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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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● (1205)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are continuing our study of the roadmap and immigration in francophone minority communities.

I'd like to welcome our ministers, Mélanie Joly and Ahmed Hussen.

We'll proceed as we usually do. You will each have seven or eight minutes to give your presentation. We will then move into questions and comments from committee members.

Who would like to go first?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage): If it's okay, Mr. Chair, I'll go first.

The Chair: Of course. Go ahead.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, committee members, thank you for inviting me to appear before this committee once again. I very much appreciate the opportunity.

I am accompanied by Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and his departmental officials.

Allow me to introduce the officials from my department: the friendly Hubert Lussier, assistant deputy minister for citizenship, heritage and regions, and the amiable Jean-Pierre Gauthier, director general of official languages.

First, I would like to mention your report entitled "Toward a New Action Plan for Official Languages and Building New Momentum for Immigration in Francophone Minority Communities". This report contained good recommendations on issues like early childhood and infrastructure, and highlighted a lack of funding for community organizations. I'd like to thank you for your work.

We responded to part of your report and will, of course, respond to the rest when we submit our official languages action plan, which will be released by year's end. I will come back to that in a few moments.

[*English*]

First, let me review our government's recent achievements.

The year 2016 was a year of unprecedented consultations. Of course, as you well know, the Official Languages Act requires us to

do these consultations. These were the most open consultations ever in the history of the Official Languages Act.

My team and I also brought in over a hundred key organizations representing official languages communities as well as those active in bilingualism to update them on the consultations. That took place in December 2016.

It was also a year of action. We granted university accreditation to the Collège militaire royale de Saint-Jean. We named a qualified bilingual justice from Newfoundland and Labrador to the Supreme Court of Canada. We supported immigration to official language minority communities through new initiatives.

Also, last fall I joined Scott Brison, the President of the Treasury Board, in announcing that our government would review the official languages regulations, as they pertain to communications with and services provided to the public in English and French across the country.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Earlier this year, we announced the reinstatement and modernization of the court challenges program. This restored and modernized program will include dedicated funding and a newly created panel of language rights experts.

We also provided \$2.4 million to the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, or RDEE, for the creation of a francophone heritage, culture, and tourism corridor as part of Canada 150. That was something the provincial ministers responsible for Canada's francophonie had been calling for for a number of years.

In fact, Budget 2017 included \$80 million over 10 years toward community educational infrastructure in official language minority communities—the first explicit investment of this kind by the federal government; \$2 million over two years to increase federal courts' ability to render decisions that are available in French and English; \$7.5 million per year ongoing to improve parliamentary translation services; and the extension of eligibility for the tuition tax credit to include occupational training in a second language.

We also announced \$2.24 million in additional funding for the young Canada works program for organizations that promote official languages and the vitality of official language minority communities. As part of the major celebrations marking Canada's 150th anniversary, we helped fund events to honour Quebec's national holiday and Canada's francophonie nationwide, which will take place on June 24.

I worked with my counterpart Minister Duclos on a new memorandum of understanding on early childhood development in recognition of the importance of francophone services.

In addition, I worked with my three territorial counterparts on agreements to boost financial support for French-language services in the territories.

We allocated \$35 million for 2016-17 to 2019-20.

[English]

Finally, due to considerable feedback on issues facing the English-speaking community in Quebec, my department has begun working with the provincial government of Quebec to look at improved ways of supporting the vitality of that important minority language community.

[Translation]

Our public consultation report is now online. I'd, of course, like to thank my colleagues who took part in the consultations.

I'd also like to thank the various community members who participated for their excellent work, which was very appreciated.

The report summarizes the consultations, but I will highlight the key issues that were raised: the rate of bilingualism in the general public and Canadians' desire to raise that rate; the role of early childhood development in the promotion of French among francophone students in minority communities; the role of immigration in the vitality of francophone minority communities; the many community infrastructure needs; the importance of access to services, which are often delivered by the provinces, territories, or private sector; and the survival of minority language media.

For the first time, my department directly consulted with representatives from every minority language school board, either through existing consultations with provincial and territorial education ministers and ministries or through separate consultations.

[English]

As we look forward to our next action plan, our government has decided to play a bigger leadership role in official languages after 10 years of inaction. Liberal governments have a strong history of taking concrete measures on official languages, be it the Manitoba Schools Act, the Official Languages Act, the Charter, or *le plan Dion*. In the coming months, we will be putting forward a new action plan on official languages drawn from extensive conversation and dialogue with stakeholders and communities. In it, we will recommit to three important roles of the federal government in official languages.

First, we will increase bilingualism. Our two official languages are at the heart of who we are as a country. They are central to our identity and key for our future.

[Translation]

The second area of focus is the vitality of official language minority communities. This means ensuring the vitality of the anglophone community in Quebec as well as that of francophone communities in the rest of the country.

The third area we will focus on is being a government that leads by example and shows a clear path forward for official languages. This area concerns us, in particular, as a government. Our new action plan for official languages will be in place on April 1, 2018. As I mentioned earlier, the plan will be announced by the end of the year.

Much work has been done, but, as you can see, much remains. There are many opportunities for us to work together.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

• (1215)

[English]

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now hear from Minister Hussen.

Mr. Hussen, the floor is yours.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the work of my colleague Mélanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage, on the official languages file. I would also like to acknowledge the tireless efforts of my colleague Serge Cormier, my parliamentary secretary, who is also a huge champion of francophone immigration.

[English]

I would also like to thank the committee for their hard work in preparing the report, "Toward a New Action Plan for Official Languages and Building New Momentum for Immigration in Francophone Minority Communities".

[Translation]

The focus of my remarks today will be on the government response to that report and the ways that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, is working to improve immigration to francophone communities.

[English]

Our government recognizes that the bilingual nature of our country strengthens both our economy and society, and our government wants Canada's francophone communities to continue to thrive all across the country.

[Translation]

To that end, we believe immigration has an important role to play in the future of Canada's francophone minority communities.

[English]

That includes continued efforts to meet our target for francophone economic immigration outside of Quebec of 4% of economic immigrants by 2018.

Mr. Chairman, let me stop here and say that as a priority, not only do I seek to meet this goal but I'm also encouraging my department to exceed it. While we are not meeting that target currently, we have undertaken a number of initiatives to increase francophone immigration outside of Quebec.

[Translation]

For instance, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada regularly promotes francophone minority communities to French-speaking foreign nationals in Canada and abroad. Our missions encourage French-speaking foreign nationals interested in immigrating to Canada to consider francophone communities outside Quebec.

[English]

In June 2016, we also launched *Mobilité francophone*, a new stream in the international mobility program. This stream exempts employers from the labour market impact assessment process when they hire French-speaking workers from abroad on a temporary basis in managerial, professional, and skilled trade occupations to work in francophone communities outside of Quebec. This is a really important initiative.

[Translation]

This makes it easier for employers to efficiently recruit French-speaking foreign workers to highly skilled jobs on a temporary basis. We know that many successful permanent resident applicants start out as temporary workers in Canada. So, it is incumbent on employers, communities, and governments to work closely together to ensure that the new *Mobilité francophone* stream is used effectively.

[English]

The ultimate goal of this program is the retention of new French-speaking workers in francophone communities outside of Quebec and all over the country.

We know that students are another important group that may want to make the transition to permanent residency. We also know that the retention of these students would significantly help francophone communities across Canada. Indeed, graduates of colleges and universities in francophone communities have created networks, improved their language skills, and built community ties.

Temporary workers and students are just some of those who will benefit from the recent changes that we made to the express entry system, which can help French-speaking candidates increase their chances of being invited to apply. These changes include awarding additional points to certain former international students to Canada, rebalancing the system by reducing the number of points for a valid job offer, and introducing some exemptions from the required labour market impact assessment to support a job offer, including an exemption linked to *Mobilité francophone* work permits.

● (1220)

Moreover, as of June 6, we are awarding additional points to express entry applicants who have strong French language skills, and even more points to express entry applicants who have strong French language skills and some command of English.

[Translation]

In 2016, 2.9% of all immigrants admitted to Canada under express entry were French speakers.

[English]

Projections suggest that these changes will strongly benefit French-speaking immigration candidates who are well ranked in the express entry pool.

[Translation]

And I encourage employers in francophone communities to hire candidates who are in the pool to ensure that francophone candidates do move to their communities.

[English]

I'd also like to mention our Atlantic immigration pilot program. This is a three-year program that, while it's not specifically designed to attract French-speaking immigrants, has great potential to help francophone communities in Atlantic Canada attract newcomers. A distinguishing feature of this pilot is that it is the first immigration program in Canadian history to be led by employers. Employers, in partnership with federal, provincial, and municipal governments as well as immigrant settlement service providers, work hard to attract and retain newcomer employees and their families. They do so by getting the employer, for the first time, involved in the settlement of not only the skilled immigrants but also their families. Hopefully, this will lead to more retention of skilled immigrants in francophone communities in Atlantic Canada.

The Atlantic program offers priority processing for permanent resident applications and does not require employers to get an LMI assessment for jobs offered to skilled workers or international graduates under the new pilot programs. The employer helps skilled immigrants and their families to make a settlement plan, takes steps to retain the immigrants, and creates a welcoming environment for them. In exchange, the federal government exempts these employers from seeking a labour market impact assessment, which sometimes can be onerous and take a long time. This program draws on enhanced coordination to identify labour market needs and to endorse candidates who meet those needs. This is a program specifically designed to meet the demographic and labour market challenges of Atlantic Canada. It will also benefit Atlantic Canada's francophone communities.

Every principal applicant will arrive in Atlantic Canada with a job offer and an individualized settlement plan for themselves and their accompanying family members. Applicants will be connected with settlement services to support their successful integration and retention within Atlantic Canada. Again, while this is not specifically designed for French-speaking newcomers, it does present an opportunity for the Atlantic provinces to work with their employers to bring in and retain French-speaking newcomers.

This fall we plan to implement another change that will help us increase our promotional efforts by sending targeted messages to French-speaking candidates in the express entry pool. We are also exploring how we can share the profiles of these successful applicants with our provincial colleagues so that they can attract these individuals to vibrant and well-placed francophone communities under provincial jurisdiction. These messages would inform potential candidates of the possibility of living in a French community outside Quebec and the services available to them for their integration, settlement, and success in Canada. This last point is extremely important. In attracting more French-speaking newcomers to francophone communities, it is important for them to know that they will have the necessary supports to establish themselves. This is an area of settlement in which we rely strongly on partnerships and collaborations.

[Translation]

We can achieve this by building on the excellent work of the 14 francophone immigration networks, or Réseaux en immigration francophone, that receive funding from IRCC.

• (1225)

[English]

In collaboration with local and regional partners, the Réseaux en immigration francophone has mobilized community players and governments, leading to better services for French-speaking newcomers.

We are also testing a new pilot service called Arrimage francophone through our settlement program.

[Translation]

This service will help create strong ties between French-speaking immigrants and the local and regional francophone community.

[English]

This will be done either by providing direct services to French-speaking immigrants or by linking them to other integration services offered in the community.

[Translation]

This type of collaboration is increasingly important as we work to reach our targets.

[English]

I'd also like to mention that we're doing what we can to support anglophone communities in Quebec. Recently, parliamentary secretary Serge Cormier and I travelled to New Brunswick to take part in a historic meeting, the first meeting in Canadian history between francophone provincial and territorial immigration ministers, the federal Minister of Immigration, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[Translation]

I had productive discussions with my provincial colleagues who are responsible for immigration and francophone issues.

[English]

I look forward to further discussions with them. I also look forward to continued engagement—

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —with our stakeholders on this file, including the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne

The Chair: Minister, can I ask you to conclude, in the interests of time?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes, I'm on the last line, actually. Thank you.

[Translation]

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, I would like to reiterate our government's commitment to enhancing and promoting the vitality of francophone minority communities outside Quebec.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Chair, I second Ms. Rempel's point of order.

The Chair: Hold on a minute.

I'd just like to thank the ministers for their presentations and let the committee members know that we will be adding a few minutes at the end so that everyone has an opportunity to speak. Since we started the meeting late, eight to 10 minutes will be tacked on at the end. That way, everyone will get the time they are supposed to during the question and answer portion.

Does that work for everyone?

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

The Chair: I'd also like to thank those responsible for arranging the ministers' appearances today. I know it's not easy to coordinate everyone's schedules, so my thanks to those who made it possible for the committee to meet with the two of you this afternoon.

Now, without further or do, we'll go to Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good afternoon, ministers. Welcome to our independent official languages committee.

Thank you for providing the report to us. That said, since you got it to us only an hour ago, we haven't had a chance to read it, which is unfortunate. We would've liked to receive it a bit earlier so we could familiarize ourselves with it. I mention it because we normally get documents like these ahead of time.

Many questions are swirling around in my mind, but first, let me say how taken aback I was by one of your comments, Ms. Joly. You spoke of 10 years of inaction. This is a televised meeting, and I want to say that I reject that statement. I was on the Standing Committee on Official Languages 10 years ago, and although our government may have done things differently, it cannot be accused of inaction. I simply wanted to set the record straight.

Now that that's out of the way, I looked at the new action plan you're proposing. The first area of focus is individual bilingualism. Today, in 2017, that is very important, especially when you work on Parliament Hill. That's a positive stance, and I commend you for it.

The second area of focus is the vitality of francophone and anglophone communities. I think that's also a positive area to focus on. In fact, a motion calling on the Prime Minister to meet with those very communities was proposed here, in the committee, but the members across the way did not support it. I wanted to make that clear because it's important to meet with those representatives. We get phone calls from people every day, and even though we are members of the opposition, we strive to work in a positive and non-partisan way.

With respect to the action plan's third area, you say you will focus on "being a government that leads by example and shows a clear path forward for official languages."

That principle should have been followed during Ms. Meilleur's nomination process. It may have led to greater co-operation on our part.

People working in the immigration sector who appeared before the committee told us that communities faced structural challenges. Either before or after the holidays, we heard that, in some francophone communities, the funding was going to the anglophone community even though the francophone community already had the necessary infrastructure in place to welcome immigrants.

Could you tell us more about that?

• (1230)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, my honourable colleague.

Let me begin by thanking my counterpart Mr. Hussen for how well he spoke French. You're right about the importance of bilingualism on the Hill, which we see in action with Mr. Hussen, who is currently taking intensive training.

I'm very glad you all received the report. I would remind you that, during the consultations carried out by the previous government, the report wasn't made available until just before the action plan's release. Our government wants to do things differently, so it has sent the report to you months in advance to give you time to review it carefully before we submit our action plan.

As far as the new official languages vision is concerned, what most definitely happened in recent years was that the responsibility for official languages was, slowly but surely, restricted to the Department of Canadian Heritage. Our government wanted to show leadership and reaffirm the importance of official languages across the entire government.

We've done it in numerous ways. Consider the following examples: in defence, by restoring full university status to the Royal Military College Saint-Jean; in immigration, to which my colleague will be able to speak further; in infrastructure, by investing \$80 million in community infrastructure over 10 years; in justice, by reinstating the court challenges program and nominating a bilingual judge to the Supreme Court; in early childhood development, by collaborating on a memorandum of understanding with my fellow minister, Jean-Yves Duclos; in the official languages regulatory review, by working with Minister Scott Brison, President of the Treasury Board; and in public safety, by making sure the RCMP has bilingual officers on Parliament Hill. I could go on.

We did all that in 18 months, which is why I am so proud of everything we've been able to accomplish during that time. Naturally, when the plan is released, we will continue to show leadership in a very meaningful way.

I hope to continue working with you, my fellow members on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, because the terrific work you do is clear every time I work on the official languages portfolio.

I will now hand things over to my colleague Mr. Hussen.

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you, Minister Joly.

Our department provides funding to 50 francophone organizations that offer settlement services to French-speaking immigrants and newcomers who are settling into francophone minority communities.

To the question around some of the money going to organizations that may or may not be francophone in their orientation, the way I'll answer that is that we have very strict requirements for whom we fund these services. Any organization that we fund has to demonstrate its ability to provide those services to francophones. We are very aggressive in tracking the implementation of the funding agreements that we have with the organizations. If they don't fulfill the services that they're supposed to fulfill to francophone newcomers, we are able to take action and cut their funding.

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

Maybe you can complete your answer with another witness.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Sure.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It is now Paul Lefebvre's turn.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank both ministers for being with us today.

Like you, Mr. Chair, I want to tip my hat to the team who managed to bring everyone together. It's not easy to do what we are doing today and to have two ministers appearing to respond to our report.

We spent months working on our report on the next action plan and immigration. It addresses key issues, and the fact that it has the committee's unanimous support shows just how important it is. The report contains 16 recommendations, two of which I'd like to focus on.

I'll speak to Mr. Hussen about the first and to Ms. Joly about the other.

Minister Hussen, as you know, Canada's target for francophone immigration is approximately 4%. Unfortunately, we've never reached that target, or even come close. According to the last study, francophone immigration accounted for about 1.4% of the national total.

Before I get to my question, I want to congratulate you on the new *Mobilité francophone* stream. It is going to be very beneficial. Not to mention, the awarding of additional points under the express entry program will go a long way towards improving the situation. Those are tangible measures. Your participation, along with that of your parliamentary secretary, at the ministerial forum on francophone immigration was very important. I received a lot of positive feedback on that.

Nevertheless, given how hard it is for Canada to reach that 4% target, the committee was told that it may be advisable to have someone in the department who is responsible and accountable for meeting the target. Instead of the target simply being one of the department's internal objectives, someone would be responsible and accountable for meeting the target. That person could be a director general or a deputy minister. We aren't exactly sure what it would look like, but, as recommendation 15 indicates, we want IRCC to ensure that the principle of substantive equality in official languages is applied to all departmental programs.

I'd like to hear your take, Minister, on recommendation 15 in the committee's report.

• (1235)

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much for the question, honourable member. I will respond by pointing out a number of things.

In the last analysis that we did on the economic immigration side, the number of francophones through that stream is now as high as 2.9%.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Progress is being made.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The changes we keep making to our different programs, and the new initiatives that we introduce, are actually having an impact. I'm very proud of that.

We are laser-focused on the target. In fact, I've told my department that we intend to exceed the target. My parliamentary secretary, Serge Cormier, who is here today, has been working aggressively to offer suggestions not only on how we can have more accountability with respect to the target, but also in consulting francophone communities all over the country to make sure we get their ideas and feedback on what more we can do.

We've done *Mobilité francophone*. We've made numerous changes to express entry. There's the Atlantic program, and so on. The other remaining piece is more aggressive promotion of French-speaking newcomers who could potentially add to our skills base as a country.

Taken all together, you are already starting to see an increase from the stuff that we've implemented. However, to meet the target, we need to do more and are committed to doing more.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: In terms of the accountability piece, we're happy to—

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I agree that good progress has been made, but it must continue and we want to see it first-hand.

We are talking about the sustainability of our minority communities and about countering assimilation, a fight in which immigration and early childhood become very important.

Early childhood plays an important role because our children in minority settings don't have access to French-language schools or to education in French from a very early age. So that's already a bad start. Recommendation 9 from our report focuses on that.

In terms of the next action plan—we have already looked at it with Minister Duclos in terms of infrastructure—we have to keep an eye on early childhood in minority settings. That was a unanimous recommendation.

Madam Minister, can you please comment on the importance of early childhood?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: In the course of the public consultations, we clearly heard that immigration and early childhood were important issues.

I would also like to thank my colleague Parliamentary Secretary Sean Casey, who is working very hard on all those matters.

When it comes to early childhood, we took two measures before we even announced the plan.

The first measure is part of Budget 2017. We announced \$80 million over 10 years for community infrastructure that sustains the vitality of minority language communities—I'm talking about kindergartens, cultural centres or school-community centres. We know that this will help communities in a general sense and provide useful infrastructure. We are currently in discussions with the provinces and territories regarding their requests and the management of those requests.

That is an example of horizontal leadership, as I am working very hard with my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Amarjeet Sohi, to ensure that funding is set aside for those elements in the community infrastructure envelope.

Concerning early childhood, as you saw, our colleague Mr. Duclos made an important announcement this week. He announced \$7.5 billion in funding over 11 years and a national framework on early childhood.

That framework specifically mentions the importance of having early childhood services to counter the assimilation of francophone communities and ensure education continuity for children from different minority language communities. Now that the framework has been implemented, one thing is very important. I am following up with Minister Duclos on that issue by ensuring that bilateral agreements with the provinces contain concrete targets that could be implemented.

•(1240)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We now go to Mr. Choquette.

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

I want to thank the two ministers for joining us today.

Mr. Lefebvre's question was very important, but I did not understand the answer. Mr. Hussen, will someone be in charge of francophone immigration to ensure that our objectives are achieved? Could you please answer with a yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The target is in my mandate letter, and I'm ultimately responsible for achieving that target.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: So we are to understand that the answer is no, unfortunately. That first answer is really disappointing.

Minister Joly, we are really in trouble; things are going badly. In January 2016, and even before, Mr. Fraser said that he would leave and that an open and transparent process would be needed to find the next Commissioner of Official Languages. You initiated a process, and there was a lot of controversy. We know about that, so we won't go over it again.

There is currently no commissioner. The acting commissioner will finish her term on June 17. What happens now? What is the next step?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have a Commissioner of Official Languages.

Mr. François Choquette: Ms. Saikaley is the acting Commissioner of Official Languages and will hold that position only until June 17. What will happen after that date?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I will have an opportunity to tell you about the process.

Mr. François Choquette: Will you have that opportunity soon?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, of course.

Mr. François Choquette: June 17 is soon, in four days.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: You heard my answer. I will have an opportunity to tell you about the process.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay. I assume that Ms. Saikaley will hold that position for another six months, and I believe that would be the best solution.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Choquette, official languages are a priority for our government. I would like to reassure all the committee members of that. The array of initiatives we have announced over the past 18 months are evidence of that.

We want to appoint a Commissioner of Official Languages. We also want the appointment process to be open, transparent and merit-based. So that is a priority for our government, and we will follow through.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Ms. Joly, but you will understand that the current instability is harmful to official language

communities. It is harmful to both francophone and anglophone communities.

Over the past six weeks, we have been ripping each other to shreds instead of making an effort to improve the situation, or to finish the report on Air Canada or the one on the legal implementation of the Official Languages Act. We have not dedicated that time to our communities. So that time has been lost, and we wouldn't want this to happen again.

June 17 will be here in a few days. Can you tell us what the government's plan is to put an end to this divisiveness and give the communities an idea of what to expect? Is the plan to start from scratch? Is it to just evaluate the top 10 candidates? What is the government's plan?

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, I just want to remind you of the topic of this morning's meeting. Can you focus on the agenda of this morning's meeting? I think that Minister—

Mr. François Choquette: This is important. We are talking about the next action plan, which is specifically about ensuring leadership in official language communities.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Choquette, I really do recognize the leadership of official language communities. They show that leadership every day, and I am very proud of their work. The department, myself, my team and, in a general sense, ministers, are in contact with the communities. I know full well that there is a lot of anxiety within communities, after 10 years of inaction.

•(1245)

Mr. François Choquette: Yes.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We very much look forward to having an action plan. No investments have been made in a long time.

Mr. François Choquette: Ms. Joly—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Boucher, please let Mr. Choquette continue what he started.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I understand that communities want new investments. Their budget has not been increased in 10 years. It would appear that no new investments have been made in francophone immigration or justice in communities during that period.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, Ms. Joly is not answering my question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I hear what you are saying and I want to assure you that we will have a Commissioner of Official Languages. That is an important position. Moreover, we will have leadership in official languages.

Mr. François Choquette: I look forward to the new announcement, which will determine what happens next. I hope that, this time, the Official Languages Act will be enforced and that the opposition leaders will be consulted.

Mr. Hussen—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Choquette, I just want to tell you that the act has always been enforced. You know that. We have discussed it in the past.

Mr. François Choquette: That remains to be seen. A complaint has been filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. We will see what that complaint will lead to.

Mr. Hussen, recommendation 10 says the following:

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada... implement an official immigration policy to increase the demographic weight of official language minority communities...

That is related to what I said to you earlier. Who is in charge of immigration? There is no such person. Mr. Hussen, will we have, yes or no, in accordance with our recommendation, an official immigration policy to increase the demographic weight of official language minority communities?

Unfortunately, I have very little time left.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We do have a policy on that. I just went through it in my speech.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Since this is a recommendation in our report—recommendation 10—I don't think there is currently an official immigration policy to increase the demographic weight of official language minority communities. If you do have such a policy, we would appreciate you sending it to the committee, so that all the members can have access to it.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can speak for my ministry. We do have a policy of increasing francophone newcomers to Canada, with a target of 4.4% of the total number of economic immigrants settling outside of Quebec, by 2018.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will continue with Darrell Samson.

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

Thank you very much to the two ministers and their staff for joining us.

Mr. Hussen, I would like to congratulate you on your knowledge of French. Every time we see each other, we speak in French, and I appreciate that.

I have one question for you, Mr. Hussen, and two questions for Minister Joly.

I have been sitting here and listening to what has been said. Today, I am surprised to hear that this was the first time in Canada a conference on francophone immigration was held. That was a historic meeting. What has happened over the past five, 10 or 15 years to prevent that kind of a conference from taking place? You planned the work. How do you think you can make a difference if nothing has happened over the past 10 years?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's absolutely critical for both the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Canadian Heritage to work together, because one of the most important ways, but not the only way, that we can contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of francophone communities outside of Quebec is through immigration. It not only adds to their vitality, but also fills the skills and labour shortage, reduces the demographic decline, as well as increases the prosperity of those communities. I'm absolutely committed to making sure that we continue on the good path we've taken.

I'm proud of the fact that Mobilité francophone is having an impact. I'm proud of the fact that the changes to express entry are already increasing the percentage, to 2.9%, and will continue to do so. I'm proud of the fact that we're using the Atlantic immigration pilot program as one of the options to increase francophone immigration into Atlantic Canada.

Finally, even in our promotional activities, which need to be improved, we will use the department's ability to market Canada to potential skilled immigrants to make sure there is robust space—a substantial space—to market Canada as a destination for economic immigrants who happen to be francophone.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much. That's great.

Minister, I have two important questions for you. I will ask them at the same time.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I chaired the caucus on official language minorities. As you know, that important issue is a major concern for me and other members of that caucus.

Can you explain to us the exceptional work you are doing with various departments to finally get them to talk about their responsibility in terms of official languages? I don't know what you are doing, but it has been very effective, including in the case of the announcement made by Minister Duclos and others.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The second point, which was raised by witnesses at a meeting of the Official Languages Committee, is the concern they feel with regard to agreements, like the one announced by Minister Duclos.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: How can we put enough weight in our bilateral agreements with the provinces to make them feel responsible for cooperating on the implementation of those initiatives? Those agreements will encourage the organizations on the ground to put pressure on the provinces to get their portion of the funding.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes. Thank you very much.

For us, it goes without saying that increasing our leadership in official languages is the responsibility of the federal government. Only last week, I announced \$2.24 million in funding for 280 new youth jobs across six organizations involved in official languages.

Another very important breakthrough is the fact that we put \$35 million on the table for the three territories—Nunavut, Yukon and Northwest Territories—to improve their services in French. We are talking about \$35 million, from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020. The funding covers three years, and it's a lot of money.

Generally speaking, at the last federal-provincial meeting of the francophone and official languages ministers, we clearly wanted to highlight the importance of economic development in official language minority communities and of support for tourism.

The francophone tourism route is a need that dates back several years. Finally, in the context of the 150th anniversary, we announced significant funding for creating a tourism corridor.

Earlier, I talked about the provision of bilingual services. We imposed a moratorium on the closing of bilingual service centres. We put an end to cuts at the translation bureau. We did so to ensure that services would be provided in people's language of choice, but also to ensure that services are provided by competent human beings. Everyone knows that the federal public service is world renowned for its translation, thanks to our leadership in official languages.

I talked earlier about the work issue with Jody Wilson-Raybould for the court challenges program, the appointment of a bilingual judge to the Supreme Court and immigration. In short, there are many issues.

I have worked very hard with my colleagues to accomplish this, to show leadership and to take action while we were working on the next plan. The current roadmap was developed by the previous government. It covers the period from 2013 to 2018.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

With your permission, we will move to a second round. I am checking how much time we have left. Members will have four minutes each.

I first invite René Arseneault and Linda Lapointe to share their time.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hussen, congratulations on your French. You have impressed me today.

Minister, during your presentation, you said that the new action plan's second area of focus was the vitality of francophone and anglophone communities.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: The plan recognizes that those communities are facing very different challenges and also have very different needs.

You are familiar with the peculiarity of my riding, which includes the northern suburb of Montreal. It consists of four cities, including Deux-Montagnes and Rosemère.

[English]

What do you do with the Quebec provincial government to assure the prosperity of their community?

•(1255)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is a very important question, and we have taken leadership on it.

In the context of our public consultations I sent a letter to all ministers who are in charge of official languages or francophonie, depending on the provinces and territories, to get their feedback. Particularly with Quebec, we wanted to make sure that we got the feedback of the Quebec government to know what they were doing and how much they were willing to study the question of supporting the English-speaking minority in the province.

Therefore, I sent a letter and had good discussions with Minister Fournier. We wanted him and the Government of Quebec to act on this important subject, the constitutional rights of the anglophone minority. He sent me a letter with some suggestions and recommendations, and we're studying all of that in the context of our plan. We know that it is extremely important for the Government of Canada to play not only a leadership role but also to have the state of English minority rights organizations in Quebec at heart and to make sure that that community is well served according to their rights that are enshrined in our Constitution.

[Translation]

Mr. Arseneault, I'm all yours.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Merci.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

Four minutes for two people is not a lot. Thank you for sharing all that good news with us. I also want to congratulate you on reintroducing the court challenges program. Since I have little time, I will get to the point. My question is for Madam Minister or Mr. Gauthier, and it is about the protocol.

Mr. Gauthier, you held a meeting with francophone organizations. However, those organizations are worried about the fact that the term "additional costs" is not well defined. In order to ensure that additional costs would not constitute spending by the Department of Education to comply with section 23 of the charter, would it not be preferable to come up with a clear definition?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As part of the public consultations, we're currently holding—and we want to continue—discussions with a number of organizations. There are representatives here from organizations, including the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, or FNCSSF; the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA; and the Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF.

Ultimately, we want to make sure that the provinces put money on the table and that the rights of minority language communities are respected. We also want more resources allocated to families, children and the school system. We'll continue our discussions. We're ready to study these definitions or find solutions. That's one of the reasons why my department is currently holding discussions with the organizations.

[English]

Time is of the essence.

[Translation]

Obviously, as part of our plan, we must also sign bilateral agreements. These agreements should be implemented by April 2018. Therefore, we must hold these discussions and reach agreements as quickly as possible.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Joly.

[English]

I understand that John Nater has given his four minutes to Michelle Rempel. Michelle, it's your turn.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are in relation to recommendation 13 of the report by the committee. It relates to the recruitment of immigrants identified as official language minorities as well as outlined in the government's response around settlement services. My two questions are for the Minister of Immigration.

What percentage of the refugees brought into Canada under the 2016 levels targets were proficient in one of Canada's official languages upon their arrival in Canada? Now, 13 months later, what percentage of refugees have obtained proficiency in one of Canada's official languages?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Of the refugees brought into Canada in 2016, 5% were proficient in one or other of Canada's official languages. For the second part of the question, I'll let my officials respond.

Ms. Stefanie Beck (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): We don't have that data yet. It would vary depending on the age of the person when they arrived, their needs, their particular—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: When do you expect to have that data?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: We can get you 2016 data within the next few weeks, but we can't get you the entire cohort because they didn't all arrive at the same time.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I would ask, Mr. Chair, that that information be tabled with the committee.

• (1300)

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Given that we don't have the data and that the 2016 levels report showed a very large increase in the number of refugees coming to Canada, the recommendation says that there will be a targeted effort to ensure there is immigration to minority francophone communities outside of Quebec.

Can you give the committee a sense of what percentage of that refugee cohort was settled in minority francophone communities outside of Quebec?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: You may be aware that the decisions made on where refugees are settled—in fact, we've discussed it before at this committee—are very much dependent on how they were brought in. If they were privately sponsored refugees, then they go to where the private sponsors are. Similarly, if they were the half-and-half category, the BVORs, they will also go to where the privately sponsored group is. When they're government-assisted refugees, we

send them to the major centres across Canada. From there, they are destined onward depending on what the needs of the particular province are.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Are there any specific programs or guidelines to direct refugees who do not have proficiency in one of Canada's official languages to minority francophone communities?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay. Thank you.

With regard to language proficiency services, one of the things we've heard at the immigration committee is that there has been a lack of language proficiency training for refugees. The reason I was looking for the data on the percentage of refugees who have obtained language services is that we know that these have been very low.

What programs have been put in place to target French training for refugees, specifically government-sponsored refugees who may be resettled, or that—as we know now—are not targeted to refugees in minority francophone communities outside of Quebec?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I absolutely reject that premise. We have funded an increase in funding for language training for refugees. We —

Hon. Michelle Rempel: My question specifically—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: If I may, let me answer the question, Mr. Chair, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: My question specifically, Minister—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Can I answer the question, please?

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister Hussen.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you. I'd like to answer the question.

We as a government spent \$76 million more last year on settlement services, and the lion's share of that is for language training.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Just now that he's—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Let me finish my answer, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have 15 seconds left, so I'd like to ask, what percentage of that \$76 million—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I would like to finish my answer, please.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, please.

[English]

Mr. Minister, go ahead. Conclude rapidly, please.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, my question has not been answered. I specifically would like to know—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I would like to finish my answer, please, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have the floor.

[Translation]

The Chair: It's a matter of debate.

[English]

I will ask the minister to please finish his answer.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I would like to finish my answer, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I would like to know what percentage of the \$76 million has been dedicated to francophone training services specifically—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I know what the question was. I'd like to finish my answer, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: —not the overall number.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, we'll hear the minister conclude on this point.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We spent \$76 million more on settlement services for refugees and all newcomers. I think that record speaks for itself. The record left to us by the previous government was abysmal on the part of settlement and integration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The lion's share of that money went to language training. We dealt very quickly with some of the shortages in language training spots. We had extra money for the Syrian cohort.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We are absolutely proud of our record of settlement funding. This year we are putting \$700 million, which is another increase, into settlement and integration of refugees. I will thus not accept that premise, Ms. Rempel.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Madame Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I would like to note, especially in light of the fact that I believe the government would like to change the Standing Orders so that ministers don't have as much of a role on committee, that the question I specifically asked was what percentage of funding was directed towards francophone language training in communities outside of Quebec.

For the record, as much as the minister was making an assertion that he answered that question, he did not. I point out, in terms of relevancy for this report, that the answer was not given. Thank you.

The Chair: The minister did answer some questions. We're running out of time, so we'll continue with Mr. Vandal.

[Translation]

You have four minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you for being here, Minister Hussen and Minister Joly.

In March 2016, in Saint Boniface, John McCallum, the former Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, announced the reinstatement of the Mobilité francophone program. The Harper government had cancelled the program. The announcement was very well received by the province's Franco-Manitoban community and across the country.

In Manitoba, immigration has three components. These components are recruitment, intake and integration. We do excellent work on intake and integration. However, we need help with recruitment. I believe this is also one of the recommendations in our report to the government.

Here's my question. Are discussions in progress with stakeholders in Manitoba to promote the recruitment of francophone immigrants, in order to increase the immigration percentage and bring it closer to the target of 4.4%?

● (1305)

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you for the question, honourable member.

The meeting that we had in Moncton in late March was pivotal, because we all agreed, provincially and federally, that we should cooperate and collaborate with respect not just to the integration of settlement services but also the promotion work so that we can attract more francophone immigrants into Canada. One way we want to speed up that work is that, instead of having those meetings every two years, we agreed to meet once a year so that we can coordinate more.

We have been working with the groups that are engaged in the attraction, and we commit to making sure we work with them on promotion. As I said, in terms of our skilled immigrant stream, the economic immigrant side, as a department we want to make sure that all promotional efforts include and expand the opportunities to market to francophone immigrants and attract them to Canada. Our pilots are also helping in that regard—for example the Atlantic immigration pilot program—and I've spoken about the other changes.

Broadly speaking, even for the attraction of international students, when I travel outside of Canada I try to sell Canada as a great destination for international students because of our world-class universities and colleges, but also our research hubs. I make sure that I also emphasize the fact that we have vibrant francophone institutions that support French-speaking international students. The response, I'm hoping, will be much higher than in the past.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Excellent, and I can say that the announcement of Mobilité francophone has helped tremendously with that goal.

[Translation]

I have a question for Minister Joly.

You may have already talked about it. We know that Budget 2017 allocated \$7 billion over 10 years for quality and affordable child care spaces. Is money specifically allocated to francophone day care centres in francophone minority communities?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I've been talking about this with Minister Duclos. Since it's his file, I suggest that you also speak with him directly.

As part of the national framework, we must focus on the importance of early childhood to counter the assimilation of francophones in minority communities. Given that Quebec isn't a signatory to the framework, there's no mention of the anglophone community. That said, it will be done as part of the bilateral negotiations with the provinces and territories. That's why it's good news.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Joly.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you.

The Chair: There are two speakers left. I'm asking them to speak for only three minutes each.

We'll start with Bernard Généreux, and we'll finish with François Choquette.

Mr. Généreux, you have three minutes.

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

Hello, gentlemen and Minister Joly.

Minister Joly, you've been bashing the Conservatives since the start of your appearance. You said that nothing was done for 10 years.

We managed Canada with the money we had. You're currently managing Canada with money you don't have. It's darn easy to play politics when you decide to spend money you don't have.

With all the measures you've taken in the past year and a half, how do you explain—

The Chair: Please watch your language.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay. By the way, the word “darn” is in the dictionary.

Minister Joly, you've been in power for a year and a half. With everything you've rolled out in a dramatic fashion, why did the Commissioner of Official Languages tell us, just yesterday, that complaints had increased by 40%? Are you proud of this? Are you also proud of the Radio-Canada article—which I believe came out a week ago—indicating that Parliament Hill or the national capital region had a serious issue regarding the use of French, particularly among public servants? The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has received almost 200 complaints on this matter. In a full room where just one person speaks only English, everyone starts speaking English instead of continuing in French. Are you proud of this? You've been in power for a year and a half. Stop talking about the Conservatives and the ten previous years. With all the money you've spent in a year and a half, are you also proud of this?

• (1310)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I congratulated you on your work because I truly believe you're doing a good job. I acknowledge the contribution of all committee members.

Regarding bilingualism, in general, we can always do better. It's an ongoing challenge in the country. I've said it a number of times. That's why the committee is so important and why all official languages supporters are important, regardless of the party.

I also think that the drop in funding in recent years and the decrease, I believe, in importance of the official languages inevitably resulted in a decline in the government's capacities.

Recently, when I gave a speech to all the senior public servants in the country, I spoke from the heart. I told them that, throughout the government and the public service, we must reassert the value and highlight the importance of the official languages. I think the work must be done collaboratively.

I also think that everyone in the public service, government and opposition can do better when it comes to bilingualism and official languages in the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Joly.

We'll move on to François Choquette, who has three minutes.

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

We won't squabble. Ms. Jolly and Mr. Hussen will each have a minute and a half.

First, Minister Joly, thank you for being here, as I said earlier.

You spoke earlier about the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones and other associations. These organizations are requesting, as we recommended in our report, a strategic agreement with Canadian Heritage. This agreement would give communities a voice when it comes to managing the federal government funding for education from kindergarten to Grade 12. Why haven't you responded to this recommendation?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I responded earlier in my answers. It was the first time my department consulted the school boards directly as part of the public consultations. We're holding discussions with them to—

Mr. François Choquette: Is it to reach a strategic agreement?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —reach, I hope, a strategic agreement. That's certainly my goal. I'm always ready to ensure the discussions move forward.

As I said earlier, given that the action plan will be launched by the end of the year and that we must establish bilateral agreements with all the provinces, the overall process is certainly tedious and time-consuming. I hope we'll reach an agreement as quickly as possible.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Ms. Joly.

I'll now turn to Mr. Hussen.

Mr. Hussen, you said that an immigration policy has already been established “to increase the demographic weight of official language minority communities,” as requested in recommendation 10 of the committee's report.

When thousands of Syrians arrived in the country, how is it that nothing was planned or prepared for their arrival, official language communities weren't consulted, and communities across Canada realized they weren't ready to handle the refugees? In New Brunswick, for example, a complaint was filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, which responded that the communities weren't ready and that nothing had been done. As a result, the complaint was founded. The government must now ensure that, when refugees are directed to certain locations, the communities are consulted.

Have you done your work? Have you established a policy in order to consult everyone who deals with immigration, within the communities, when refugees arrive in Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: First of all, there was consultation with francophone communities with respect to the Syrian refugees. The report indicates one example, but to say there was no consultation, I disagree.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Are you saying that the commissioner lied and that her report is unfounded?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There was consultation. As I said, that work is ongoing. We will do better in integrating refugees into francophone communities. We fund more than 50 francophone immigration settlement service providers. I'm very proud of the fact that on March 30, I signed a Canada-New Brunswick immigration agreement which, for the first time, included a francophone annex. It's the first one that will make sure that we collaborate on the attraction, retention, and settlement of francophone newcomers in New Brunswick. It also recognizes the unique bilingual nature of New Brunswick. Ontario now wants to follow suit. As part of the upcoming Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, they also want a francophone annex. These are the things we are doing moving forward.

● (1315)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: This concludes our meeting this morning. On behalf of the committee members, I want to thank the two ministers for their presentations and for their answers to the questions.

Once again, thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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