that momentum will die. One hundred of the best consultants in the country and the world helped us design the programs we submitted. A lot of energy went into creating those programs so they could be among the best in the academic community, given the current state of the world, and they will definitely improve over time. It's a bit like a cake that's taken out of the oven too soon and collapses. If we stop the project, we won't be able to restore it to the level of quality we have today.

This university project has gained the trust of the best people in the country and around the world. I went to France to attend a conference two weeks ago. Representatives from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France's great engineering school CentraleSupélec and the Conférence des présidents d'université de France expressed considerable interest in our project. Those people were completely fascinated. They told us that a project this innovative and representative of academic reality today couldn't be introduced in France.

If the project were terminated or suspended for three years, I think all that confidence would vanish as well. If its funding were stopped, the Université de l'Ontario français itself would lose a lot and the francophone communities would as well.

Mr. François Choquette: Yesterday, Minister Joly testified before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages and said she had been asked about funding arrangements for the Université de l'Ontario français. She answered as follows:

Let me enlighten you. If there is one issue where we are certainly in a position to co-operate with the provinces, it is in the funding of school infrastructure. The Official Languages Branch has increased its funding envelopes considerably under the action plan. Whenever a province submits a project to us, whether it concerns early childhood, the primary, secondary or even the university level, that can be funded up to a 50% ceiling by the federal government.

In the wake of what we heard from the AFO, do you agree we're no longer really waiting for the Ontario government to take the first step. Instead we're expecting the federal government to request an emergency meeting with the Ontario government to propose that it fund up to 50% of the project and to discuss terms and conditions, who will fund the first four years of operations and who the last four.

This is urgent. January 15 is almost tomorrow. This must be done without delay.

This is the Standing Committee on Official Languages, at the federal level. What do you expect from the federal government?

Mr. Normand Labrie: We think the ideal situation would be for the two levels of government to agree today, as we speak, to work together to find a solution. We think there is one and that it would be optimal for both parties.

We acknowledge that the deficit must be reduced, and we agree on that subject. We're prepared to make an effort, but it's not up to us to start negotiations between the two levels of government. However, we sincerely hope those negotiations are undertaken immediately so a solution can be reached before January 15.

Mr. François Choquette: What would happen to the programs? You've already developed and submitted them, and they're now in the hands of the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Will they be approved or set aside? What will happen to those programs regardless of the direction the project takes?

● (1025)

Mr. Normand Labrie: I slightly shortened my remarks earlier, but I'd like to point out that five conditions must be met before we can open our doors in 2020. One of them is that our programs must be approved.

They were forwarded to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities on October 1st. At that stage, the ministry has the power to examine the programs and forward them to the organization that will evaluate them, which in fact commissions a peer review. As far as I know, that hasn't been done yet. The programs file is sitting on the minister's desk. She must first approve the budget for providing those programs before forwarding the file to the organization, which is called the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, or PEQAB.

Work will start once that's done and will be spread over several months. It could take 8 to 12 months. A panel of international experts will review the quality of the programs and, more particularly, seek to determine whether there's really a need in the sector that warrants their introduction.

Mr. François Choquette: It's absolutely urgent. The two levels of government must agree or else the programs won't be in place on time.

Mr. Normand Labrie: If they aren't approved by early summer, we won't be able to promote them. As a result, students in their last year of high school won't be aware of them and won't have an opportunity to register for those programs in 2020.

That's very important for us. The file's sitting on the minister's desk. We hope it will be quickly forwarded to the PEQAB for peer review.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

We now turn the floor over to Mr. Rioux, member for the riding of Saint-Jean.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased to welcome you, madam and sir.

The founding of the Université de l'Ontario français is a beautiful project.

We've just experienced the return of university education to the riding of Saint-Jean, at the Royal Military College Saint-Jean.

Linguistic duality is part of our identity in Canada. When people attack it, and that's what's happened to the Université de l'Ontario français, they attack our Canadian identity.

According to Statistics Canada, there are 622,000 francophones in Ontario. Less than 50% of people who have studied in French at the secondary level continue their education in French. If we want to ensure the survival of the French fact in Ontario, as well as in Quebec, we must act. As I've always said, the development of the French fact outside Quebec guarantees our survival and vice versa. If the francophonie has a strong home base, that will help you survive.

I have two questions for you. You'll have all the time you want to answer them.

As I just mentioned, there are 622,000 francophones in Ontario. How many of that number could the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto attract?

What are the five conditions that must be met for the university to open its doors in 2020? You mentioned them earlier. Would you please provide us with more details?

Mr. Normand Labrie: Thank you very much.

As I mentioned a little earlier, it will be a university of modest size when it starts up so we can maintain a level of excellence. We intend to increase the student body to 2,000 after 10 years of operation, and we'll continue to grow thereafter. The current population of the central—southwestern region is almost equal to the francophone population of New Brunswick, which is 240,000 inhabitants. So there's room for an even larger university. However, we intend to grow gradually.

We have to meet certain conditions.

First, as I just mentioned, there's the issue of the programs we've submitted. If they aren't reviewed very quickly, imminently, that will compromise the university's opening in 2020, or at least the bachelor's degree programs it offers.

The second condition concerns the appointment of members to our board of governors, which was done by regulation. Two conditions originally had to be met for the board of governors to go from temporary to permanent status. First, the board had to adopt administrative by-laws, which it did in September. Second, an employee had to sit on the board. I've been that employee in my capacity as interim president since October 1st. So we've met those two original conditions. Five new conditions were added on July 18. The university is required to develop and approve administrative policies, more specifically, an executive compensation plan, an access to information policy and a policy on sexual violence. Those conditions are in the process of being met as we speak.

To meet the third condition, we negotiated a lease with the Daniels construction company, on very favourable conditions, on offices in downtown Toronto. Our location is in the innovation corridor, which really makes it ideal for this kind of 21st century university. We had to meet certain parameters. We had to be located near public transit, more particularly the metro. We also had to be close to our partner universities in Toronto: the University of Toronto, Ryerson University and the Ontario College of Art and Design. We found a place that will be available in January 2020, and we'll be able to start fitting up the interior for our opening in September 2020. The real estate market is highly competitive, and we secured favourable conditions in accordance with Treasury Board instructions. George Brown College and the Ontario School of Art and Design will also have facilities on those premises. It's an ideal site for this university. We signed an agreement on July 18. Since then, we've been waiting for the Ontario government's authorization to sign the lease. Yesterday, we received a letter from the Daniels company informing us that it would renew its offer until January 18, 2019. We've lost our exclusive arrangement as a result of all the delays we've experienced. Daniels is now negotiating with other potential tenants but will honour the same conditions for us until January 18.

The fourth condition concerns start-up funding. We already discussed that this morning. We need \$84 million in start-up funding for the first eight years. The federal and provincial governments will contribute in equal parts. I won't go back over the amounts we've received to date since we discussed them earlier.

As for the fifth condition, we mentioned that we'll have no further funding as of January 15. We'll have to find some after that date.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rioux.

We will now continue with Paul Lefebvre for four minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the members of the committee for allowing me to sit with them and ask questions.

Thanks to the witnesses who are here with us.

First of all, allow me to provide a bit of history. My mother holds a bachelor's degree in social work from the Université de Hearst, which is affiliated with Laurentian University, as is the University of Sudbury. Your affiliation or federation plan is very interesting. It's sort of what people wanted: a kind of campus or satellite university.

My first question is a practical one, further to that of Mr. Choquette, and concerns the January 15 date and what would happen afterwards.

Let's say the federal government responds to your request and gives you 50% of the required amount, which is \$8 million this year. Since you said you've already received \$1.5 million, there would be a serious shortfall. Next year, in 2019-2020, you'd need \$12 million, and the federal contribution would be \$6 million. Suppose the federal government contributes up to 50% of the amount over the next four years. Could the project nevertheless advance without the province making a contribution?

Would that be tantamount to letting the province off the hook so it might respond by saying that the federal government need only provide its full contribution? What does that mean for you?

Mr. Normand Labrie: If the funding is granted and we can continue our operations, we'll stay the course and be able to offer our programs gradually. As I mentioned, the bachelor's degree programs we submitted to the ministry must be approved over the next few months so we can offer them in September 2020.

We're working on a certificate in the pedagogy of postsecondary education. Many university and college professors have no pedagogical training. The current trend is toward experiential pedagogy through skills acquisition. The Cité collégiale supports that approach and has 1,000 trainers who have to adapt to this new way of doing things. We have a plan, and the program is already developed on paper. So we could start offering it in summer 2019.

We already have a supply of programs in place. We have the authority to issue degrees, without going through the approval organizations, for the bachelor-level programs we have proposed. Consequently, we could open in 2020 and start by offering degrees in those fields.

We'll be able to start teaching and to begin scientific and academic activities as soon as we have the necessary resources.

• (1035)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: You mentioned that you had until January 18 to sign the university's lease but that you no longer had exclusive access to the site. If you don't sign, you may have to find another location. What's your plan B?

Mr. Normand Labrie: Several months ago, we took steps to identify Toronto locations that were available and met our parameters. Infrastructure Ontario and the Avison Young commercial real estate company looked at provincial properties available in the Toronto area. Based on their analysis, the selected site was the only one that could be operational by September 2020, in addition to being the only one zoned for educational purposes. It takes a long time to process any application for zoning changes. So the site's ideal for us.

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

Mr. G n reux, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Labrie, am I right in thinking this institution can still be established since the Universit  de l'Ontario fran ais Act, 2017 hasn't been repealed?

Mr. Normand Labrie: You're entirely right. We're delighted the government elected not to repeal the act in the budget statement.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: That leads me to believe that the government's intention wasn't to completely abolish the university but rather to postpone its introduction.

Earlier you talked about favourable circumstances. Here you have a fantastic and extraordinary chance, and I hope you'll seize it. From what I understand, we're talking about approximately \$80 million in funding over a period of 10 years. If the federal government is prepared to invest \$40 million, then you'll have to come up with another \$40 million. Have you considered raising \$35 million from the private sector? Over 10 years, that would mean \$3.5 million a year, a paltry amount. We discussed that earlier with Mr. Jolin. To get yourselves out of this crisis, you could tell the provincial government it would only have to provide \$5 million over the next 10 years—that's \$500,000 a year—and the project would be on its way.

I think Ontario has made a misguided decision that will truly undermine the project, but I think we can solve the problem. I did an online search on donations received by Bishop's University, in Sherbrooke, and I saw on its fundraising page that it had raised \$40 million from 2012 to 2018, in addition to the \$5 million in annual donations it receives. It has collected \$60 million on its own, even though it's a small university.

I think you have an extraordinary chance here. Go and see Ms. Meilleur, the former Ontario Minister of Francophone Affairs, and ask her to head up your fundraising campaign. I guarantee you'll collect \$3.5 million in three days. I can give you \$100 right now. Wait a minute; I'll see what I have in my pocket.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I'm going to pass the hat with Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I'm sure you could go around the table and collect \$1,000 right now.

The federal and provincial governments hold the keys you need. One of those keys is to accredit you quickly, not in six months, so you can issue tax receipts. That's the least the government can do. Here's tangible and immediate action that can be taken. Don't ask the Ontario government to give you money; just ask it to let you issue

tax receipts. I can't believe they'll deny you that. These are things that can be done right now.

I got an arena built when I was mayor of La Pocati re. On January 1st, 2007, I had no idea how I was going to raise \$1 million, which was the private fundraising goal we had set for ourselves. On February 14, I and two other guys named Bernard, who were honorary presidents like I was, kicked off the "Un amour de projet" fundraising campaign with the Club des cent, which consisted of 100 mothers and grandmothers. We raised \$1 million in six weeks in a town of 5,000 inhabitants.

When I talk about the momentum I see right now, I'm talking about momentum all across Canada. There are 622,000 francophone citizens in Ontario, but there are millions of francophones and francophiles in Canada. So we can do it. Quebecers are ready and would be enormously pleased to take part in your project.

I'll tell you one thing: don't miss this opportunity. It's here, and now's the time to move quickly. I'm convinced that, in three days, the federal government could take the necessary steps so you could issue tax receipts. You have to take advantage of the opportunity to raise money. That will help both the Universit  de l'Ontario fran ais and the francophonie of Ontario. It will definitely tell you whether Doug Ford's government resents the francophonie or the university. There's a serious problem if it can't even invest \$5 million over 10 years.

• (1040)

Mr. Fran ois Choquette: There is one.

Mr. Normand Labrie: Thank you very much for those comments.

Yes, as a university, we can solicit large donations. That's certainly the approach we'll take.

Under federal-provincial agreements, there has to be a provincial commitment, depending on the nature of the program, and the 50% contribution must come from public funds.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: That's why I say the province's share of the funding could be allocated between the province and the private sector. I don't know whether the conditions set by the federal government allow it, but I think that would be a very quick and effective solution.

Mr. Normand Labrie: Universities elsewhere in the country have said they want to help us open in 2020 and have offered us free administrative services and courses in our fields of study. That offer's on the table.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Here's a cheque for \$100. That's my contribution.

Mr. Normand Labrie: Thank you very much. I hope I'll be able to cash it.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Don't worry; the funds are there.

The Chair: Oh! We have a first cheque.

Mr. Normand Labrie: We're currently working with the Université Laval and the Université de Montréal, which have made very generous offers to help us start up in 2020. We're also receiving gifts in kind.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Mr. Arseneault, you have four minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm going to try to share my four minutes with Mr. Samson, who is so generous in that regard. I'll try to be as brief as possible.

I prepared over the weekend. We receive documents from the analyst that we can use to prepare for witnesses, and that includes you today. I'm sure there is one, but I haven't heard of any economic argument on the impact of a university in Toronto. I come from New Brunswick, I did all my university studies in Moncton, and I know very well that a university has a gigantic economic impact on a city.

I'm sure you've done that study on positive impact. In 30 seconds, do you have any figures for us?

Mr. Normand Labrie: I don't have any figures for you. In recent months, we've wanted to conduct that kind of study, but it wasn't possible, partly because of the budget restrictions we saw coming.

However, I can tell you that a study recently conducted by the Université du Québec network shows that every dollar invested in a university generates nine dollars in society. There are figures like that.

There's also the example of the Université de Moncton, which has helped structure New Brunswick's economy and develop the Acadian communities.

There are a lot of models like that. The same phenomenon that occurred in Acadie happened in Corte, in Corsica. The founding of the Université de Corse 40 years ago completely altered the region's economy.

Mr. René Arseneault: We don't have to reinvent the wheel. We mentioned little Bishop's University earlier. There's also the Université de Saint-Boniface, in Manitoba, the three campuses of the Université de Moncton and the Université Sainte-Anne, in Nova Scotia. All those examples could help you calculate specifically and objectively the economic impact of your institution. I'm sure the Ford government would find that economic impact on Toronto much greater than the minor contribution you're asking it to make over the next 10 years.

Mr. Normand Labrie: You're entirely right.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm going to give the rest of my speaking time to Mr. Samson, but, before I do, even though we said there's never be any partisanship on this committee, I'm nevertheless going to leave you with two expressions from the time of Molière, whom I adore. The first is "On n'y voit que du bleu," meaning "We're letting ourselves be fooled," but we aren't fooled by Mr. Ford's argument. Consequently, and here's the second, "tirer à boulets rouges": keep attacking with all guns blazing.

I now turn the floor over to my colleague.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Mr. Généreux' suggestion or strategy of fundraising in the private sector isn't a bad one in principle. However, he doesn't really seem to understand the reality of a minority society that, unlike the majority, has to raise funding for every one of its 100,000 projects, which is very complicated.

I'd like to explain an important point that some committee members referred to. It isn't impossible to obtain multi-year funding. You have to ask the federal government to pay for the first four years, then ask the province to pay for the next four years. It's feasible. For the past 10 years or so, Canadian Heritage has offered a multi-year funding formula, under which, about seven or eight years ago, I asked the federal government to provide 100% funding for the first year of a pre-kindergarten program for children four years of age, whereas the Nova Scotia government paid for the following year. We proceeded in that manner for seven or eight years. In the case of the university, the federal and provincial governments could definitely share funding for two, three or four years each.

I just wanted to tell you about that example so it appears in the record of this meeting. Thank you.

• (1045)

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

On behalf of all my colleagues, thanks to all the witnesses for their excellent presentations, which I found very helpful.

Good luck to you. Let's continue and not let...

Do you have a question, Mr. Choquette?

Mr. François Choquette: Could we take 5 or 10 minutes after the meeting on Thursday to talk about what we want to do with this special study? January 15 is fast approaching. Does the committee want to send a letter to the ministers? What specifically do we want to do as a committee? Can we take a little time to talk about it on Thursday?

The Chair: Yes, definitely.

Mr. François Choquette: It would be just a few minutes; we don't want to take anything away from the witnesses.

The Chair: We've already confirmed that two panels of witnesses will be here for that meeting. That being said, you're right, we could take 10 minutes or so to decide whether we'll prepare a report solely on this crisis that we are discussing or whether we'll include it in a more comprehensive report as part of our current study on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. François Choquette: We should agree on specific action, such as a letter from the committee to our federal government ministers, of course, but also to certain provincial ministers, inviting them to sit down together.

The Chair: That's an excellent idea.

Mr. Blaney, do you wish to add anything on the subject?

Hon. Steven Blaney: In view of the witnesses who'll be appearing, perhaps we should plan for a longer meeting at another time because I think Mr. Choquette has a valid idea.

The Chair: All right.

Once again, thanks very much to the witnesses for your presentations.

Mr. Normand Labrie: On behalf of the Université de l'Ontario français and all the generations of students who will pass through its doors in the coming decades, I say thank you very much.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. We will see each other again on Thursday.

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