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The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are continuing our study of the state of Canada's Francophonie.

It is my pleasure to welcome Dyane Adam, chair of the board of governors of the Université de l'Ontario français. Ms. Adam joins us by videoconference.

Welcome, Ms. Adam.

As I mentioned, a vote is scheduled for about 11:50 a.m. So we will have half an hour and then we will suspend the meeting in order to go and vote. You may start immediately, Ms. Adam, we are all ears.

Ms. Dyane Adam (Chair, Board of Governors, Université de l'Ontario français): First of all, thank you for inviting me again to appear before your committee.

I had anticipated that my presentation would be short. As we only have half an hour, I would like to leave more time for members of the committee to ask questions. I will try to shorten my presentation a little, which was intended to be short in any event.

A lot of water has gone under the bridge, in fact, since I last appeared in December. I would like to answer two questions today.

The first is: what is the situation with the Université de l'Ontario français, the UOF? Thanks to the support of the federal government and to funding granted last January for project development for the Carrefour francophone du savoir et de l'innovation, we have successfully done a number of things. I would like to point out some of them.

First, we have been able to maintain and enhance our team, continue our activities and start work on one of our major sites, specifically the Carrefour project, which is essentially the university's permanent campus. We are re-examining our business model in the light of the current government priorities of the province of Ontario. We have started an ongoing conversation with the key players in all orders of government.

Following a request for qualifications, we have found a private-sector partner that is able and willing to participate in the real estate activities of the Carrefour. We have identified locations, properties of interest to the UOF in Toronto, that various orders of government have available. I will come back to that later.

Starting this summer, we are going to launch a summer school with the help of fifteen or so partners in the Carrefour. This will lay the groundwork for a common understanding and an implementation model for the knowledge that the Carrefour will prioritize. Remember that the Carrefour is not strictly a coming-together of francophone groups and institutions or of community groups. In the Carrefour, we are creating and implementing a unique, focused and cutting-edge model for pooling knowledge, practices, services and infrastructures so that we can make French-speaking Toronto and the surrounding region into a connected, unified, efficient and prosperous community.

Last week, we obtained the Canada Revenue Agency's designation as a registered charitable organization. As a result, we are working to seek out to diversified funding; more specifically, we will be launching a fund-raising campaign in the coming months. Of course, we will be continuing our work with our many partners in bilingual and French-language education, in Ontario and elsewhere in the country, looking for their help as expert advisers or in research, training and learning. In addition, some universities are contributing directly to the Université's training mission by lending us university staff, at no cost, for one year. This gives us time, as we work to get out of our current impasse. That is a sample of the advances we have made in recent months as we continue to get the UOF up and running.

The other question that I would like to discuss with you is about the positive measures that the federal government could take in the current situation to support the UOF and its many partners, in the light of Part VII of the Official Languages Act. Of course, Part VII takes its strength from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, especially section 16, which seeks to advance French and English in Canadian society by granting them equality of status and equal rights and privileges in their use.

The first aspect is the Carrefour's infrastructure. The federal government could find a property, or cooperate with other levels of government to find a property that would be suitable for housing the Carrefour. There are precedents for this. I could point out, for example, that the federal government contributed to the establishment of Royal Roads University in British Columbia, a public university supported by the province.

• (1105)

The federal government gave the university a long-term lease on converted military land for the price of one dollar per year. The federal government currently owns comparable properties in Toronto in which the UOF would be interested.

The federal government, of course, has other programs supporting research and innovation facilities in post-secondary institutions. There is the Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund, run by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. There is also the infrastructure projects component of the Development of Official Language Communities Program, run by Canadian Heritage. Also run by Canadian Heritage is the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, because the Carrefour has a strongly cultural dimension, including a theatre, the Groupe Média TFO, the university and Le LABO, all of which are organizations devoted to culture. Infrastructure Canada also has a social infrastructure component in its Investing in Canada Plan. That is one of the major levers that the federal government has through which to provide concrete support to the university and its many partners.

The second aspect is the fundraising campaign we are about to launch, as I mentioned. The government could provide matching funds up to a certain maximum. The federal government has often provided matching funds for various causes, including for refugees and for assistance after disasters. In the post-secondary field, there are also precedents such as the millennium scholarships, a federal program providing matching funds that was of great benefit to all post-secondary institutions at the time.

Funding and support for students could take the form of scholarships, or loans and scholarships. A number of them exist, targeting specific populations or those with specific needs. The same thing could be done for francophone students attending our institution. Our university is just getting underway; we therefore do not have the scholarship funds that a number of universities have been able to accumulate over decades. It is always a struggle for minority institutions that come on the scene much later; they have not had the advantage of the many government investments over decades and, in some cases, over centuries.

The third aspect is immigration. As a committee, you are well aware of this. It is a key factor by which official language minority communities develop and flourish. Ontario has set itself an objective of 5%. Since the end of August, the province has scarcely reached half of that target. It remains a challenge. For a minority community, immigration is essential. We need a highly qualified workforce to enrich us, to meet the needs for services, and, of course, to participate fully in the Canadian economy.

To reach our immigration targets, communities and governments must explore new ways of recruiting and retaining francophone immigrants in minority situations. We are discovering that foreign students are a major source of immigration. Statistics show that Ontario has about 60,000 foreign students and that 60% of them intend to apply for permanent resident status once their studies are complete. We can say with confidence that about 50% of foreign post-secondary students intend to settle permanently in Canada after their studies.

• (1110)

Given that Toronto is the country's destination of choice for newcomers and for a number of foreign students of all languages, the UOF, a university located right in downtown Toronto, and its partners in the Carrefour could become a major driver for the

recruitment of foreign students and, of course, for francophone immigration to Ontario and to the country.

We are becoming almost a living laboratory, experimenting with new ways of welcoming newcomers. The multi-service Centre francophone de Toronto already takes care of welcoming and integrating immigrants. They provide a whole host of services, including legal aid. By including the students that the university trains, they will help us to create a rich environment, a synergy, which, in our opinion, could make for a very interesting laboratory in which to experiment with matters of the recruitment and retention of francophone immigrants in Ontario.

I will stop there. I am ready to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adam.

Given the number of people who want to speak, and with an eye on the clock, I would like to tell committee members that they will have four minutes each.

I will be quite strict about those four minutes. That also includes the time for the answer.

Let's start with Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Adam.

I am very pleased that you are here with us today. The last time we saw you was in December, in the middle of a storm, a political storm, not a winter one. We are finally coming out of the winter.

I see that you are still full of will and full of hope. It's more than hope, I feel: you have pointed out a huge number of very interesting solutions.

And yes, the fact that you are here today, still Chair of your board of governors, has been made possible by the two million dollars that the federal government has contributed, and that's great.

You said that you are having ongoing conversations with all levels of government, which includes the government of the province of Ontario, of course. I gather that the Université de l'Ontario français Act, 2017 has not been repealed, I gather.

I would like to know two things.

First, how do provincial authorities see the existence of the UOF?

Second, between December and today, what was your last correspondence with the Government of Ontario? Perhaps there was more. What is it about? Basically, what does it say?

• (1115)

Ms. Dyane Adam: The first correspondence goes back to the beginning of January. At that time, the provincial government confirmed that the act was not repealed, and that the university, and the board of governors, continue to exist.

We are a university, therefore, and we have all the legal powers normally granted to it under its charter. However, the provincial government told us that it is suspending the funding for the Université de l'Ontario français because of the province's financial situation. It did not specify for how long.

In recent months, we have had discussions with the office of the premier and the office of Minister Mulroney, who is responsible for this matter, as we look for ways to reduce the length of the suspension and to make it as short as possible.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

Ms. Dyane Adam: We want to start the university in a way that will acknowledge the province's fiscal constraints.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay, I understand. Thank you.

As for your need for a location, I have seen a document that was sent to me, either by you or by the committee analyst. It contained a table. The columns in that table correspond to the criteria that you are looking for in each location.

I notice that two federal properties seem to be quite good matches, up to about 53%.

To this point, have you had discussions with any officials of the Canada Lands Company about the Moss Park Armoury on Queen Street or the parking lot on Queens Quay West?

Have you started any discussions at all?

Ms. Dyane Adam: We are working closely with Canadian Heritage, which is facilitating discussions with different departments. During the process, we have discovered that each department is more or less responsible for the properties that belong to it. Some properties belong to the Department of National Defence and others to Canada Post. Dealing with departments on an individual basis can become tedious.

Two organizations are in charge of it all, the Canada Lands Company and Public Services and Procurement Canada. Nevertheless, we could end up working with one department in particular. We are in the process of doing that work.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Adam.

Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

Your turn, Ms. Fortier.

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Good morning, Ms. Adam. Thank you very much for being here.

About two weeks ago, I had the privilege of meeting with Florence Ngenzebuhoro at the Centre francophone de Toronto, among others. We talked about the university, of course. They all agree that we have to use the immigration route, but you said that, in order to do that, you need programs to receive foreign students.

Have you continued to design programs like that, despite this sort of hiatus? I know that you have submitted programs to the department. Where do things stand in that regard? You have to have programs in order to attract students. That is a very important step.

Ms. Dyane Adam: The programs have been designed and will be submitted to the Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment

Board for approval. It takes that organization about a year to come to a decision about the quality of programs. Then the provincial government will have to decide on the funding for those programs. So that gives us a certain amount of time.

At the moment, we are working on other certificate programs, but not on the bachelors program. Bachelors programs have to follow the route that I have just described. In collaboration with a partner, the university is looking at the possibility of offering certificate courses in pedagogy for higher education, starting next September. Given that the agreement has not quite been concluded, I cannot announce it publicly. We are working with university partners to design those kinds of programs and keep our university moving forward.

• (1120)

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Aside from the critical matter of financial resources, are there other advances that you have not yet told us about and that the federal government could support?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Are you talking about programs?

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Yes, and I am also talking about space and location. You have to continue the process with the departments in that area, but I feel that there is progress in that area. Are there new items we should be aware of?

Ms. Dyane Adam: The board of governors wants the university to commence its activities as quickly as possible. That is the message that we are sending to all levels of government. We are also ready to play our role and assume our responsibilities. We recognize that the province of Ontario's financial situation is a problem and we are looking to find other, diversified, sources of funding.

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Adam. I hear the bells calling us to a vote in the House. I have to interrupt you for a few moments to ask for the unanimous consent of committee members to continue the meeting for 20 minutes or so.

I see that we have unanimous consent.

You may continue, Ms. Adam.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I will finish my answer to Mrs. Fortier's question.

We have our priorities. We have to solve the funding question and come to an agreement with the Government of Ontario. We also want to obtain the support of the federal government. We believe that it is perfectly possible for the university to begin its activities.

The fundraising campaign is one of the ways in which you can support us. If the university meets its objectives and obtains matching funding, that will solve a lot of the problems. The province has clearly said that it is in favour of the project and the problem is actually to do with funding. That is what we are tackling at the moment.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Okay.

Thank you very much, Ms. Adam.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Fortier.

The floor now goes to François Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Ms. Adam, I will start with a comment. I just want to offer my congratulations to you, to your board of governors, to all your full-time employees and to all Franco-Ontarians. Faced with this obstacle, you have been kicking to the left and to the right. You have said that you will not stay down. You have met the challenge enthusiastically. I am very impressed. There is a lesson to be learned from your courage and determination.

I see that, in a way, a page of history is being written about the way in which the federal government, at the limit of its powers, can and must respond to language crises. This is a great example. The federal government has done what it is supposed to do, and my hat is off for that. It has allowed you to continue your work and you have well explained all the work you are doing. It is really impressive. As I understand it, if all goes well, you could even begin to receive students in September in a certificate program. Basically, that would be incredible.

The problem, however, comes from the provincial government side. You mentioned that in one of your answers. Could you tell me a little more about that? I know you are in a tricky position, but you say that you have had no communication with the provincial government since January. Is that correct?

• (1125)

Ms. Dyane Adam: Actually, there has been a lot of communication. You probably misunderstood me. I talked about written correspondence in January, but I am currently having constant conversations with the provincial government in order to find a way out of our financial impasse.

At this stage, I would say that having obtained financial support from the federal government has helped us. Back in December, everyone was quite emotional and reacting to the situation. After that, we had a quiet period. Everyone involved is much more calm and we can have more proactive conversations that are focused on solving the problems rather than simply reacting to them. Personally, that's really the approach I prefer.

Mr. François Choquette: I completely understand that you have been looking to conciliation in order to find a long-term solution, but it would be good for the provincial government people to be sitting at the table as well. This is not the case at the moment. As I understand it, it is preferable to proceed in that way in the long term.

You brought up the matter of recruiting foreign students. Can you tell us more about that? What role can the federal government play to support you in this area? It can help the Université de l'Ontario français but also the Canadian Francophonie, given that we are trying to reach our targets and to maintain our percentage of francophone immigration to the country.

Ms. Dyane Adam: There is a very close link between recruiting foreign students who are francophone or bilingual, and immigration targets. For decades, we have not been meeting the targets. We have to find new ways of meeting them and making the best use of post-secondary institutions. In a way, that is the case I am making. Even at the end of our Université de l'Ontario français and Carrefour projects, we are going to still make that case to you.

The Chair: We are going to have to move on to our next speaker.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I am sorry.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adam.

Ms. Lambropoulos has the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you for being with us today to answer our questions.

You talked about immigration. I am from Quebec, but I am anglophone. A lot of Quebec anglophones in minority language situations find it very difficult to stay in Quebec because they do not speak French. That language barrier prevents them from finding a job.

Is it the same in Ontario? Is that why francophone immigrants leave? Why do they not stay in Ontario?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Francophone immigrants do stay in Ontario. I would even say that a number of francophone immigrants from Quebec come over to Ontario. Ontario attracts immigrants, whatever their language. Our difficulty is in recruiting francophones in sufficient numbers and I am not sure what kind of problem we have: is it a retention problem or a recruitment problem? I confess that I am not an expert so I cannot give you any statistics on it. I believe that the situation in Quebec is different from the one in Ontario. Quebec is losing not just immigrants who speak English, but also those who speak French. It seems to me that the statistics indicated that, the last times I consulted them.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

Do you have any recommendations for attracting more francophone immigrants to Ontario?

Ms. Dyane Adam: The Carrefour and the Université de l'Ontario français have access to a pool of foreign students who are francophone. In Toronto, recruitment is going very well, even in English-language universities. We have to get all our services working, to bring all our efforts together, not only in order to recruit and train them, but also in order to integrate them into our community. Our programs are designed to provide experiential learning. All the programs provide the students with that kind of learning and with co-op placements. Work experience gained in that way is essential for people who want to stay in the country. We will provide that on-site; that is how we will also be able to become one of the key drivers and players that will enable the province to reach its target of 5% in francophone immigration.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

René Arseneault has the floor for three minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Ms. Adam.

My comments are still on the subject of immigration. About a year ago, I was heading to Ottawa on Autoroute 40 when, on the radio, I heard someone speaking on behalf of the Université du Québec à Montréal. What they said astonished me. They said that francophone post-secondary universities—those in the province of Quebec—were recruiting foreign students. The practice has previously been adopted in Acadia, at the Université de Moncton and at the Université Sainte-Anne in Nova Scotia. I believe that it is also the case in Manitoba.

I would like to know your thoughts on the subject. Has recruiting foreign students now become something that must be done in order to ensure that francophone post-secondary institutions in Canada survive? Are we also seeing a similarity with what is done in anglophone post-secondary institutions in Canada?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Yes.

Let me talk about the current reality in Ontario.

In this province, foreign students make up a good part of the student pool. For example, at the University of Toronto, foreign students represent almost 40% of the student population. Even small universities, like the University of Hearst, are recruiting foreign students. In addition, university funding is very diversified. People generally believe that universities are entirely funded by governments. However, they should know that government funding per student in Ontario is very low, particularly because of the economies of scale at large universities. Recruiting foreign students, therefore, is a major source of funding for universities both in Ontario and elsewhere in the country.

Mr. René Arseneault: Do you see the same thing in other universities, such as the University of Toronto or a francophone university?

Ms. Dyane Adam: We have not yet had any recruiting activities ourselves, but other universities, for example the Glendon campus of York University in Toronto, have a significant number of foreign students from all countries, more than 200 countries. I think we have about half a million foreign students in Canada, with approximately 60,000 of them in Ontario.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you for providing us with that information.

I have to stop there or Mr. Chair will be giving me a talking-to soon.

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

Mr. Clarke now has the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adam, I am going to go back to the table you gave us. As you have said, the locations at Moss Park Armouries and Queens Quay West interest you a great deal. I see that you have some concerns about the extent of soil contamination. For Canadians to fully understand the problem, let me say that contamination may not be major but it is still contamination. Do you have specific questions, apart from those about contamination and the accessibility of the properties, that you would like us to ask the officials from the Canada Lands Company, who will soon be appearing before our committee? I believe it's next Tuesday.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Actually, we now have a private partner. That is one of the ways of reducing costs. Private partners, such as real estate developers with experience in building in Toronto, consider factors that we were, and are, less aware of. Our criteria are different.

For example, building next to water introduces more challenges for a developer. That does not mean that we cannot do it, but it means that there are factors that we must consider when we are making our choices.

All that I can tell you is that, if the federal level transferred or leased a property, as it did at Royal Roads University, the cost of the university's activities would be considerably reduced. The model we have in mind at this stage is a public-private partnership. The private partner advances some of the construction and maintenance costs, but certainly, owning the land would really reduce the bill.

• (1135)

The Chair: Ms. Adam, thank you very much for that excellent presentation.

Colleagues, we are going to suspend the meeting in order to go and vote. We will meet back here after the vote.

• (1135)

(Pause)

• (1215)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we continue our study on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

This morning, we are pleased to welcome Jérémie Séror, Director and Associate Dean, from the University of Ottawa's Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute, and Roger Farley, Executive in Residence at the University of Ottawa. We also welcome, from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, Lynn Brouillette, General Director, and Ronald Bisson, Director.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to our committee.

We will proceed in our usual way. Each group will have approximately 10 minutes in which to give their presentation. After that, we will move to questions and comments from members of the committee.

Mr. Séror, the floor is yours.

Dr. Jérémie Séror (Director and Associate Dean, University of Ottawa, Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute): Good morning.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be with you today and to address your committee on the topic of the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

With me today is Roger Farley, a former director at Health Canada, and now the executive in residence at the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute.

I should first congratulate the committee for undertaking these important tasks.

My time is limited so I will get right to the point. Today, I would like to address the need for more clarity in the act, the role of a more modern definition of bilingualism and linguistic duality, and the importance of universal access to French and English teaching, in order to promote that linguistic duality.

I would like to start by focusing specifically on Part VII of the act, sections 41 and 43. Section 41 stipulates that: "the Government of Canada is committed to...fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society".

In section 43, the implementation of that commitment is described as follows: “The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take such measures as that Minister considers appropriate to advance the equality of status and use of English and French...”

These two sections reveal all of Parliament’s good intentions. However, I share the opinion of a number of experts who have already testified before you in saying that one of the weaknesses of the act is a lack of precision on the specific measures and concrete expectations that must accompany the implementation.

I therefore recommended that Part VII of the act be revised so that the obligations and expectations of the government are more specifically defined. As to what those specifics may be, I am not a legal scholar, but, as a researcher in applied linguistics, my suggestions would focus on the concrete objectives that linguistic duality and bilingualism are intended to achieve. Other witnesses before me—I am thinking of Benoît Pelletier, for example—have told you that the act is quite silent on the concepts of linguistic duality and bilingualism.

In fact, although Canada’s bilingual character and identity are mentioned in the act, it often deals with French and English separately. It focuses specifically on minority francophone and anglophone communities. This approach reinforces a vision of bilingualism as parallel, but still separate, monolingualisms—the famous “two solitudes”—rooted in communities of native speakers that are often represented as homogeneous, uniform, and quite well defined. What I would like to highlight today is that this representation is quite a poor reflection of the modern version of bilingualism found in the research.

• (1220)

[English]

The problem is that in the absence of a precise definition or representation of what we expect with bilingualism, what often remain for the public are myths that hinder the promotion of language learning and development. People end up believing myths, such that languages should be learned and preserved in isolation from one another, or that one needs to show loyalty to a single-speech community. Worse, people feel that they cannot call themselves bilingual, like so many of my students.

[Translation]

When I ask who among them identifies themselves as bilingual, few hands go up because they have this idea that, to be bilingual, you have to have a perfect and equal knowledge of both languages.

However, in reality, we know that it is very rare to be able to attain that level because each language, or rather access to both languages, is never used in the same way.

[English]

In such cases, the problem is that it leaves people with an ideal that is unrealistic and, therefore, they often hesitate to identify as being bilingual or even to look for bilingualism.

[Translation]

We need a definition that values and appreciates the multilingual capacity of every Canadian, in whom a number of languages,

dialects and identities actually exist together. We are all multilingual, hence the importance of the idea of linguistic duality rooted in the Canadian context that goes beyond school walls and that includes all the facets of interaction in which individuals evolve.

Even though the act seeks to “provide opportunities for everyone...to learn both English and French” and to foster the use of both languages, we must ensure that linguistic duality is seen as an attainable reality, not just for official language minority communities, but for all Canadians. The good news is that linguistic duality and bilingualism are already seen by a large majority of Canadians as fundamental values that are enriching, both collectively and individually.

[English]

As underscored by the Minister of Canadian Heritage in the official languages action plan 2018-23, linguistic duality enhances cross-cultural understanding and communication, broadens perspectives and allows Canadians to shine on the global stage through the ability they have—as I’m doing now—to move from one language and one culture to another, and back and forth.

[Translation]

That’s still impressive. We are not the only ones who can do this, but we are often the only ones in North America.

However, to ensure that the added value materializes, this more modern vision of bilingualism and linguistic duality must be reflected in the act and be accompanied by specific targets. I therefore recommend that the new legislation include provisions whereby the Government of Canada undertakes to promote, support and facilitate—with provincial and territorial governments—the learning of both official languages and linguistic duality in the school system. To do so, there needs to be an inclusive definition of bilingualism and a notion of institutional completeness, from early childhood to post-secondary education, including the public sphere for all Canadians as well.

I also recommend that those intentions be accompanied by an audit system that would report to Parliament on the results, that is to say, the rate of bilingualism achieved and the specific mechanisms used to achieve those levels, particularly when it comes to transfers to the provinces and territories.

I would like to illustrate the importance of these comments with a specific example of linguistic duality for immigration.

I will read an excerpt from a webpage from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada:

English or French language skills are very important to help you settle in Canada. You may choose to focus on learning or improving one or the other. This will likely depend on which of the two languages most people speak in the area where you live.

Let me draw your attention to the words “or” and “one or the other” and to the dichotomous choice immigrants have to make. As a result, they are implicitly pointed toward a linguistic repertoire associated with one language and the majority. Once immigrants have made their choice, it is no longer possible for them to have access to programs to learn the other official language. They have to choose one or the other. We are falling back into a monolingual vision that limits, not encourages, linguistic duality and multilingualism.

Year in, year out, Canada welcomes between 250,000 and 300,000 newcomers each year. In addition, a number of studies show that those newcomers are often already multilingual and that they welcome opportunities for themselves and their children to learn both official languages. This happens even if, sometimes, in schools, they are told that they should focus on English if they live in an English-speaking region because it is the language of the majority.

I propose that, in addition to encouraging francophone immigration—which is very good—a more inclusive and modern vision of bilingualism would ensure that all immigrants see the possibility of being bilingual as a reality through legislation that recognizes, ensures and asserts that linguistic duality is an option for everyone.

I therefore recommend that the modernized Official Languages Act include a provision requiring the government to encourage, facilitate and support second official language learning and linguistic duality for all newcomers, and to report to Parliament on the results achieved. With the significant contribution of newcomers each year, such a provision would undoubtedly have a long-term impact on Canada's linguistic duality.

In conclusion, the sustainability of Canada's linguistic duality and bilingual character and the increase in bilingualism among Canadians are not immutable assets. They require the Parliament of Canada to take bold and innovative measures to encourage this linguistic duality not only among minority populations, but among all Canadians by ensuring that the opportunity to learn both official languages and achieve a high level of bilingualism is unfailingly and verifiably available.

These measures should target all school-aged youth, college and university students, newcomers and adults in the workplace who provide services to the public, such as health professionals.

These provisions, along with strong accountability mechanisms, will be transformative for Canada and future generations and will make Canada a global model for bilingualism.

Thank you.

•(1225)

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

There are two other shorter presentations, those of Ms. Brouillette and Mr. Bisson, for about five minutes each.

Go ahead, Ms. Brouillette.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette (General Director, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, good afternoon.

I want to thank you for your invitation to participate in the ongoing study on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

“Imagine being condemned in a language you don't understand or only slightly understand.” This is how the Senate Communications Branch launched its fourth interim report on the justice sector on April 10 of this year. Such examples can be multiplied. Imagine being cared for by a doctor or nurse who speaks a language you don't understand or only slightly understand. Imagine receiving tax advice in a language you only slightly understand.

I am the Executive Director of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC), composed of 21 francophone or bilingual colleges and universities in French-speaking minority communities across Canada.

The association's member institutions offer more than 1,200 French or bilingual programs of study in all disciplines. More than 42,000 students attend these institutions and nearly 10,000 graduate each year.

It is important to note that the association's mission goes well beyond the provision of French-language educational programs. We know that education is a provincial jurisdiction, but that is not what I want to talk about today. I want to talk to you about the importance of French-language education in the vitality of communities.

Vitality is a federal responsibility. How can we talk about progress towards equality of status and use without talking about a right to education in French? By training professionals in all spheres of life, including health, justice, education, psychology, administration, engineering and research, for example, member colleges and universities contribute to the vitality of francophone minority communities, to Canada's economic growth, to the transmission of knowledge and to the provision of services in both official languages across Canada.

As part of the modernization of the Official Languages Act, my goal today is to present a single message and a single recommendation.

The message is this: without a right of access to education in French as a first or a second language, from early childhood to post-secondary levels, we cannot talk about the equal status of Canada's two official languages.

It is time to recognize and clearly state that access to education in French, from early childhood to post-secondary levels, is an ideal way to ensure the equality of status of Canada's two official languages. People acquire the ability to provide services in a language because they have been trained in that language.

As parliamentarians, you exercise your right to communicate in the official language of your choice because you have been educated in that language. The same applies to federal public servants who must provide services in both official languages. The availability of services in both official languages can only be guaranteed if Canadians have equal access to education in French on an equal basis with English.

As former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli said: “Upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends.” Members of the committee, it is time to recognize and to affirm the importance of education in French to truly guarantee the equal status of the two official languages of our country.

• (1230)

To this end, the association asks the committee to recommend that the following be added to the purpose of the Official Languages Act, which would read as follows:

The purpose of this Act is: [...] To recognize and guarantee the right to education in French as a first or second language, from early childhood to post-secondary levels, as a means of ensuring the substantive equality of status of Canada's two official languages.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will now give the floor to Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Ronald Bisson (Director, Justice, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll get right to the point. When the clerk contacted me about three weeks ago to appear once again before the committee, I consulted with the various members of the Réseau national de formation en justice and asked them what new information we could bring. You have already received thousands of pages of documents and heard hundreds of presentations.

So we focused on the following question that the committee might ask: what is your one priority in modernizing the act and what is the one single thing you would like to achieve? We have given this a lot of thought, and today, I will give you the answer.

As you know, the word “priority” defines where we spend our first dollar, not our last. For my part, based on my entire life experience, the top priority in modernizing the act has to do with demographics.

This is the only message I want to convey to you today: the modernized act must affirm in its objectives that the federal government wants to support—not promote, but support—a strong, stable and demographically resilient Canadian Francophonie.

Why? The answer is quite simple: demographics is the foundation for everything. Canada's public policies of the 1890s to World War I severely disadvantaged francophone immigration to Canada. These policies have had a devastating effect to this day. So we have an opportunity to turn the tide.

I want to talk to you a little bit about my personal history, which will help you better understand my message and the reason why I'm saying it's the priority today.

I am a Franco-Manitoban by birth and have lived in Ottawa since 1982. I am 68 years old. I was there on December 8, 1968,

when the Honourable Gérard Pelletier came to Notre-Dame school in Saint-Boniface to tell us that his government would propose an official languages act the following year. I was 18 and I was one of the young people starting their adult lives.

I was there during the discussions about the patriation of the Constitution, during the time of the former Fédération des francophones hors Québec (FFHQ). I was there during the discussions about amending sections 41 and 42. For over 25 years, I have worked with at least about 10, if not 15, federal departments to implement sections 41 and 42 of the Official Languages Act. I was there when the first action plan was announced in 2003, and I am still here.

My professional life developed alongside the Official Languages Act. One of the topics you are studying deals with the impact of the act on daily life. If a journalist asked me what is the most important message to take away about the Official Languages Act, given my 50 years of experience as a member of the minority community, I would reply as follows. Without strong demographics, we have nothing: we have no services in French, we have no justice, we have no health care and we have no education.

I therefore ask the committee to recommend that a paragraph be added to the purpose of the act, which would read as follows:

The purpose of this Act [...] is to support a strong, stable and demographically resilient Canadian Francophonie in order to ensure the vitality of francophone minority communities, enrich and strengthen Canada's bilingual character and promote the use of both official languages.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1235)

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

We'll start the round table right away.

Mrs. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here.

My name is Sylvie Boucher and I am a member of Parliament. I was on the Standing Committee on Official Languages in 2006. You mentioned the Senate, and this reminds me that the committee drafted four reports from all parties at the time.

I think it is unfortunate that in 2019 we are in the same place as we were in 2006. We are preparing fine reports, but they are not read much, if at all. This makes me sad because we are talking about the language of the minority and about issues that we have been talking about for years. I am sorry to see how slowly we are progressing.

We are now in the process of modernizing the act. That's where we are now and we need to talk about it. We have met with a lot of people. You have delivered strong messages. We are dealing with schools, health and justice in French. A whole host of organizations come to meet us. But if we were to put everyone in the same boat, without naming the organizations, and we had a single, strong message to deliver in the context of modernization, what would it be?

Mr. Ronald Bisson: Who is your question for, Mrs. Boucher?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It is for everyone. I want to hear your comments. We need something that unites us, not divides us in our own separate sectors.

In your view, what is the strong message that needs to be delivered in the context of modernization?

• (1240)

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: I would recommend that we stick to what is at the heart of the act, which is the vitality and development of communities. Then, we move on to demographics and so on. I think that if we all work in that direction, we can achieve great things. It will also be a matter of ensuring that the new modernized legislation is upheld, understood and implemented. I truly believe that we should focus on the vitality and development of communities.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Ms. Brouillette.

Do you all agree with Ms. Brouillette?

Dr. Jérémie Séror: I had just circled the word “vitality”. Yes, education will support and nurture the vitality. So will demographics. Young people—for example, those who study in immersion—who study both languages or who are multilingual are part of the generation of the present act. However, they sometimes have difficulty identifying with the act in its current form because it has quite separate categories. If all those factors can be included, the vitality of French and francophone communities will certainly be strengthened.

Mr. Roger Farley (Executive in Residence, University of Ottawa, Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute): Here's what I think. When we look at the demographic reality, as Mr. Bisson mentioned, Canada has clearly changed a lot since the first Official Languages Act. Promoting bilingualism, Canada's linguistic duality, is important because it was not part of the first act or subsequent amendments.

If we want everyone—not just minority communities or bilingual people—to be part of the linguistic duality, we will have to invest in education, as mentioned earlier, from early childhood to post-secondary education and adult education. In the labour market, many people who provide services to the public would like to be able to provide them in both official languages, but they do not have the opportunity to do so. So it's a matter of investing in education.

The Chair: I'm going to have to limit the time to four minutes each, including the answers. I see that, if we want to end the meeting at 1 p.m., as planned, we will have to be more rigorous in terms of speaking time.

Colleagues, you will therefore have four minutes to speak, which will include the answers of our guests.

Mr. Rioux, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Thank you for joining us.

Mr. Bisson, I'm sure you've read the book *Boom Bust and Echo* when you tell us about the importance of demographics. In telling us about all the immigrants who arrive, you are still giving us a message of hope. We have to integrate them.

Ms. Brouillette, you said that the vitality of bilingualism is a matter of federal jurisdiction. In fact, I think we will have to exercise

it. I was struck when I heard that only one in five francophone children could go to an early childhood centre in Vancouver. We are talking about demographics, and I think we must ensure that those people have access. Earlier, we also talked about this with respect to the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto. It is vital.

My question is for you, Mr. Séror. I liked what you said about the need to ensure that the act is modern and to have a different perspective. What does that mean to you?

Dr. Jérémie Séror: Much like my colleagues, we have given a lot of thought to what we could say that you have not heard before.

In my field of applied linguistics, I remember how interesting it was to see the evolution of what it means to “learn a language”. For a long time, we have thought in terms of separate categories. For example, if I am a French-language learner, I only speak French in the French-language classroom. Similarly, when I am in the English-language classroom, I only speak English. Learners' identities are therefore often exclusive: I am an “English as a second language learner”.

As we are increasingly seeing in the literature, in Europe and in language policies, the problem with this vision is that it does not reflect the reality of individuals in society. In the French-language classroom, these individuals are not just French-language learners, but they also bring all their linguistic knowledge. In society, they are not just people who want to learn the dominant language, which could come from another country. In Canada, for example, a person can decide to learn both official languages at the same time.

Why should they not be able to come into a room and say that they want to learn both languages at the same time? The classic divisions will return when they write an assignment, which they will often have to do in the imposed language. Yet, at home, these students often write in both languages, taking advantage of their linguistic duality or multilingualism.

This richness has often been ignored or neglected. However, there is once again the danger of a gap between what young people feel—I am talking about young people because they are the future—and what they see in society or in the way those things are presented.

In her work, Sylvie Roy presents the classic case of immersion students who, at some point, tell themselves that they love French and decide to continue their immersion education. If they are lucky, they will have access to a post-secondary school where they can study in French, a language in which they will eventually reach a good level. However, they will get caught up in the categories when asked whether they are anglophone or francophone. They will say that they are sort of both. However, if the traditional definition of the word “bilingual” is that you must express yourself perfectly in both languages, almost no one will raise their hand.

Until we modernize the definition, we will continue to deal with those old categories and the students in my example will have to call themselves anglophones. That is unfortunate, because we are losing the richness of bilingualism in the process. In reality, we feel it, we see it and people make comments. But this richness is not sufficiently valued.

In my opinion, this is therefore the advantage of a modernized and more complex vision for those who use several languages or promote multilingualism in society.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Séror.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor for four minutes.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, I very much appreciated the relevance of your remarks on education, immigration and the meaning and clarity of part VII of the act and its concepts.

I would like to come back to one point that came up in all your three speeches and that seems to me to be just as important: the enumeration of rights holders. In recent years, we have discussed this at great length in committee, but unfortunately we have not yet gotten to the bottom of it. We also have no idea whether the next survey will include a good definition of what a rights holder is. Is this important to you? Of course, you talked about revising the definition of “francophone”, since this label provides the right to study in French. How important is this to you and how does it correspond to your priorities?

Mr. Bisson, you can start.

Mr. Ronald Bisson: Here's what I have to say, Mr. Choquette.

Yes, the enumeration is necessary. As I look back on 50 years of the act, let me ask you: how come we don't have it?

I would like to make another recommendation. Your committee has a reputation for telling it like it is, which is to your credit. In your report on the modernization of the act, I therefore recommend that you choose strong words, action words. If the lawmakers use soft or ambiguous words, we will have to fight endlessly on the ground for every little change we want.

Let me give you an example, which sort of deals with the issue of enumeration. We have school boards today because a judge in Ontario discovered the preposition “*de*” in the French version of section 23 of the Charter, which deals with minority language facilities. This “*de*” allows for school boards, which we would not have if the preposition had not been there. It is unthinkable to see that the evolution of a country may depend on the presence or absence of a preposition.

That's my answer to you. Don't be afraid to use strong words.

Thank you.

Mr. François Choquette: Is there anything you'd like to add, Ms. Brouillette?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Yes.

We would like to see section 23 as a floor, not a ceiling. The enumeration can be done, but there are many other people who would like to study in a first or second language. That is why we recommend aiming higher than what is currently in place. Section 23 should not be seen as a ceiling, but as a floor.

Dr. Jérémie Séror: I agree. The definition must be generous so that all those who want to be part of the Canadian francophone community can have access to this type of education.

• (1250)

Mr. François Choquette: I have a subquestion.

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, Mr. Choquette.

There are still four speakers who have requested the floor. We will have to limit their remarks to two minutes.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mrs. Mona Fortier: I will give my two minutes to Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mrs. Fortier.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bisson, thank you for talking about the real priority. This will help us prepare our report. It is true that, with no demographic balance, things are not going well.

Mr. Séror, I come from New Brunswick. In our part of the country, linguistic duality in education, as you advocated earlier, is a given. When we talk about duality in Ottawa, I realize that people do not interpret that concept in the same way as I do, as a francophone from New Brunswick.

When you talk about duality in education, are you referring to the same duality as we have in New Brunswick?

Dr. Jérémie Séror: I am talking about duality in education in the sense of the ability to achieve a high level of bilingualism. If I am anglophone, I must have access to all the tools I need to improve my French, and the same goes for francophones who want to improve their English.

Mr. René Arseneault: In New Brunswick, linguistic duality is ingrained in the province. Education is a provincial responsibility. So there are two school systems and two governing bodies. Francophones have their own programs, just like anglophones. The schools were separated not so long ago. I experienced linguistic duality in education, and it was great.

According to your definition of duality, anglophones can learn French if they want to, and francophones can learn English. How will we be able to overcome this pesky and age-old obstacle of respecting provincial jurisdictions over federal ones?

I want some solutions, as do all of us here.

Dr. Jérémie Séror: In my view, that's the Gordian knot of the matter.

In terms of transfers to the provinces, the objectives and expectations must be clearly defined in the act. This will then enable us to hold you accountable. It is not enough to encourage initiatives, we need clearly defined and specific objectives so that we can determine how you enforce them.

Mr. René Arseneault: Have you seriously studied this approach, which is to hold the provinces accountable for federal transfers so that we know whether they have taken care of their linguistic minorities, both in Quebec and in English Canada?

Dr. Jérémie Séror: I am not a lawyer, so I do not have that expertise.

It is certainly important, because it helps us find out what has been done and where we are heading. If we are not aware of those details, we can't make adjustments.

Mr. René Arseneault: Ms. Brouillette, you come here often. You must have certainly thought about that before.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: The provinces must ensure the vitality and development of linguistic communities, but the federal government also has a responsibility. That's how the federal government can help to improve things in the event of a crisis or erosion in language, as we have seen recently. It has an obligation to ensure the vitality and development of the communities. It can take action and support communities in a meaningful way.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Farley?

Mr. Roger Farley: I have also had experiences with the Official Languages Act, both within the government and as a volunteer in the communities.

In my opinion, the key lies in the accountability of the provinces for federal transfers of funds, whether in health, economics or all areas of the public sphere. If the Official Languages Act required the provinces to be accountable, we would have tools to keep track of the money and figure out the outcomes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Farley.

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

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today.

[*English*]

Mr. Séror, I'm going to ask you my questions in English, since I'm the only anglophone on this committee and I feel that we need to be represented as well.

You do speak about how very few people consider themselves to be bilingual, even if they do have a good understanding of the other language and are able to express themselves in it. I hear from the different witnesses at this committee that we want to make Canada respect French as much as English is across the board. Obviously, I agree with you, but shouldn't there be something that pushes all provinces to take this into account? I feel that in order to get everybody on board, including even anglophones and provincial governments outside of Quebec, there needs to be some kind of an example for everybody to follow.

If Quebec has the right to impose French-language instruction on new immigrants, and all of this, that then gives precedents to other provinces to be able to do the same thing eventually, if they choose.

What do you suggest can be done to promote this across the board?

• (1255)

Dr. Jérémie Séror: If we go back to what the reality is for the average citizen, we see that the advantages of linguistic duality, the ability to speak more than one language, are real and concrete, with important economic, political and social advantages. The problem is that we so often focus on the negative or sometimes see multiple languages as something that is going to take away from another language. There is something called “negative bilingualism”, which

can happen, but as a result, we obscure the fact that there can be positive and additive bilingualism.

I think if a province is, again, not faced with the choice of either/or, but that we can say they can do both well, as many of our citizens do, it's going to be good for them. When they go abroad, they can negotiate and sell and make deals and sign agreements with universities and private organizations in the languages spoken by the members of their province. It's to their advantage. It's also to the advantage of the citizens themselves, who feel that the reality of who they are in all of their richness is better expressed. That would be my argument for that.

I think in the long term, if you do not allow that reality to be recognized, again, that gap between what is felt and what is presented will create problems. People will either leave the province or they will find other ways to express themselves. We'll lose that human potential that is so rich in Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Séror.

We will now go to the last speaker.

Mr. Généreux, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you all for being here today.

Mr. Bisson, I'll start with you.

At the outset, let me thank you for telling us about our committee's great reputation. I didn't know the committee had such a good reputation.

Mr. Ronald Bisson: Well, yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We are very glad to hear it. You're the first to tell us so.

You're right when you say we like to call a spade a spade. Something else we like to do is advance the cause of the French fact in Canada and the English fact in Quebec in a non-partisan way.

In a very short period of time, you summarized nearly the entire history of the Official Languages Act. It was quite fascinating.

You talked about demographics, which brings me to a question I wanted to ask Mr. Séror as well.

We can have the most well-written piece of legislation in the world, but it has to take account of the reality. My background is in the private sector. When I want to implement something in my business, I take the necessary steps. If I wanted to do the same thing in my current capacity, here in Ottawa, at the rate things move, I would be dead long before ever seeing any results.

As soon as the legislation sets out a particular objective, it must be possible to ensure that objective is respected. You mentioned the importance of supporting a Canadian francophonie that is “strong, stable and demographically resilient”. If that objective were incorporated into the act, how could we achieve it?

It is all well and good to use the finest wording in the act, but we have to be able to apply the principles therein.

How exactly would we uphold that principle and achieve the objective?

Mr. Ronald Bisson: This is what I think.

You are lawmakers, and it is your job to state what your intentions are. Fantastic mechanisms can be put in place subsequently to follow through on those intentions.

I'm going to share my experience with you. Take, for example, the word "fostering" in section 41 of the current act. I've worked with departments, and everyone knows that word means nothing. Had the act used a much stronger word, it would have led to consequences.

When you work with people in the government—and these are good people, not bad people—they say they are doing what the act or policy states. It is from that standpoint that I recommend the act use strong wording.

• (1300)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Let's take the word "support", as you suggest. If we use "support" instead of the word "foster", how, in your mind, does that change anything, concretely speaking, once the act is passed?

Mr. Ronald Bisson: One of the things that would change is how the government went about supporting a strong, stable and democratically resilient Canadian francophonie. What would "support" mean in that context? I'll give you a concrete example, without getting into the political dimension involved.

The province of Quebec decided to reduce its level of immigration. Given what I've observed on the ground, that reduction will have repercussions for francophone minority communities. A lot fewer francophone immigrants will come to Canada even though the national target remains the same. I know what that will mean on the ground in five or 10 years' time.

If the objective set out in the act used the word "support", we, in the communities, could work with government representatives to achieve real results. We could ask them to propose solutions to remedy situations like the one I just described. We could come up

with plans, do the hard work, create and implement programs and so on. If, from the outset, we have an objective that uses the word "foster"—and not a strong word like "support"—we are hamstrung from the get-go.

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

Ms. Brouillette, on the education front, I completely agree with you that access to French-language education absolutely has to be guaranteed from early childhood through university. Again, achieving that hinges on the involvement of the provinces. Mr. Arseneault talked about it, in fact. Holding them accountable doesn't seem possible.

Mr. Bisson and Mr. Farley, you spoke about your experiences and your good working relationships with departments. How can we build the principle of accountability into the act? First of all, is it even possible? If so, it would have to be done in a way that respected provincial jurisdiction, of course.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: The relationship with the provinces can be difficult. What I would say is that, if the federal government keeps to its responsibility of ensuring community vitality and development—again, this ties in with what I said earlier—it can achieve progress without encroaching upon provincial territory.

Certainly, measures to ensure vitality can come from the provinces as well, but it is the federal government's responsibility to ensure the vitality of communities and support and assist their development. That empowers you to take action and do the work that falls within the federal domain.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Brouillette.

Thank you for your presentations and your participation in today's discussion. Your input was very helpful.

That concludes today's meeting.

Thank you.

We will resume on Thursday.

Meeting adjourned.

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