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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning. Welcome to the 93rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to the committee's mandate to review and report on the procedures and practices of the House and its committees, today we are beginning a study on the potential use of indigenous languages in the proceedings of the House of Commons.

Members will recall that on June 20, 2017, the Speaker ruled on a question of privilege, which had been raised at a previous sitting by the member for Winnipeg Centre, regarding simultaneous interpretation services available to members who use indigenous languages in the House. Although the Speaker did not find that a prima facie case of privilege existed, he did suggest that the committee consider studying the matter.

To this end, we are pleased to be joined by Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons, and André Gagnon, deputy clerk, procedure.

Thank you both for being here.

Just so the committee knows, for the technical questions on this, Public Services and Procurement Canada provides these services—both translation and the document. We'll have them later as a witness and they can answer further technical questions after we get proposals from our witnesses. We have quite a list of witnesses that the parties have submitted, so it should be very interesting hearing from them.

We'll go to you, Mr. Clerk, for your opening comments. Thank you for coming. I know you're very busy, so we really appreciate your being here today.

Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am delighted to be here with you, and I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to appear today to speak on the use of indigenous languages in the House of Commons.

The right of members to speak in the House in either French or English has been guaranteed by section 133 of the Constitution Act, 1867. Simultaneous interpretation was introduced in the House in January 1959, allowing all members to listen to every word spoken in the chamber in either French or English.

Over the years, various members have also addressed the House in languages other than English or French. This has prompted questions

as to how these interventions could be understood for the benefit of all members of the House and those listening at home. Such interventions have often been limited to a few words, and most have occurred in statements by members.

Although simultaneous interpretation into English or French on the floor of the House is not available in these instances, a note is made in the *Debates* to explain that the member spoke in another language. If a translated version of the remarks made during statements by members is provided to the parliamentary publications directorate, that will also be documented. As an example, the *Debates* would state, "Member spoke in Cree and provided the following translation", which is then accompanied by the text of the statement.

[Translation]

Members have also chosen to speak in another language at other times. This has occurred during debate on a bill, a motion, or even during oral questions. When a member speaks in a language other than English or French, outside of statements by members, the *Debates* simply note which language was spoken, without including a translation of the remarks, as follows: "[Member spoke in Cree.]".

To facilitate understanding of what is being said in the chamber, the speaker has generally encouraged members using another languages to repeat the remarks in one of the official languages so they can be interpreted. This ensures that their interventions are fully reflected in the *Debates*.

In response to the question of privilege raised by the member for Winnipeg-Centre, Mr. Ouellette, Speaker Regan reiterated on June 20, 2017, that:

[...] given the House's current limited technical and physical capacity for interpretation, if members want to ensure that the comments they make in a language other than French or English can be understood by those who are following the proceedings and are part of the official record in the *Debates*, an extra step is required. Specifically, members need to repeat their comments in one of the two official languages so that our interpreters can provide the appropriate interpretation and so that they may be fully captured in the *Debates*. By doing so, all members of the House and the public will be able to benefit from the rich value of these interventions.

Admittedly, going beyond this and expanding support for the use of other languages does raise significant considerations involving technical and physical capacity, linguistic expertise, and information technology requirements; these, of course, would need to be thoroughly assessed.

[English]

While other jurisdictions have some experience upon which you could draw, it will be important to recognize the uniqueness of each context in order to understand the real possibilities for the House of Commons. The recent experience in the Senate is worth noting. The practical challenges it experienced are likely similar to the types the House would face in attempting to support the use of other languages in our proceedings, such as the issue of securing the services of qualified interpreters and addressing the logistical and technical limitations.

Whatever decisions the House makes on including other languages in its proceedings, I can assure you that the administration will do all it can to support you in your discussions and to implement your decisions.

With that, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have, with the assistance of André Gagnon.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Masi cho. Gunalchéesh. Sôga senlá.

Just so the committee knows, we'll have as witnesses a number of MPs who are indigenous. We'll have a number of senators. We'll have a number of translation organizations and a number of legislatures in Canada and from around the world that use different languages. So we'll see different models.

We'll go to the first round of questioning.

Mr. Graham, please.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you both for being here.

First, members are, by their very nature, considered honourable, so what precludes members today from providing translation to the translation booth to read into the record at that time? As I recall, when the member for Winnipeg Centre started, he had intended to do that, namely, provide the English and French text to the translation booths and then not read it in that language.

Mr. André Gagnon (Deputy Clerk, Procedure): If you recall, Mr. Graham, that situation arises when members make some statements in the House. They provide the text for *Hansard*, but not for interpretation.

I think you would be in a good position to ask that question of our interpretation services, but our understanding is that they are not able to qualify or at least identify the quality of the translation provided at that time.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's my point. The members are considered honourable, so we have to assume that what they are providing is in fact correct. Would that be correct?

Mr. André Gagnon: That could be a decision of the House, yes.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I see. Okay.

You mentioned at the end of your remarks the Senate's experience. Can you talk a bit more about your perspective on the Senate's experience, given that you were certainly there for it?

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes. In fact, I was responsible for the experiment. I was the principal clerk of chamber operations at the time. The Senate had made an agreement that it would experiment with the use of Inuktitut. We had senators who spoke that language, and there was a recognition that we should respect their home language, their maternal language, and allow it to be used in the chamber.

Under the program that was used, we requested that we be given advance notice. The reason for that was not to discourage them but actually to work with the interpretation services to identify someone who would be available in Ottawa to provide the translation from Inuktitut into English. We did not have the capacity to do Inuktitut into French.

It was used on various occasions by Senator Willie Adams and Senator Charlie Watt. They did use it. In the sense that they were encouraged to use their language, it was reasonably successful, but it always required considerable preparation and advance notice. If we were not able to secure the services of an interpreter, we had to either delay the intervention or explain to the senator that we couldn't provide the interpretation that we had hoped.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You mentioned that it could only be done into English. Could it not have been done through relay translation to get it into French?

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes, but that presents a challenge of its own, which I think the interpreters could explain. There is always a loss when you go from one language to another. It's like, I guess, Plato's cave: it becomes more and more of a shadow. If you go from Inuktitut to English, and then French from the English, there is a double remove.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You said there was a notice period to get it. What was the notice period?

Mr. Charles Robert: At the time, we originally asked for five days. Again, it was because we needed that lead time to secure the availability of an interpreter.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: How hard is it to find those interpreters? Are there companies in the area that provide interpreters on call? For example, if we were to make this more institutionalized, could we have, with 24 hours' notice, any of a set series of languages available?

Mr. Charles Robert: My suspicion would be that it would be a lot easier for commonly spoken foreign languages. I'm not sure how difficult it might be—or how easy it would be, to give it a more positive spin—for the aboriginal languages. I think for the ones that are popularly spoken it's likely that it would be easier. We had difficulty, actually, with Inuktitut, not necessarily because there is a dearth of members who speak the language, but they just don't happen to live in Ottawa.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's fair. I guess, with modern technology, could we not do the translation from a remote site?

Mr. Charles Robert: That's certainly a consideration.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay.

Logistically, are we capable of easily looking at having an additional interpreter in the chamber, in the new chamber in the West Block, or in the future chamber in Centre Block?

Mr. Charles Robert: André may know more about this than I do, but I do think that the new chamber in the West Block will be more accommodating than the current one. As I see it, the interpreters' booths look like telephone booths at the corner of the chamber. These don't look very commodious, and I suspect that the interpreters don't really like them, it but they put up with it. If they had to squeeze in somebody else, I think they would start talking about the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Voices: Oh, oh!

• (1115)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Would the West Block have additional telephone booths?

Mr. André Gagnon: Yes. There will be a third, additional booth for the House of Commons, for the chamber. The booth would not be situated in the assembly in the same way the two others are today, but yes there will be. As for committees, the solution to that would be like what we are doing today, which is to have additional booths in the room.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay.

You mentioned earlier that translation is to be provided for *Hansard*. That's already the case, right?

Mr. Charles Robert: Well, only if you have the interpreter. The *Hansard* would not necessarily reflect the language itself. In the English version of *Hansard*, or the French version, you would maintain the integrity of English and French. You would just simply note that the member spoke in a third language. Only in the audio feed would you actually hear, I suspect, the third language.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay. Now, *Hansard* itself isn't technically published until Parliament dissolves, right? The final version is published at the end of the Parliament...?

Mr. Charles Robert: That's an edited version. There is the daily issue that comes out.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Is it realistic that the edited version not be translated by the member speaking, but that any time an indigenous language is spoken—and I would limit it to indigenous languages spoken in the House—it is properly translated by a professional translator within the context of *Hansard*, as opposed to being provided? Is that realistic or is that crazy?

Mr. Charles Robert: I'll let André speak to it, but I suspect that if the House decided to do that, they would have to live with the possibility of a delay in the issuance of the *Hansard*.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's why I asked about the publication at the end of the Parliament.

Mr. André Gagnon: That's a good question, Mr. Graham. As you are aware, when we're talking about S.O. 31s, statements by members, the individual makes a statement, and it stays on the record and then can be added later on.

The difficulty comes—and it's up to the committee to decide what they would want to do with that—when you're in question period, let's say, or during debate, and an individual makes a statement in a

language that is not known by the other individual or cannot be interpreted immediately. You are stuck in a kind of void.

Imagine the situation afterward, where this intervention would be included in the *Debates*, let's say, afterward or days after. It's hard to see how in the *Debates* there would be continuity between the intervention by the member and other member, who did not respond at all during questions and comments to the comments being made, because that member was not in a position to answer. That's why there was, through the years, from the interpretation services and *Hansard*, a practice of mostly doing it through statements by members.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you. I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Maybe I can start by going back to how things are handled in the Senate. I think I'm right in saying that the standing orders of the Senate have actually been rewritten to specifically allow the use of Inuktitut under certain constrained circumstances. I think that's correct.

Mr. Charles Robert: I think you are right.

Mr. Scott Reid: Not other indigenous languages?

Mr. Charles Robert: Not for the moment, no.

Mr. Scott Reid: The approach you adopted then was to say essentially that we'll respond as the demand is made. I gather that would be the simplest way of summing this up.

Mr. Charles Robert: Actually, at the time there were other aboriginal senators who spoke languages other than Inuktitut. We had one senator who spoke Salish and another senator who spoke Montagnais. This was an experiment. There was a pilot project. There was an agreement to just see how we could handle this. Again, because of the technology and the space limitations, we wanted to see whether or not we could actually cope with this on the Senate side.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

You described having some difficulties finding translators to translate to and from Inuktitut. I guess it was just from Inuktitut, not into Inuktitut. Is that correct?

Mr. Charles Robert: That's right. It was from Inuktitut into English. I don't believe we ever experimented the other way around because, in fact, the senators were comfortable in English and so it was not really necessary.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. Ottawa is the place where planes fly back and forth to Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, and, therefore, all things considered as Canadian cities go, we have a wider supply of Inuktitut speakers here than one would encounter elsewhere in the country. When you talk about a language like Salish, I'm going to guess that is not so true.

• (1120)

Mr. Charles Robert: No.

Mr. Scott Reid: Nor is it for a number of other languages. I do wonder about the kinds of practical considerations we're going to have. On the one hand, it sounds to me as though you were able to move forward in the Senate with the Inuktitut pilot project because you had the consent of the Montagnais and Salish speaker. They didn't say it seemed unfair to them. They understood that we were experimenting with something that does not create a hierarchy of languages.

The question I'm asking essentially boils down to—and maybe this is an unfair question to ask someone in your position—how do we avoid creating the kind of hierarchy in which the more widely spoken languages and those that have the advantage of being “local”—and I say that with quotation marks around it, but you get the point...? How do we avoid that sort of thing?

Mr. Charles Robert: I think there you'd have to actually work with the interpretation services and develop some kind of idea or appreciation of the availability of people who might be willing to provide the interpretation service in a specific language. As Mr. Graham pointed out, there's always the possibility of trying to do it from a remote location. That presents its own challenges, but it may reduce the notice time that we experienced in the Senate if the interpretation services say that it is in fact a viable option.

Mr. André Gagnon: Mr. Reid, if I can add something, I was going through my notes, and one of the assemblies in Canada has identified, I think, nine aboriginal languages, and they have decided to do a rotation such that they have one language per week.

The Chair: That's NWT.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's the Northwest Territories, yes. They have only three official languages in Nunavut—French, English, and Inuktitut.

The Chair: They also have the Inuit languages, of which there are two, actually.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, that's right.

The Chair: That's four all together.

Mr. Scott Reid: What is the situation in Yukon?

The Chair: They're not official languages, but they do make provisions. It's in the research report that you have there. Everyone got a report of what occurs in other legislatures, and in Yukon there's some provision, but it's not an official language. It hasn't been used very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Scott Reid: I have a question regarding the two official languages.

If English is used as an intermediary when translating Inuktitut into French, does that not create a situation in which the two official languages are not given equal importance?

In this example, would English not be seen as a bit more important than French?

Mr. Charles Robert: Indeed, I addressed that in answering Mr. Graham's question. Yes, that is a risk, but you would really have to ask the interpreters how great a risk it is and how it could be managed.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Reid: I was going to make one other comment here. It's a comment rather than a question. On the use of relay languages, I thought your analogy to Plato's cave was interesting. You're more academic than I am. I thought it was like the child's telephone game, in which you go around a circle, or like the use of Google Translate to go back and forth in the same language. The story is that someone took Dorothy Parker's famous rhyme, “Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses”, and translated it into some language—I think Portuguese—and then back to English and it said, “Ships carrying men don't stop at icebergs carrying women”, or something like that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: I think that is a legitimate issue.

The other thing that occurs to me is that as a practical matter, if you're trying to engage in debate—as opposed to someone delivering an S.O. 31—it seems to me that once you get involved in a relay language, it's no longer possible to have simultaneous translation. You have something like a delay. Occasionally when I've chaired hearings at the international human rights subcommittee, we've had someone speaking a non-official language such as Farsi or something like that, and it has slowed things down very considerably. Have you given any thought as to how to deal with that particular practical issue?

• (1125)

Mr. Charles Robert: In fact, that it is a real issue, but I think the ones who would be best able to guide you in how it might be successfully addressed would be the interpreters themselves. They're the ones who actually live the experience of trying to work with the languages and provide to members the very best service possible. I know that when the issue was being addressed on the Senate side, we had to take into account their preferences as best we could, even though André has said that in the new chamber the location for the third language interpretation will be—I'll use Mr. Graham's language—a remote site. Interpreters hate that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

Mr. Charles Robert: They don't feel they can provide the best service when they're caught up in that situation. They will make the best of the environment they're offered, but they will give you fair warning that they will not be able to do as best they might.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mentioning the word “time”, the relay, that takes more time. We have to think of the timing considerations, in what we come up with.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thanks, Chair.

Thank you both for being here.

This is an exciting project, I must say. I've been really looking forward to this. Canada is still an unfinished work, a work in progress, and this is part of nation-building. Certainly it reflects a lot of the importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, and I mention this because the government is committed to implementing every single one of those recommendations.

I want to underscore that on page 321, under "Language and culture", in number 14, the commission called upon the federal government to enact an aboriginal languages act that would incorporate certain principles, including the following:

- i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them....
- iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation....
- v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.

This is interesting, and I just throw it out to colleagues. This may be a jumping-off point to address this promise, since I consider nation-building to be a file that we all own and have as a priority. In 15, the commission's report states:

We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.

There may be an opportunity to use this as a segue into that promise, given its obvious connections.

Having said all of that, I don't have a lot of questions. I appreciate that we need to start with your framework, but I would be interested, notwithstanding your remarks here, to know what you would consider to be the biggest administrative challenge we would face as members wanting to bring this about. What's the biggest one?

Mr. Charles Robert: I think I alluded to it. It's the notion of unintended consequences that might come about from a good-faith effort to bring in third languages. We're speaking in the context of aboriginal languages, Mr. Christopherson, and that's why you feel there's a need to recognize them. It's part of the Canadian identity and needs to be promoted. But there are other senators and members who might want to speak another language, and if we open the door, they should have the same right. There should be no real discrimination from that point of view.

The challenge comes when you are not able to find an interpreter who can work in French and an interpreter who can work in English. For the third language you need two people if you want to make sure that you're not jeopardizing, as Mr. Reid pointed out, the possibility of treatment with respect to the relay of the languages and the delay.

I don't think it's an insurmountable challenge, but I think this committee would be overlooking something that could potentially be a serious issue if you didn't look to address it and be conscious of it.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. I would assume that there are probably some lessons to be learned from other nations that have gone through this.

• (1130)

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes. I remember once watching a program on the European Parliament and the 28 languages that are used there. The interpreters were having a hell of a time finding somebody who

could do Danish into Greek. They found everything else, but that combination presented some difficulties. In the end, I think there were something like 500 combinations. Actually, for the European Parliament, it is the single largest budget item in its operations.

Mr. David Christopherson: I've been to a European Council meeting as a delegate and the whole perimeter of the council chamber is filled with interpreters.

Mr. Charles Robert: What makes it successful is that they are trying to find everyone who can move into each language without a relay.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's good, Chair. Anything else I have would probably be for other witnesses.

Thanks very much, and good job.

The Chair: Could you explain the technicality of the department that does all this translation you're referring to? Do you hire them? Does that come under your budget?

Mr. Charles Robert: There is no budget, at least when I was working on it in the Senate. I assume it's the same in the House. We have a memorandum of understanding, and they provide service. They will translate a gazillion words a year; they will produce so many pages. It's almost as if you're renting a car. You try to estimate how much mileage you're going to use so you avoid extra payments. You work with them so they have an understanding. If they really require this much for translation, we have to hire this much in the way of staff. We have to budget for it accordingly. Those are the parameters of the memorandum of understanding that we establish with that division of Public Works.

The Chair: That comes under their estimates.

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Thank you for being here today.

Did I hear correctly that the West Block does have an additional booth, but it's not in the chamber?

Mr. André Gagnon: For the chamber, yes.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Where is the booth?

Mr. André Gagnon: I don't have that detail. Sorry.

There is no direct view from the booth into the House. Probably a screen would be organized on which the person would see the individual talking in the House.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Why was that booth created and when was the decision made that this booth would be created?

Mr. André Gagnon: I don't have that information. We can provide that to you.

Mr. Charles Robert: I suspect it would have been some time ago, because I think Public Works as well as the administration of the House are aware of members' interest in exploring the use of additional languages besides English and French.

There was the evidence of what was going on in the Senate. In the same way the Senate has delayed televising its proceedings, perhaps the Senate jumped the gun with respect to the House in using third languages as a matter of routine.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: So you foresaw this and this is why we've accommodated with the extra booth, but whatever shape it takes is yet to be determined. We at least have it there.

Mr. Charles Robert: That would be my guess.

Mr. André Gagnon: There have also been occasions, as you may recall, when international figures address the House. Those individuals commonly and frequently spoke in another language.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: With respect to the problems and challenges that you faced in the Senate, that's good experience for us to have for you to answer questions today for us.

You talked about having this service available and the problem of maybe not being able to get the service on time. How is that handled in the Senate? For example, if someone were scheduled to speak and all of a sudden you couldn't get the interpretation, and that person had to be bumped, how did that play out?

Mr. Charles Robert: Because it was experimental and an initiative done in good faith, the senators who were involved were understanding and co-operative. The real problem also comes from the fact that when we're dealing in French and English, we're dealing with highly trained, qualified individuals. Because French and English are the official languages, the training available for the work of interpretation and translation is provided through courses offered at universities. Are we sure the same sorts of services would be available to train interpreters to a high standard in the 40-some aboriginal languages that are spoken in Canada?

• (1135)

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Has the House taken any steps to determine whether those resources are there?

Mr. Charles Robert: Again, I think that would basically be through Public Works rather than through us.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay.

Mr. Charles Robert: If I recall my history correctly, when Canada made a greater commitment to official languages, the federal government supported the establishment of training and courses, through funding to universities, to provide proper interpretation training.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay.

With respect to the language that you decided upon in the Senate, you said that was based on the indigenous language that was spoken by—

Mr. Charles Robert: We had two senators who were from the north who spoke Inuktitut, Senator Watt and Senator Adams.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: If the House of Commons were looking at something, what would you suggest, having now gone through that experience with those two senators, about the model that we would adopt with respect to which languages?

Mr. Charles Robert: I think you would want to do the preliminary work through negotiations with Public Services and Procurement Canada to determine who is available, and work out the modalities. We know that Mr. Ouellette has a real keen desire to speak in Cree. I suppose he would certainly be someone you would want to approach. There may be others who would like to use a third language. They don't need to be just indigenous, presumably. You

could, I suppose, canvass them and see what's feasible and what makes sense.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay, so we could canvass the MPs to determine what languages they would like to speak in the House, indigenous languages specifically, in this case.

I appreciate the comment about the mileage and the car. Can you give us an idea of the cost with respect to the Senate's trial on this? What was the cost?

Mr. Charles Robert: I don't recall actually seeing the cost, because we were under the mileage limit. We just negotiated that.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I see.

Mr. Charles Robert: The cost was actually borne by the department, and because it had a commitment to provide the service, the negotiations were always fruitful, always moving in the same direction: how do we understand each other, to be able to meet your needs and provide a quality of service that is acceptable to us as a department?

Ms. Filomena Tassi: With respect to our moving forward with this, what suggestions would you offer? One of the comments you made that is interesting to me is that the senators understood that this was a trial and so they were very accommodating. For the House of Commons, what suggestions would you make with respect to our moving forward in this regard?

Mr. Charles Robert: I think you will come to an understanding of what your real options are once you start to explore with others. You'll have an idea from the members themselves how passionate they are in their desire to speak their maternal language. You will know from the department what its capacities are right now to provide them and how they might be able to be developed in the future, if that's the direction the House insists on taking. You will be able to work out, I suppose, a time frame that actually accommodates the needs of those members.

I would suggest to you that what is being considered is a very forward proposition that is meant to demonstrate clear respect. If it is to be meaningful, it has to be done correctly, and you have to properly explore what resources are available to you to put this in place.

As I mentioned at the close of my remarks, we in the administration are determined to provide you with the support that is available to us. If it is going to be implemented, like you, we would like to make sure it is successful.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: That's the priority: ensuring that if we do this we do it right.

• (1140)

Mr. Charles Robert: Let me be more candid. We don't want another Phoenix.

Mr. David Christopherson: Whoa.

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to Mr. Gagnon and Mr. Robert for joining us this morning. It's always nice to have our clerk staff here to provide some feedback.

I want to very briefly follow up on Ms. Tassi's question about the capacity of members in the House to speak in an indigenous language. I know we have a fairly strong understanding of which members speak the two official languages. Am I to assume that we don't have a complete understanding of which members or how many members may speak indigenous languages at the current point in time?

Mr. Charles Robert: I suspect that the only real way we know this, because we don't ask the question, is when the members themselves insist on speaking that language.

Mr. John Nater: Very good.

I want to go back a bit. We talked about remote translation. That's something our interpreters are not keen on, and certainly I think there would be some unique challenges with that as well. However, I want to go a step further and talk about parliamentary privilege as it might apply to a remote facility providing these interpretations. This is something Mr. Bosc, in the past, has spoken to this committee about. I was hoping you could provide some background or some insight on how you see parliamentary privilege applying in a case where you have a remote site, perhaps within the parliamentary precinct but more likely beyond, whether privilege would still apply in those cases.

Mr. André Gagnon: That's an interesting question.

You could probably argue that because of the fact the individual is performing duties directly related to House business, that would be directly protected by parliamentary privilege. In the same way, when this committee travels, if it is outside the Ottawa precinct and travelling anywhere in Canada, privilege applies.

Mr. John Nater: Very good.

With the assumption by the Senate that you would interpret Inuktitut into English, but the challenge would be with the direct interpretation, English into French, within the House of Commons would it be acceptable under the Official Languages Act to have interpretation only to one or the other of the official languages?

Mr. Charles Robert: That's a determination for you to make. You would find out whether you're ranging outside your comfort zone from the discussions you have with the interpreters who would provide you the service and can tell you how much is lost, and whether you're comfortable with that threshold.

I'm not qualified, and I don't think André is either, so we should not venture into it. We've done our job in raising the matter and bringing it to your attention so that you're at least aware of it.

Mr. John Nater: I was on the official languages committee for about a year and a half. Hearing from the professionals in the interpretation industry, I know they do set themselves a very high standard.

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes.

Mr. John Nater: From the experience here, I am always remarkably impressed with how well they interpret the stream of consciousness that sometimes spouts from our mouths, so I really appreciate that.

Mr. André Gagnon: And the speed at which Mr. Graham speaks, as well.

Mr. John Nater: That has to be a speed-reading record for our friends in the interpretation booth. I do appreciate that.

Mr. David Christopherson: We're waiting for computer interpretation.

Mr. John Nater: I have two brief questions left.

First, in terms of any recommendations this committee might make, you mentioned that you would like to see an ability to implement them as best you can. Would it be something you'd be willing to come back to the committee for, towards the end of our study, perhaps to hear some of the suggestions we might have at that point and how they might be implemented in the—

Mr. Charles Robert: Certainly. In fact, we would work with the clerk and the analysts to make sure that we follow the deliberations. The more time we have to understand what direction you might want to explore, the better able we will be to assist in informing you about how we could successfully implement your proposals.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Chair, I have one brief question. It's slightly off topic, so please stop me if I go too far. It's more of a request.

When we move to the new West Block, I understand there's currently a committee within the House administration looking at how to preserve some of the ceremonial functions when we end up in different buildings. The poor Black Rod might have to jump on his bicycle to come to the House of Commons. I understand there is a group looking at that and I just question whether at some point in the future we could have an update on how some of these ceremonial functions might be preserved when we move.

Mr. Charles Robert: That in fact is an initiative that also belongs to the government, not just the administration. The ceremony for the Speech from the Throne, the royal assent, and telling the House to find themselves a speaker are all ceremonies that really have some sort of control through the executive and the crown prerogative. Whatever we might propose should really be done in concert with the executive. I would suggest that you talking to them would probably be a useful exercise.

•(1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

Your testimony has been quite useful, particularly the point in your opening remarks that we haven't had both official languages, French and English, all along in the House of Commons either, that there was a transition period in 1959. Obviously you weren't around then, but have you read about or do you have information on that transition? The way we operate today, did that happen from the first day we started providing interpretation, or was there a learning curve? Was there a transition period where we improved?

Mr. Charles Robert: I can describe it to you because I have actually bumped into pages in the Debates before 1959, when it was only in English and only in French. If you didn't speak the other language or understand it, it was basically tough luck, because the way section 133 was interpreted, you can work in either language, but if there is no translation or interpretation, there's no principal violation of the guarantee that you can work in either language.

The period of friction that I was reading through was basically at the time around World War I when Canada was very keen on participating and doing its bit in the war effort, and bills were coming into the House and the Senate, and they were available only in one language. Well, the French senators, the French MPs, those of that language, were furious. They were actually being deprived of their capacity to function as parliamentarians because they could not see the draft legislation in their language.

That was an issue, and I assume that it would have been an issue from 1867 through to 1959. Everyone, I suspect, was really quite grateful that technology had advanced so far that we could actually allow for simultaneous translation in practice, and I think that was in some sense how, as a parliament, we actually fulfilled the intent of section 133 more completely.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: But at that point, you stated that the federal government had provided funds for training for interpreters, because, I'm assuming, there probably weren't people qualified to the standard that we require of them to interpret in both languages.

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes, and I think it was the policy of the government to demonstrate support for official bilingualism that prompted it to recognize that if we are going to rely on interpreters, they have to be properly trained.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: There was probably a rough period when they were trying to transition into languages. I respect the fact that we want to do it right and to make sure that we have a good quality, but I think we have to be realistic. In order to give our first languages respect, and by trying to elevate them to this level and bring those languages to the House of Commons, we're going to have a rough patch, again, in trying to get it to that point where it functions as well as it does today. But I think the funding—

Mr. Charles Robert: I think that's a real risk, and that's why I think your conversations with the interpretation service will be so important.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In our brief, from going through the records, we were given a few different languages that have been used in the House to date. In your experience have you had people come up to you with a request to speak in other, different indigenous languages that we have not heard about as yet in the House?

Mr. Charles Robert: No, not personally.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

Mr. Charles Robert: I have had experiences, not with indigenous languages, but with foreign languages and working with interpreters who either do the relay, as Mr. Reid mentioned, or who do it simultaneously. It does have an impact on how you conduct meetings when you can't do it simultaneously.

I think that's where, speaking about the relay from English into French, it becomes a bit of an issue.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Starting off, it's my understanding that it probably would not occur that frequently. You had mentioned something about others also having a right to speak in languages that are not indigenous to this land.

Why do you feel that way?

•(1150)

Mr. Charles Robert: It's because, based on the experience that I've had in the Senate, there are some senators who are very proud of their cultural heritage and who want to show that pride by speaking in their language. I suspect that would arise also in the House. We applaud ourselves quite rightly for being a multicultural society, the great mosaic that seems to know how to work together. Well, if we want to demonstrate that, it may very well be that the House will recognize the right of members to speak not only the two official languages, but also other languages that are spoken in this country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

We'll now go on to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to go back to something that has been talked about a fair bit, your experience with the Senate. I don't think I heard responses to any of the questions I'll ask.

My first question is in regard to the arrangement that was made for Inuktitut translation. I think there was notice required for that. Is that correct? How long was it? Was it five days?

Mr. Charles Robert: It was five days, because I remember.

Mr. Blake Richards: Can you recall how often that was put into use?

Mr. Charles Robert: Honestly, you could count it on the fingers of one hand.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

Mr. Charles Robert: Largely, I would say, it was because it was so difficult. Who knows; it might become easier if the demand becomes greater.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure.

Mr. Charles Robert: If the demand is greater, then trying to put in place the infrastructure that supports that program becomes easier. There's a greater justification for it. To the extent that it is marginal, you'll have problems identifying interpreters who would be willing to do the work on relatively short notice, to perform a service that might only last for 15 minutes, tops.

Mr. Blake Richards: Right.

Mr. Charles Robert: Those are issues that I think have a practical consequence.

Mr. Blake Richards: When you say "difficult", you're referring to finding available interpreters when there are a very few times that it's requested. Is that what's making it difficult?

Mr. Charles Robert: That was one element of it. There may be other factors involved that you could explore with the interpretation service.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

You said you could count them on one hand. What types of interventions would those have been? Would you remember? Were they statements, or tributes, or a question of speeches?

Mr. Charles Robert: There was one item I remember that was an extensive speech. I think it had to do with a bill that the member was proposing to deal with the heavy cost of bringing food up north. I think Mr. Bagnell would have experience about how expensive it can be.

There was a bill that was looking for some sort of tax relief for the benefit of the inhabitants of the northern regions. The member was quite willing...because he was speaking to his own people about what he was trying to do for them.

That's one vague recollection I have.

Mr. Blake Richards: So that was an entire speech, or a large portion of it.

Mr. Charles Robert: It was a good chunk of his speech.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's the only one you can recall that would have been of that nature.

Mr. Charles Robert: Again, as I said, the occasions were relatively infrequent. There were some that would have been used for statements, but this one, as I recall, was a substantive intervention in an aboriginal language.

Mr. Blake Richards: In that case, if you can recall, and in any of the other few cases that existed, was prepared text provided in advance, or was it required to be?

Mr. Charles Robert: There was prepared text available to us. He provided it to us in English. We were able to make sure that there was a translation in French. At that point, we didn't have to do relay. The moment we had both languages available, when the member was speaking, we would try to coordinate it so it was understood in both languages. That is one of the reasons that having an extensive notice period is useful if we want to avoid that problem.

•(1155)

Mr. Blake Richards: As far as you can recall, was there ever an instance where a relay was needed and text wasn't provided?

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Was that in most of the cases then?

Mr. Charles Robert: I would have to review it. I would have to speak to people who have a better memory than I do.

Mr. Blake Richards: What you're indicating, though, is that having the text prepared in advance sounds like it's quite helpful to ensuring timeliness, because if you're talking about doing a relay, then there's more time being consumed.

Mr. Charles Robert: In fact—

Mr. Blake Richards: It's also about the quality of the interpretation.

Mr. Charles Robert: In fact, you could avoid a relay if you were given a text that said this is the English of what is going to be said in Inuktitut.

Mr. Blake Richards: Exactly.

Mr. Charles Robert: If you had the time, you could translate it.

The translation is a different class of work than interpretation. Interpretation is simultaneous. You're hearing it at the same time you're speaking it. The level of concentration is far greater. If you're basically working with having an opportunity to write the text from

English into French, then you're not really interpreting; you're simply reading.

Mr. Blake Richards: Exactly.

I agree with you completely. I could never imagine being an interpreter. It amazes me that they can be listening and speaking. It astounds me.

That was what I was getting at. I think your answer is that it is certainly much easier, from both the perspective of the quality of the translation or interpretation and also of the use of time, if the text can be provided in advance. That's something we might want to consider when we're making any decisions about this. That would maybe be a requirement, I guess was what I was asking.

Mr. Charles Robert: Again, to constantly be putting a positive spin on this, I would suspect that, if the infrastructure is properly built, then the time frame for the notice may be squeezed. No one would feel then that they were being shortchanged, in terms of the ambitions you have to introduce additional languages other than French and English.

Mr. Blake Richards: In your current role, or in setting up that arrangement in the Senate, in preparation for this study, have you had any interactions with other jurisdictions that have had this multiple language interpretation? If you have, can you share with us any information?

Mr. Charles Robert: The only one was when I spoke to the secretary general of the European Parliament, who explained what a challenge it is. He has 10,000 employees and they move. They go from Strasbourg to Brussels, and it's a huge operation. However, they seem to be successful at it, because they're not working in just two official languages and an additional language, but they're dealing with 28.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

The Chair: I guess one of the ramifications people talked about was that if they're speaking that language—let's say Inuktitut—in a place where there are a lot of people who speak Inuktitut in Canada and they're the audience, then there will be ramifications for a channel like CPAC, so that those people can hear that speech.

Thank you very much. We appreciate your coming here. We're going to suspend for a minute to get the translation set up in Cree. If anyone wants to speak to you, I'm sure you'll be here for a couple of minutes.

•(1155)

(Pause)

•(1205)

The Chair: *Drin gwiinzih shalakat.* Good afternoon, and welcome back to the 93rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as we continue our study on the use of indigenous languages in proceedings of the House of Commons.

We'll hear from Romeo Saganash, MP for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. For members' information, Mr. Saganash will be delivering his opening remarks in Cree. For today's meeting, we have arranged to have simultaneous interpretation of Cree into English and French. We'll have the clerk explain to you a little technicality of how that will work.

Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon): In the interpretation system, channel 0 will be the floor language, so when someone is speaking in Cree, you'll be able to hear it on the floor channel at 0. The interpreter will be interpreting from Cree into English, and then our interpreters will be interpreting from the English translation into French on channel 2.

The Chair: Mr. Saganash, thank you for coming. We appreciate your being here and look forward to hearing your comments.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP) (Interpretation): Thank you.

I want to thank you all for inviting me to bring my thoughts here while you're working on this and trying to bring other languages to be spoken here at these meetings.

I would also like to say that I'm really happy that I'm here to be able to put forward my thoughts on this.

I want to let you guys know that I will be speaking English sometimes on some of the things that I will be talking about. Maybe you won't understand if I share it all in Cree, but what I will talk about is the Constitution. That's what I'll be talking in English about, when I start talking about the Constitution and the way we look at it.

I know that this was talked about in the past. One of the things I want to discuss is this. I know that it can be easy to bring people here so that our people can speak their native language, and I can help you guys. I really expect the Cree language will be able to be spoken. I would always tell you guys ahead of time what I would be talking about. I can tell you guys about what I think, and I think that it's easy.

Can you hear Priscilla interpreting in the background? I want to thank her. She's here helping us today.

I know that I don't have much time to talk to you guys, but I will try to talk about what I need to talk about here.

I really think that you will help people, especially aboriginal people, to be able to speak their language. It really helps us to speak our native language. You probably know that before they took me, before I was sent over here, there was no title for someone to be working in what I am doing right now. There was no title as to how we were going to be called, for what you'd call a member of Parliament. We tried to find a name for us. Today I can say that we call them "the people who speak on our behalf, on their behalf". That's what they call me, and this is what I bring, my word, here in Ottawa, and that's what I did. We didn't have that. You guys had speakers, but we didn't have that. Now we call that "the boss of words".

That's how we can help each other—by allowing aboriginal people to speak their language. I really think we look at the Constitution too much. We should look at section 16 of part I of the Constitution, but it's not the only one we should be looking at. We should also be looking at sections 22, 25, 26, and 34. Those are all the ones that we should all look at equally so we can understand where they came from, about my knowledge, about how I'm able to speak my language.

●(1210)

Mr. Chair, I have read some of the stuff the Senate has done in the past with respect to the feasibility of achieving what I've been proposing since I got elected to this place in 2011. Is it feasible? In my view, it's a resounding yes.

As I said in Cree, those who wish to speak their indigenous language can provide advance notices as to whether it's going to be a question, a statement, or a speech in the House. The notice may change to that effect. Development of a bank of interpreters like Priscilla in the back is easy. That should be developed jointly with the member of Parliament. There are known interpreters up in my riding, many of them who do speak Cree. I think it's a matter of resolving the technology and the space required. I don't know if any of you have visited one of the cubicles of the interpreters in the House of Commons. They're pretty small. It wouldn't be possible today because of that.

I also did mention in my opening remarks that the recognition of my right to speak Cree in the House of Commons will benefit all indigenous languages. If we are serious about recognition of rights in this country then we need to do that. I'll come to the constitutional aspects in a while.

Protection and preservation of indigenous languages is one thing, but there's also the development aspect of indigenous languages when we do recognize the right of indigenous people to speak their language in the House of Commons. I gave two examples there. We didn't have a word in Cree for member of Parliament until I got elected and we had to develop that exactly.

I explained to elders what a member of Parliament does. They suggested a couple of words and we came up with *yimstimagesu*, "He or she who speaks on your behalf". We did the same for the Speaker.

I know that my time is flying by, but I did want to touch on certain aspects. We seem to be focused too much on section 16 of part I of our Constitution, which recognizes the two official languages of this country and the House of Commons. We need to read section 16 jointly with sections 22, 25, 26 and, of course, section 35 of the Constitution of Canada. I think if you combine and read along with other sections there is a definite constitutional right for me to do so in the House of Commons.

Added to that, since our Constitution, UNDRIP, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was adopted in 2007 by the UN General Assembly. Section 13.2 of the UN declaration states:

States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

I think under UNDRIP there is an article that pertains to that. I think the present government has committed to the UN declaration and implementing it, including, to a certain extent, article 5 as well.

The TRC also recommended to the government, in call to action 13, the following:

We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.

That's call to action 13. I believe that the present government also endorsed all 94 calls to action. I think this committee needs to refer to both of those.

That's our framework, Mr. Chair.

•(1215)

I listened closely to the presentations of the clerks just a while ago. I raised these constitutional issues and fundamental rights issues because I don't want to be told as an indigenous person, "Yes, we will allow you to speak your language; yes, we will give you permission to speak your language in the House of Commons." That's charity. I don't want charity. I want my rights to be recognized and respected in that place. I've always stood up for those rights, and I will continue to do so.

One other aspect that needs to be mentioned is that in the most important decision by the Supreme Court in June of 2014, the *Tsilhqot'in* case, the Supreme Court talked about human rights with respect to indigenous peoples for the first time. The Supreme Court said in its decision that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in part I of the Constitution and section 35 in part II of the Constitution are sister provisions. In that sense, we need to look at my right to speak Cree in the House of Commons as a constitutional and human right.

I don't know if I have much time, Mr. Chair, but....

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Interpretation): As I close, I want to let you all know that I'm really happy to see that this is being worked on. It's something that indigenous people have been looking forward to, and it's something that we've always looked forward to—being able to speak my language to you. It's something that we've waited for for a long time. I really think that we all said that we would work together—calling it reconciliation—to have a good relationship.

There is a word in our language for that. We've had it, and we've always done that in the past: to always look at you and to be able to work with you. When I first started working with you, I really tried to work closely and openly with you. That's how I want to continue this working relationship. I want to have a good working relationship with each and every one of you, and for you to be able to acknowledge me while I speak my language every time I stand up when we meet. I always want to be able to know that I'm able to speak my indigenous language, and I want to thank you.

•(1220)

The Chair: *Merçi. Mahsi cho. Gunalchéesh.* That's a very historic first speech in these historic hearings. We really look forward to this movement towards reconciliation as you described.

We'll go on to our first questioner, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Saganash, thank you very much.

I'm going to start by asking you about the word that you used that you essentially created on your arrival to describe what it is that you do as a member of Parliament. Could you spell that for me, please?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: If you can write by sound, I can.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay, can you say it one more time?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It's *yimstimagesu*.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay, I'm going to try that again later.

The reason I say this is that, if it's okay, I'd like to use that at some point on my letterhead because it sparks a conversation. Then I can tell your story. In what year were you first elected?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It was 2011.

Mr. Scott Simms: Exactly. Imagine, in 2011 we didn't have a word for that in your language, which is really a fundamental democratic principle that existed with us, even preceding 1867. I find it absolutely stunning. I'll confer with you again later on.

One of the things that all members of Parliament can do ad nauseam—it's what we all have in common—is to brag about our ridings. We can go days on end talking about how wonderful they is. I'm going to ask you about yours.

In your riding, Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, what community do you live in?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I live in Waswanipi.

Mr. Scott Simms: In that community, can you give me a demographic breakdown of who speaks the language and who doesn't? How prolific is it in your area?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It's an important question that. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission refers to aboriginal rights, which includes language rights, I think they are right on that. For a long time, we did not agree with the content of section 35, and the concept of aboriginal rights was so vague. Nowadays, there is certain agreement on certain things that are contained in section 35, including self-government.

We are fortunate in the Cree world to have signed the first modern treaty in this country in 1975, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, which recognizes a decree to develop curriculum in Cree. All of our kids, for the first four years of their schooling, are taught in Cree, which makes it possible for over 90% of the Cree to still speak their language today.

Mr. Scott Simms: In interactions with the outside world, if you're going outside of your community and you're representing them in a place like this, to what extent do they get information in the Cree language right now?

•(1225)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It's very common now.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Even all of the deliberations of the Cree Nation Government are in Cree. In a lot of our interactions with Quebec, Hydro-Québec or other institutions, they take the time to translate documents into Cree, which is important for our elders. My mom, who just turned 89 on International Women's Day, only speaks Cree. Most of the elders only speak Cree, which helps as well. That's how we managed to develop these words. That's why preservation and revitalization are important, but development of language is also important along with this.

Mr. Scott Simms: We all have this thing called a householder, and for anybody listening outside, that's that pamphlet you get once every four months from your member of Parliament.

When you send out yours, what languages do you send them out in ?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I've used all of the five major languages that are spoken in my riding: Inuktitut, Cree, Algonquin, French, and English.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's quite stunning, actually, stunningly good, mind you, because I want to ask you—

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's why I got re-elected.

Mr. Scott Simms: Pardon?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's why I got re-elected in spite of you.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: Well, congratulations.

He stumps me again.

Do you get any friction? How long is the process to do that? Do you have trouble with the translation part?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: No.

Mr. Scott Simms: It seems logical, then, to do this through translation here from an audio perspective. Certainly it would be a logical next step.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's the easy part.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's the easy part, yes, but yet it doesn't really exist in format.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's what I said in Cree. We've been waiting for this for a long time, for the last 150 years. I think it should have happened long before. In New Zealand, it happened in the late 1800s.

Mr. Scott Simms: With the Maori.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: The Maori. The first Maori elected to Parliament in New Zealand only spoke Maori.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm going to turn to David Graham because he has a question, I think, that talks about the next step.

You're on the spot.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Yes, apparently.

What's the stepped approach that you see? How do we build towards where we need to be? Obviously we're not going to have all indigenous languages translated in both directions starting tomorrow, so what is the stepped process that you would see?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I don't think it will be that difficult. There are some 50 indigenous languages still spoken in this country. Today we have about 10 indigenous MPs. I don't think all of them speak their language—fluently at least. My colleague Georgina speaks her language fluently. It won't be that massive an entrance of indigenous MPs, although I wish there were. I wish there were more of us in the House of Commons. I think it's going to be easy.

I haven't visited the West Block and seen how it's going to look in terms of the technology there, or if that would be possible when we move there, but we shouldn't be afraid of the fact that there are still

52 indigenous languages spoken. That's why I'm suggesting that for indigenous people who wish to speak their language in the House of Commons, the collaboration will always be there.

We know there are many interpreters. I know the ones who can interpret from Cree to English and from Cree to French. Those interpreters exist, and we know all of them, so that part needs to be developed jointly with the MPs.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Now we'll go to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I appreciate your being here, too.

I have several questions, but I'll start with this. You mentioned in your opening remarks—and I might be paraphrasing them slightly—that you would always tell us ahead of time when you were looking to use your Cree language. I guess that lines up pretty well with what you said back in June, when this question of privilege came up, which led us essentially to where we are now. You said that you had tried to negotiate a solution where there would be 24 hours' or maybe 48 hours' notice to allow for an interpreter to be arranged.

Is that your feeling on this? Do you think the best approach would be to provide some kind of advance notice that would allow for an interpreter to be arranged for a pre-determined time?

• (1230)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I think the principle is the notice, and from there we have to determine how much time is required. If the interpreters are way up in James Bay or Nunavik, there are travel costs and travel time involved. If they're in Ottawa, then that's another story, but those are the kinds of considerations that need to be looked at.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. I just wanted to make sure you were comfortable with that—

Mr. Romeo Saganash: The principle of notice is the element here.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Can you just tell me a little bit more about the Cree language? Is Cree your mother tongue?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think there are a number of different dialects. That's not necessarily the correct terminology, but is that accurate? Do you know how many there are?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I think it's a question that's been brought forward by anthropologists and ethnologists. I spent 23 years at the UN, negotiating the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and whenever we were meeting with the Canadian delegation and did not want them to understand us, my brother from Alberta—Wilton Littlechild, who is Cree—and I would speak in Cree. He would perfectly understand what I was saying and I would perfectly understand what he was saying. He supposedly speaks Plains Cree, but there is not much difference.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, so that might answer my next question. Would there ever be a need for interpretation between the different dialects of Cree? It sounds like you're saying probably that wouldn't be required.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Well, I think that's a privilege that belongs to the MP.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, so there is no real definite answer to that question?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: No.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Maybe you can tell me a little bit about your experiences in your constituency. This has been touched on a little bit, but how often do you communicate with your constituents in Cree? What about other indigenous languages? Do you utilize those, whether it be in spoken or in written communications, or things like that?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: In any Cree meeting, assembly, or speech, I use Cree entirely. Mind you, when the Innu or Algonquin or Tkemec speak, I can understand more than half of what they're saying.

Mr. Blake Richards: So that works well.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: They have the same Algonquian roots.

Mr. Blake Richards: That obviously works well in personal communication. It may be face-to-face meetings, maybe even small town halls and things like that. What about your communications such as websites, householders, and things like that? Do you offer those in multiple languages?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: No, just the householders and ten percenters.

Mr. Blake Richards: Have you had to use interpretation or translation services in your riding-level communications, whether written or in town hall meetings or things like that?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: In what way?

Mr. Blake Richards: In your constituency, for example in a town hall meeting.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Amazingly, even though the Inuit have been our neighbours for thousands of years, the Cree language and Inuktitut are very different. In fact, there isn't one word in Inuktitut that has crossed over to Cree, and there isn't one Cree word that has crossed over to Inuktitut. They're the two solitudes of the north.

Mr. Blake Richards: In other words, what you're telling me is that you probably have had to use interpretation and translation services.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: In that case, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Has that worked pretty well?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Blake Richards: That leads me to my next question, and you touched on it a little bit earlier. What's your understanding in terms of the number of interpreters that are available to translate from Cree into English and French? Are you aware of what the numbers would be and whether those individuals you're aware of would meet the translation bureau standards and qualifications that are expected?

●(1235)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: The availability of interpreters is pretty good. Not the Cree Nation Government, but the Cree regional James Bay government, is a regional government structure where half of the membership is Cree and the other half is the non-indigenous communities in the riding. That's the regional government in northern Quebec. In their proceedings and deliberations, there's simultaneous Cree, French, and English translation. The services are there and are easily accessible. In fact, I suggest you communicate with that regional government to talk about the service and how it works.

Mr. Blake Richards: So you don't have any concern, then, about the issue that has come up a couple of times already, namely the idea that there may be a limited number of trained interpreters for the translation into French directly, so there wouldn't be a need for the relay interpretation?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: No.

Mr. Blake Richards: You don't feel this would be an issue?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: No, absolutely not.

Mr. Blake Richards: Good. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just forgot to mention that we couldn't get a room that was televised and that's why APTN have their camera here.

I'll just ask the committee a question before I forget. One of the reporters has asked for a copy of the report that the researcher did of the various jurisdictions. Does anyone have a problem with our allowing that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair, and I want to thank my colleague Romeo for coming in today.

I've been serving in Parliaments since 1990, provincially and federally, and although we're all equal, I have found that in every Parliament there are those among us who rise above. It's because of who they are and the gravitas their personality brings forward. Two of the people who I've served with and who I think come under that heading are Mr. Irwin Cotler and Mr. Ed Broadbent.

Romeo, I want to say that I add you to that, and I consider myself to be very honoured to serve at a time when you are here, because of your important role in building our nation, in giving life to our Constitution, and in doing it in a way that's so classy—I can't think of another word—and so elegant almost, and yet the forcefulness behind your passion is so clear.

Having said that, colleagues, I debated whether I wanted to say this or not, but I think I need to. As much as a successful outcome would be seen as a positive part of continuing to build our nation, I think we have to recognize, based on what our friend and colleague Romeo has said this morning, that the cost of failure is so great that failure is not an option.

We started this by asking “is it time?” and “how could we do it?”, and it was sort of notional, but having now started down this road and having laid out in front the historical implications of how important this is to many of our fellow Canadians, to then fail in this endeavour would mean that our time and our Parliament that we serve in have done more damage than harm, because we started out to do the right thing and failed. I will just say I personally feel that now that we've set down this course we have to succeed. We have to find a way to send the message to our fellow Canadians that we are serious about giving them their rights in a way that is respectful and about acknowledging the rights they have.

That's just to say that usually we do things that would be nice to do, but if they don't work, well, you know, we'll come back at it another time in another Parliament. We don't have that option. We really, really need to make this work, and I have a sense that we will.

I'm like my voting brother, Mr. Simms—that's inside baseball and I don't expect anybody else to get it—on the 150 years. I'm having some trouble getting around the fact that there wasn't even a word for member of Parliament. Now, is that because we weren't electing enough people for this to become an issue? Is it because there was such a disconnect that there was no need for it?

Can you help me just understand a little, Romeo, how we could get to the point? I'm like Scotty: 150 years to come up with a word that describes what a member of Parliament does, given that it's the foundation of our constitutional democracy...? Help me understand, Romeo. How did we get here?

• (1240)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Well, it's for all of the reasons you've mentioned. It's also the fact that there was never a Cree from northern Quebec elected to Parliament—

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: —so this was the first occasion to come up with a word.

In my career, I ended up in the Hockey Hall of Fame, and that wasn't because of my abilities as a hockey player, although I played hockey. Back in the 1980s when I was in law school, I had a second job as a radio host—in Cree. There was a project to do the play-by-play of a hockey game between the Montreal Canadiens and the Quebec Nordiques, and I participated in that project. One of the things we needed to do was to come up with words for “puck”—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Romeo Saganash: —and “referee”. Those were the kinds of things that did not exist. I carried that on throughout my career and did the same for legal terminology, and now I'm doing it for parliamentary business. It was a nice occasion to sit down with elders and explain what I do as a member of Parliament. Once they understood the concept, they proposed a couple of words. I think the best one was *yimstimagesu*.

Mr. David Christopherson: On leaving this, were there other indigenous languages that had or have the same issue?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I wouldn't know.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, thanks. That just struck me.

You mentioned the example of New Zealand in your remarks, and of course we have the examples of NWT and Yukon. Are those examples that you would ask us to look at as potential models, or do you have others that you would suggest we look at in detail, particularly as we grapple with the fundamentals here?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: What I can do, Mr. Chair, is send you not only a written brief of my presentation and some references but also suggestions of other models you could look at.

Mr. David Christopherson: That would be really helpful.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I think that would be important.

When I was coming back, I tried to find a case law or jurisprudence with respect to the interpretation of section 22 of the Constitution, because it does refer to other languages besides English and French. I haven't found jurisprudence about that yet, but I'll continue looking because, as I said, we need to read section 22 along with sections 25, 26, and 35 of our Constitution to determine that this right that I'm talking about, to speak Cree in Parliament, is a constitutional right. It is a human right as well, and I think that's where we need to go in moving forward with this question.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks.

I'll say one last thing, and I don't expect you to have an answer to this, but you may know something about it, given the interpretation.

I think that at some point, Chair and colleagues, we're going to need to take a look at where we're going to be in the very near future in terms of simultaneous interpretation as it relates to AI. I don't know about others here, but I'm sure you're doing the same, reading and trying to get a sense of where things are and what the issues are that we need to grapple with.

There are those who suggest that within a very short period of time, AI will be such that you could actually almost have an earpiece and be talking to someone and have instantaneous interpretation. Are you familiar with this at all?

No? Okay. But I think it is something that we need to look at, because parliaments will exist for a long time and AI is going to have a major impact.

Romeo, thank you again, sir. I hope that we can call upon you at any time as we continue our deliberations.

• (1245)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Sure.

Mr. David Christopherson: Very good. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

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

Now we'll go to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you for being here today, Mr. Saganash. I appreciate all the work you've been doing. I think we're truly blessed to have you as a member of Parliament so that you can help us forward this agenda and move towards a more inclusive Parliament.

After the testimony that we had from the clerk, I can't help but feel that in this case I would hate for perfect to become the enemy of the good. We're trying to progress, and we're trying to make sure that you who have the right to speak in your native language get to exercise that right and that others who have come before you or will come after you also get to do the same.

You were saying that there are about 10 members of Parliament currently who may or may not fluently speak an indigenous language. What languages are those?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: There's certainly Dene. My colleague, MP Jolibois speaks her language, which is Dene. When Robert-Falcon Ouellette spoke Cree, that led us to this room today. He spoke in five Cree dialects.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What are the most spoken indigenous languages today?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Cree.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Cree is the most spoken?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: There is Cree in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, North Dakota, and Montana.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. I was just sitting here thinking also—

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's about 450,000 people.

Ms. Ruby Sahota:—that there have also been witnesses before committees and other members of Parliament who have served throughout the years who may not have English or French as their first language. Therefore, sometimes in speaking those languages, they make mistakes. Sometimes we have to understand through context what they are trying to say, so the accuracy we were talking about earlier, which we may lose through a relay.

I'm sure those people are sometimes silenced, but we wouldn't want to silence people who don't speak English or French as their first language. If we are not able to find anyone to interpret certain languages, but have to rely on relaying the language into French or into English, would you say that is still satisfactory for us to move forward with this? Could we just accept that loss of maybe a couple of words that we'll then be able to figure out in the context of the whole speech as given?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Having recognized what you just said, if we do recognize that, I think it's a problem that we can deal with. Let's say my mom got elected in 2019. She only speaks Cree. With her budget as an MP, she could certainly hire her boy to translate. Well, she wouldn't be allowed to do that, but I could certainly help her write in English what she would tell me.

She's one of the better Cree speakers in our world. I spoke that language for the first seven years of my life, before being taken away to a residential school, and she taught me that language. That's why, although they tried to take away my language in the residential school for 10 years, the roots of my spoken language, my spoken Cree, were so strong. It was because of her. That's why it never disappeared.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Are there any official training classes for Cree, or is it all passed down through the family?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Absolutely there are. There's even an application for it right now. I know of two applications that you can

look up and download. You can type in any English word or French word, and—

● (1250)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Are there training classes for interpreters?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Really. Okay.

There must be some languages that they don't have training for. I feel like sometimes we're trying to put the cart before the horse. Perhaps if we were to allow for these languages to be spoken, and the need for translation to be there that quickly, we would get to a point where people would be interested in taking formal classes. We would figure out a way to get to the perfect eventually. That's basically what I'm trying to get at.

In closing, I just want to return to what my colleague David Graham was kind of asking about. In our first step, what do you feel, as an advocate for your language, would be a satisfactory place to start? I think simultaneous translation would be great. AI might be able to help down the road, but at this step and this juncture, what do you think would be satisfactory for us to start?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I think the first immediate step is to make sure that the space and the technology exist in the House, in Parliament, to allow for that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What kind of technology?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I would have preferred Priscilla being in that room rather than being at the back—that kind of thing.

I want to add one thing about indigenous languages, following your comments. I've attended Assembly of First Nations meetings over the last 30 years. I've seen standing ovations for politicians many times in those assemblies. The biggest one I ever saw was when the Prime Minister announced that there would be an indigenous languages act. He got a rousing standing ovation for that announcement.

So if you're serious about protecting and revitalizing indigenous languages in this country, well, let's move forward. I don't know what the content of Minister Joly's legislation will be. Much to my surprise, I haven't been consulted on the preparation or development of the legislation, unfortunately. I don't know if what we're trying to do here could be included in that legislation. I don't know. I haven't seen what's in the works at that end.

I'm hoping that we can deliver on this, because it's dangerous to abuse the trust of people. I think we're at a period of time, after 150 years, when we're no longer allowed to abuse the trust of indigenous peoples.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. *Nakurmiik*.

Mr. Nater, please.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just following up on the indigenous languages legislation, do you have any idea, or have you been given any notice, of when that legislation might be forthcoming?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I have no idea. As I said, I haven't been consulted. I have seen what Senator Joyal is proposing. That's basically programs and so on. If we want something meaningful, then we need to include meaningful stuff in it. But I haven't been consulted, so—

Mr. John Nater: You'd be ready and willing to offer—

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Of course.

Mr. John Nater: —as well as I'm sure other members of Parliament, and certainly across the country. I appreciate that.

You talked earlier about creating words for hockey and things like that, and words for Parliament as well. Is there a formalized process in which some of these words are created or is it a traditional practice with community members and elders, or is it an as needed type of thing? How does the language develop? Is it developed naturally or is there a process as well?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Our institutions are the elders; they're the speakers. I think that's the main area or source for the development of language. It takes time because you need to sit down with them, explain what you want in a word, explain the concept. Once they get it, they sometimes come up with four or five words that would fit. It's up to them to determine exactly which is better.

• (1255)

Mr. John Nater: It's within the community.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes.

Mr. John Nater: It's a collaborative, I guess. I find that fascinating.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: We had a Cree language commission for some time, but it doesn't exist anymore.

Mr. John Nater: Would the people who were involved with that still be active, so that we could potentially hear from them as future witnesses?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I think so, yes.

Mr. John Nater: That's excellent.

That leads into my next question. You mentioned that the Cree Nation Government deliberates almost entirely, if not entirely, in Cree. Are there translation services for that into either English or French, or is it exclusively done in Cree?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's the reason the Cree language is so strong today, because all of our deliberations are in Cree. The younger generation is compelled to maintain that language because of that. Only the regional government, which is composed of 11 Cree and 11 non-Crees, translates English, French, and Cree.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Chair, they're not on our list of potential witnesses right now, but perhaps that's a group we could consider inviting in future.

I want to conclude by thanking you for joining us and for your comment earlier about attempting to have your language taken away from you during the terrible residential schools in our history and for advocating and being a voice for the language. I think it's very meaningful.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: After 10 years in residential school, I promised myself two things: One was to go back into the bush,

which I did for two years. The other was that I was determined to reconcile with the people who put me away for 10 years, and this is another attempt at doing that. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: In my family my great-grandfather is known to have spoken Cree and Ojibwa as well as English and French. He wasn't indigenous. It was the language of trade at the time. It was a bit of a shock. Growing up I learned that it was perfectly normal a few generations ago for the white man to learn these languages, and I can only presume it was deliberately lost.

I think that what you're bringing forward is very important and I'm completely sold on the need to get there. But the first thing I want to focus on is the logistics. How we do it, until Douglas Adams gets his dream of giving the Babel fish to all of us?

On that basis, what's a reasonable notification period? How much time is needed? You talked at the beginning about being perfectly fine with notifying the House about your intent to speak in a different language.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It depends on where the interpreters are. That's the complicated variable here. If I have a question tomorrow morning, giving notice to you today is perfectly fine.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I think the right to speak exists already. We want to find the right to be understood, which I think is the more important one. I think we ought to make that distinction.

Earlier, I mentioned to the clerks—I don't know if you were here in the room at the time—that I believe it's important that when someone speaks in an indigenous language in the House—and I think this should apply to all indigenous languages—that Hansard eventually can translate that and have an affirmative record without your having to provide it to them. I think that's reasonable.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It should at least be when it's printed at the end of the Parliament. I don't know if you agree with that comment or how you see the written records.

Do you have comments to add to that?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It wouldn't be available in the next 24 hours—that's for sure—but it's doable easily.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We note in this room right now that we have translation from Cree, but not to Cree. Is that part of this? Are we getting all proceedings of the House? Does that apply at committee as well? Is it from and to, or just from? How do you see that?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: That's a choice we will need to consider. In order to accommodate the House of Commons, I wouldn't ask for English to Cree translation. In terms of give and take, I will allow that.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We mentioned there are 56 or so languages in the country. Which ones do we look at including? Which ones do we not look at including? Where do you draw those lines?

•(1300)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: I don't think there should be any exclusion. My constitutional right to speak applies in the very same manner to every other language in this country.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's fair.

I want to see if I got this right when I say *yimstimagesu*.

Mr. Scott Simms: I have it here.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: He has it even better.

Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Simms: Sorry to steal your time.

Priscilla was kind enough to give me the spelling and the pronunciation if anybody wants to write this down. It's *yimstimagesu*.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes, *yimstimagesu*.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay. So it's pronounced, "yum-shta-ma-jeh-suu".

Thank you, Priscilla.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: Not really, but go ahead.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: First, what about remote interpretation? Would that be something you would consider acceptable? If we couldn't get somebody here, could we do a remote interpretation?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes, if it's possible.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay.

The second thing is probably hard to envision. The day you're able to stand up in the House of Commons and speak in Cree and have that interpreted, what is it going to feel like for you and your constituents, while you represent them?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It won't be only me.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Yes.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: It will be for all indigenous people. It will be all for Canadians as a matter of fact, all of us. This is going to be a victory for all of us, not just me.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Romeo Saganash: In that sense, it's going to be, of course, a historic moment, but I think it's going to be a victory for Canada.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Very good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

David.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, just before you bring us to a conclusion, there was a reference to the Cree Language Commission. Could I just ask the researchers to give us a little background on that? That may prove helpful.

The Chair: Thank you very much, *yimstimagesu*, for coming here.

I also thank Priscilla Bossum, the interpreter, for coming today. This is historic translation.

Thank you to all the committee members for this excellent exercise.

The meeting is adjourned.

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