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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee is meeting on the study of the federal support for French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in a minority situation.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me.

[English]

Lastly, I remind all participants and attendees that you cannot take photos or screen captures.

[Translation]

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. I thank them for accepting our invitation to appear before the committee.

For the first hour, we are hearing from, as an individual, Jean Poirier, former member of provincial Parliament and former president of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, as well as Lynn Brouillette, president and chief executive officer, and Martin Normand, director of strategic research and international relations, both from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne. We are also hearing from Luc Bussi eres, rector of the Universit e de Hearst.

I see that Marie-France Lalonde has raised her hand.

Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orl ans, Lib.): Thank you very much. I apologize, Mr. Chair.

I don't want to delay the appearances, but the clerk has sent us a request to appear from the University of Ottawa in relation to the study. I have spoken with the representatives of the Association des universitaires de la Facult e Saint-Jean, who met with Mr. Blaney and Mr. Godin to request an appearance. If possible, I would like to know what my colleagues think about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

We will begin with Mr. Godin, and then Mr. Blaney could say something.

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

Mr. Jo el Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Concerning what my colleague Mrs. Lalonde just said, we have received a copy of the request you have received, as chair, from the Association des universitaires de la Facult e Saint-Jean, to add Chiara Concini to the witness list.

Has the committee made a decision on whether we will reply to the association to let them know what the committee has decided? If the committee accepts, will the meeting be held in a committee or subcommittee?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Blaney, do you want to say anything?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—L vis, CPC): I will be brief, Mr. Chair.

Yesterday, I met with Chiara Concini, from the Association des universitaires de la Facult e Saint-Jean. I told her it would likely be difficult to hear from her.

I did tell her I would at least suggest to committee members that she submit a written brief, which could be worthwhile considering in our study. We could do the same for the other witness proposed by Mrs. Lalonde.

So we could decide to hold additional meetings, but it seems that House business could eat into the time planned for committee meetings, at least next week. Perhaps we should take five minutes, without witnesses, to discuss this amongst ourselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will consult the clerk, but I just want to remind you that we have scheduled four meetings for this committee study and that today is the last meeting.

If we have the committee members' consent to act on Mr. Blaney's suggestion, we could discuss it in camera and decide when we could hold extra meetings. It's a bit complicated, technology wise, as we have to stop, and new passwords are then needed to go in camera.

So I will discuss this with the clerk, because it cannot be done now. After this meeting, you will receive an email informing you of what can be done, if that is what all the committee members want. Is that okay with everyone? Okay.

We will continue the meeting. I want to remind the witnesses that they have five minutes for their opening remarks and that I will let them know when they have a minute left for their presentation or when they have no time left, be it during the presentation or during the question and answer period.

Mr. Poirier, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Jean Poirier (Former Member of Provincial Parliament and Former President, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you.

This committee has heard many statistics concerning the disparity in funding among post-secondary institutions in Canada, as well as between French-language and English-language institutions.

I would rather like to focus on the reasons why the federal government must support French-language communities outside Quebec more directly and rethink the way funding is allocated to communities. Answering that question actually helps better understand the challenges related to this matter.

For over 50 years, I have been advocating for the promotion and defence of French language and culture, both locally and internationally. I have done that as a member of Parliament for Queen's Park over four terms. I have also done it as president of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, as a community development officer, and so on.

As a fourth generation Franco-Ontarian, I think I am in a position to properly evaluate the past, current and future situations of French outside Quebec.

For more than 262 years, Canada's francophones have been aspiring to true equality between this country's two official language groups. However, that true equality has been slow to materialize. A person does not need to hold a doctorate degree in this field to understand the reality of our experience. All they need to do is avoid watered down history texts published over the years, texts that have been approved by governments, even the church, and which have been redacted. Those texts have hovered over our reality, which has not always been rosy. I would even talk about institutional and individual francophobia. In those texts, authors carefully avoided describing real obstacles we must constantly face—that reality and that francophobia—generation after generation.

Provinces have even adopted laws and regulations to ban the teaching of French. For example, we, Franco-Ontarians, have for decades been subjected to the Government of Ontario's infamous Regulation 17.

The symbol that unites us, as francophones, is the fleur de lys. However, if we were to let certain members of the majority adopt a symbol more representative of the way they see our quest for equality, I am sure they would choose a bar code, like the ones on products. We are being perceived as an unjustifiable cost, a frivolous expense and a waste of public funds. That is what I have often heard.

At a time when we absolutely deplore the horrible racism that has been and is still being directed at first nations, Blacks, Asians,

Muslims and so many others, it should also be understood and accepted that Canadian francophones also deserve a slogan like "French Lives Also Matter".

You have witnessed the way the Government of Ontario stopped supporting the creation of the Université de l'Ontario français and the way it has abolished the position of independent French-language services commissioner. You have seen how Laurentian University, although bilingual, has cut French programs in an unfair and shameful manner; how Campus Saint-Jean, in Edmonton, is on the brink; and how an advisory committee, in Newfoundland and Labrador, even proposed abolishing francophone and anglophone school boards.

Provincial governments still refuse to understand, accept and implement their role, their duties and their commitment toward their own French-language communities. That is why the federal government, in its mission to achieve substantive linguistic equality in the country, must get involved and ensure that francophone communities can fully benefit from French-language programs at the post-secondary level.

The Official Languages Act must better reflect the real needs of our French-language communities. Since we still don't have full linguistic equality, asymmetric amendments to the act must be a possibility, if necessary, to comply with our distinct and urgent needs, as we are still catching up.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1545)

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

I want to use this opportunity to congratulate you on serving as a member of Parliament over four terms. Well done!

Ms. Brouillette, from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, I now give you the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette (President and Chief Executive Officer, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, brings together the 22 francophone or bilingual post-secondary institutions located in eight Canadian provinces. Our mission is to increase access to French-language post-secondary education in francophone minority communities, and to represent the collective interest of our members with federal institutions.

I would like to use my time to present four main ideas to the committee. The brief we have submitted to the committee elaborates on those ideas.

First idea: Francophone communities and students get the short end of the stick when governments toss the ball back and fourth concerning the funding of post-secondary education. Today, I want to present our point of view on what the federal government can and must do to address funding issues directly.

Second idea: We feel that the government must think of other methods to provide federal support to post-secondary institutions. The primary vehicle the federal government has used to support post-secondary institutions in our communities is the official languages in education program, or OLEP. As you know, that program complements the funding provinces provide. The program contains many good aspects that must be retained. However, that program is over 50 years old, and it is time to check whether it still meets the needs of post-secondary institutions.

Third idea: We have no doubt that the federal government has the right to provide minority francophone and bilingual post-secondary institutions with direct support without undermining provincial jurisdiction in education. I will explain. Our institutions cater to francophone minorities in Canada. Their civic mission is different from that of institutions that cater to the majority. They must assume additional responsibilities and perform additional duties. The initiatives our post-secondary institutions must implement to fulfil that civic mission come directly under federal jurisdiction. I have three examples for you.

First example: Our post-secondary institutions must contribute in a special way to the vitality of francophone minorities. The federal government is the steward of that vitality, and it has an obligation to take action in that respect. That is a federal responsibility.

Second example: Our institutions must increase the rate of French and English bilingualism in the country. It is the federal government's objective to increase the rate of individual bilingualism, and it must find innovative ways to achieve that objective. That is another federal responsibility. Our institutions can help the government accomplish that goal.

Third example: Our institutions provide the necessary structures to welcome an international clientele. They establish partnerships with settlement agencies in the transition toward permanent residence. The federal government is in charge of francophone immigration, as it has set a target to meet. Once again, this is a federal responsibility.

Fourth idea: We are noting that political will is evolving more quickly than administrative vehicles, so the government must take action in that area. To that end, we ask you to make three recommendations in your report to the government.

First recommendation: That the government adopt regulations for applying part VII of the Official Languages Act.

Second recommendation: That the government adopt a public policy statement to support the post-secondary sector in a francophone minority context in its areas of jurisdiction.

Third recommendation: That the government develop a permanent program for supporting post-secondary institutions in a francophone minority context in order to take action in categories of need related to federal jurisdiction.

In closing, I will say that the government must take action, as it clearly states in its official languages reform document that communities cannot be strong unless institutions are also strong. We must avoid a weakening of francophone minority post-secondary institutions leading to a weakening of community vitality.

• (1550)

I would be pleased to answer your questions.

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

I remind the committee members that Ms. Brouillette is joined by Mr. Normand.

We will now hear from the rector of Hearst University.

Mr. Bussi eres, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Luc Bussi eres (Rector, Hearst University): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the vice-chairs and members of the committee for inviting me to appear today.

I feel the need to start with a bit of background on Universit  de Hearst, which still has a relatively low profile outside northern Ontario, in particular, and Ontario, more broadly. Universit  de Hearst has been serving francophones for 68 years. I'd like to share some historical milestones. S minaire de Hearst was founded in 1953 to provide secondary education to francophones. The institution's name and status changed in 1959, when S minaire de Hearst became Coll ge de Hearst and began offering university courses. The third major development in the institution's history was in 1972, when it became known as Coll ge universitaire de Hearst and gained provincial recognition as a public institution. Since then, our funding has come from the province directly, not through Laurentian University, with which we have been affiliated since 1963. From that point forward, our affiliation with Laurentian University has been academic, as opposed to financial. In 2014, we were authorized by the province to formally adopt the name Universit  de Hearst.

Finally, just recently—on June 3—the Legislative Assembly of Ontario passed Bill 276, giving Universit  de Hearst a charter and making it an independent institution. Once that process is complete, our affiliation with Laurentian University will come to an end. Universit  de Hearst will join the ranks of Ontario's 20 or so stand-alone universities.

Université de Hearst is firmly rooted in northeastern Ontario, with three campuses: Hearst, Kapuskasing and Timmins. Our contribution to the educational, social, cultural and economic development of the region's francophone community has been widely recognized by our many partners for quite some time.

If an institution like ours is not well connected to its community and fails to be responsive, it will struggle to survive in the face of social, demographic, economic and political change. In 2014, we completely revamped our post-secondary service delivery model. Here's a recap of what we have achieved since. First, enrolment has gone up by 125%, even though northern Ontario's demographics are not in our favour. Second, international students, from 25 countries, now make up 60% of our entire student body. Third, we achieved all of that with an offering of just three undergraduate programs.

Despite our nearly 70-year history and despite our resilience and ability to innovate, our financial situation has always been—and continues to be—a cause for concern. From 2011 to 2021, we ran seven budget deficits. We have an annual budget of \$8.5 million. We generate roughly a third of our revenue, and the rest, \$5.8 million, comes from subsidies. Through the official languages in education program, or OLEP, we receive approximately \$450,000 from the federal government. That amount has not changed since 2003 and accounts for less than 8% of our total subsidies.

However, to perform the role expected of us, we need significantly more support, especially from the federal government, which should invest in strengthening the institutional underpinnings of francophone communities. We are the federal government's natural allies in ensuring the vitality of minority communities, training a bilingual workforce and achieving francophone immigration targets. At stake is the federal government's responsibility to protect, promote and, ensure the vitality of, the country's linguistic duality. That is why the federal government must increase the funding it provides through the OLEP and establish measures to remedy the impact of the extended freeze on the federal contribution. Also necessary are new ongoing programs to support post-secondary institutions in minority language communities.

In conclusion, it is imperative that the federal government act to ensure the decline of our community institutions does not undermine the vitality of our communities, as Ms. Brouillette mentioned. Through Official Languages Act reforms, the federal government can take swift and robust action to ensure Canada's linguistic duality has a stronger and more sustainable future.

● (1555)

We are counting on your support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bussières.

None of the witnesses went over their allotted time.

I'd like to welcome the honourable member Arif Virani to our meeting.

We will now move into our first round of questions. Each party will have six minutes.

I assume Mr. Blaney is going to start us off. Please indicate who your questions are for.

Mr. Blaney, please go ahead.

● (1600)

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

I have the same question for all three witnesses. They can answer in the same order in which they gave their presentations. First, though, I want them to know that their opening statements were music to my ears.

Ms. Brouillette, I know you spoke with my assistant. I didn't have the chance to meet you virtually, but I'm glad we have that chance today.

Mr. Poirier, thank you for being such an ardent advocate. I really appreciated what you said about substantive equality for minority communities. You underscored the need for an asymmetrical approach.

I'll be in the House later, and we realize what communities are going through. I am a Quebecker and I recognize that you and I face the same thing; the reality is catching up to us.

Ms. Brouillette, you said the federal government has to make a concrete commitment. We aren't hear to criticize the provinces. They aren't perfect and they face constraints.

We, in the federal government, need to develop mechanisms to increase funding for the cornerstone that is Canada's linguistic duality; we need to leverage the Official Languages Act and fulfill our constitutional responsibilities. That is precisely what Mr. Bussières was talking about; he is calling on the federal government for enhanced structural support.

My question is for each of you. I'll start with Mr. Poirier.

Mr. Poirier, have you come up with mechanisms, targets and costs? Do you have a per-capita funding formula to propose? How do you think the federal government can discharge its constitutional obligation to support educational institutions on an asymmetrical basis?

Before you answer, I want to tell you that the committee began its study on the crisis facing Laurentian University, only to realize that it was the tip of the iceberg. We heard the same worrisome things from the people in Moncton. The Campus Saint-Jean is also in the same boat.

We really feel this study will be useful.

How, then, should the federal government structure the support it provides? What mechanisms should it put in place to establish a fair and stable funding formula, one that meets the needs of minority communities?

The Chair: Mr. Poirier, you have 30 seconds to answer.

I stopped the clock; I want to let members know that, because of the time, we will have only one six-minute round per panel.

I'm starting the clock again.

Go ahead, Mr. Poirier.

Mr. Jean Poirier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Blaney, what you're proposing is a change in philosophy that could lead to a complete overhaul of how support is provided to French-speaking communities outside Quebec.

I cannot tell you today how exactly to get there, but I do suggest that you really examine the matter to come up with a recommendation by the end of your study. It has to have the backing of francophone communities, who must come away with the sense that they are genuinely being supported.

Truly, you will have to consider an asymmetrical approach, because applying the same approach to all groups is not working. That is clear from Canada's changing demographics, as the census results and figures show. As Bernard Derome, the former *Téléjournal* news anchor, would have said, if the trend holds, there won't be any students left to attend French-language post-secondary institutions.

I cannot tell you how to do it, but do it, please.

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

Ms. Brouillette, I'd like to hear what you think.

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Thank you for your question.

We feel strongly that the federal government must play an important role, and it is essential that federal jurisdiction in relation to post-secondary educational institutions be clearly defined.

The federal government has the power to act. It could introduce a new program, something we strongly recommend, while reviewing the existing program, OLEP.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

It's fitting that you say so, since that is exactly what our leader is recommending—a new funding mechanism.

Mr. Bussières, do you have any recommendations of a more practical nature? In terms of your university's needs, do you have a certain figure in mind?

How much should the federal government contribute, possibly on a per-capita basis?

• (1605)

Mr. Luc Bussières: In addition to reviewing the OLEP, the federal government needs to establish a new program, and that program has to have more than one facet or component. A mixed approach is what's needed.

The 22 institutions Ms. Brouillette talked about earlier face a fairly different set of circumstances. I'm tempted to say that the per-capita funding formula is not always well-suited to very small institutions like ours. Large institutions do not need the same level of support or even support components.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Bussières, I gather you are recommending core funding that takes the institution's size into account.

Mr. Chair, I have a minute remaining, and I'd like my fellow member to have the little time I have left. At least, he will have a chance to weigh in.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Blaney.

My question is for Mr. Bussières.

Mr. Bussières, I realize that your university is small, but do you think performance should factor into the funding formula?

After listening to you and the other university officials, I gather that enrolment isn't the problem. Students want to study in French.

Should the government establish a program based on the rate of francization? That would be an effective basis for developing a new program, something that would motivate people, don't you think?

Goodness knows universities compete against one another, but this could present an opportunity to protect the French language and support its development.

What do you think?

The Chair: Mr. Bussières, please answer in 10 or 15 seconds.

Mr. Luc Bussières: We've never had a problem. We've never had a problem rising to a challenge or being held to account. Our student body is entirely French-speaking, so achieving further francization would be difficult, but we can contribute to bilingualism.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bussières.

We now go to Mr. Lefebvre for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Lefebvre. You can share your time, if you like.

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

I will indeed be sharing my time with Ms. Lalonde.

Good afternoon, Mr. Bussières.

As you probably know, I hail from Kapuskasing. My mother graduated from Université de Hearst and Laurentian University; she was a social worker. We are very proud of that in my family. She was able to work from home. I fully understand how important small universities are in small communities, and Hearst is known as the Gallic village of Ontario.

I'd like you to talk about your small university and its resilience.

How did you make it through the difficult years?

In its 2020-21 budget, the federal government announced an additional \$121 million in support over the next two and a half years. What would that funding mean to you?

How would that investment help you?

Mr. Luc Bussières: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lefebvre.

There is something I often say about the institution's resilience. The fact that Université de Hearst is still around nearly 70 years after its founding is attributable, first and foremost, to the strong momentum created by its founders. Second, its resilience is the mark of all those teams of people who came afterwards. Third, it is the product of our ability to innovate and bounce back. That, too, is resilience. We had to be extremely imaginative to get where we are, to say nothing of our stubbornness and determination.

The potential of receiving additional federal support for official languages is very encouraging. I said that, in the past 11 years, we had run seven budget deficits. Aside from working tirelessly, what we have frequently done is turn to the provincial government or elsewhere for one-off grants, which do not help with core operating requirements. That's where the additional burden comes in. The money gives us the ability to enhance certain aspects of the university, but it does not help with core operations. That is where we need the extra help; that would be the best possible support we could receive.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I think the committee members need to hear a bit about your reality and your budget shortfall vis-à-vis your provincial and federal funding. You said you had a budget of \$8 million. Would \$9 million give you more peace of mind?

How can you grow your university and help it thrive?

Tell us about your resources and the things you could accomplish if you had more.

Mr. Luc Bussières: If I go by the numbers from the board of governors, I would put our structural deficit at somewhere between \$600,000 and \$1 million.

With that money, we could do things properly and grow the university. We just received our charter, and people will, of course, be expecting us to expand the programming and services we offer. We can't do that, however, with our current resources. Year after year, we still struggle to survive.

• (1610)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, again, and congratulations on your charter. I know you were waiting for that. It makes me very proud. Keep up the great work.

I will now give Ms. Lalonde the rest of my time.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Lefebvre.

My question is for Ms. Brouillette.

As we've heard, the provinces and territories submit action plans to the federal government, and those plans set out the priority areas for the funding of official language minority communities.

Where do the consultations between minority communities and provincial and territorial governments stand? Could you also talk about French-language school board groups at the elementary and secondary level? I'm interested in the post-secondary dimension as well.

Do you know whether the consultation process is the same in the francophone community?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: That's a good question, but association members like Mr. Bussières may be better people to ask about the consultations with provinces.

We have 22 institutions among our membership, so it's important to understand that the challenges they face are many and extensive, as well as widely varying. Our job is to find solutions, and we are hoping for federal support for our network of institutions.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I think that this was brought up earlier. My colleague spoke about the budget, the \$121 million for post-secondary education. The document on the reform of the Official Languages Act talks about the education continuum.

Ms. Brouillette, a number of witnesses emphasized the need for asymmetrical funding for the benefit of official language minority communities. The argument was made that the anglophone and francophone systems shouldn't be funded in the same way.

Other than an increase in federal funding, what changes does this mean for the provincial and territorial post-secondary education system?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: Could you quickly repeat the question, please?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, may I?

The Chair: Yes, you may, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: The argument was made for asymmetrical funding for the benefit of official language minority communities.

Other than an increase in federal funding, what changes does this mean for the provincial and territorial post-secondary education system?

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: I can't necessarily comment on what this might mean for the provinces, because we deal with the federal government. That's our area of expertise, so to speak.

As I said in my remarks, the important thing will be to review the administrative mechanisms. The political will is there, of course. We've seen that. There's also the further \$121 million in the 2018-23 action plan for official languages. The amounts are significant. However, the administrative mechanisms must be implemented.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brouillette.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank all our witnesses for joining us.

My first question is for Mr. Poirier.

Mr. Poirier, you dared to identify a phenomenon that's rather taboo, a bit like the elephant in the room. That phenomenon is francophobia. Yet the entire history of Canada has been marked by anti-French legislation. Even today, French is constantly being pushed aside. French-language post-secondary institutions are underfunded.

Could you provide more examples and explain what you mean by "francophobia"?

Mr. Jean Poirier: I've noticed that francophobia appears mainly in the English-speaking media. Like all of you, I read the articles published. Some of the readers' comments are appallingly francophobic. I don't understand why English-speaking society allows these types of comments.

I've been experiencing this for 50 years. Even at Queen's Park, I felt like an alien. I look like Colonel Sanders, the developer of the Kentucky Fried Chicken chain. However, I still felt like an alien. We keep hearing rude questions and comments.

• (1615)

[English]

What do the French want? You don't speak real French.

[Translation]

I've heard things from all parties, at all levels, that I couldn't repeat. They forgot about the francophone activist in the room. It's always the same thing, and it's still happening. It's as if, in English Canada, all phobias, except for francophobia, are absolutely terrible. Attacks against francophones are tolerated and supported. What I saw at Queen's Park really threw me. I thought that I would find support. However, I spent my time trying to explain the francophonie outside Quebec and the francophonie in Quebec, and how they're different and how they have their own characteristics. I realized that there are two kinds of blind people in the world. I have tremendous respect for the blind people with the white canes. Yet there are willfully blind people who don't want to see or accept that our needs are different.

As Mr. Godin said, French-language educational institutions must be as attractive as English-language institutions. If we were to list the programs available in French outside Quebec and in English outside Quebec, you would see quite a disparity. This discourages many francophones.

I'll go back to francophobia. I don't accept that it's tolerated today. No phobia should be tolerated, whether it's against francophones, Muslims or Black people. It must be strongly condemned.

Most people don't want to understand that our needs are different, so you'll need to help us make them understand. We're in catch-up mode. Smaller universities such as Hearst need special assistance to launch many diverse and quality programs. When it

comes time for young people to choose a university, they must think that it's worthwhile to study at a francophone university.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What do you think about the fact that English-language universities and CÉGEPs in Quebec are overfunded? English-language universities received 38.4% of federal grants from 2010 to 2017.

What do you mean by asymmetry?

Mr. Jean Poirier: I'm talking about that issue, among other things.

I read the report that one of the witnesses submitted last week and I saw the statistics. These amounts are the stuff of dreams for francophones outside Quebec. I would love to get my hands on these types of amounts. With all due respect to English-language universities, the imbalance is obvious. That's why I hope to see an asymmetrical approach to help francophones achieve this equality or this reality that everyone is talking and bragging about.

This must be put into practice. If that means taking some money from large educational institutions that have long-standing networks, let's do it. They've been around for a long time. They have large networks that fund or help fund their institutions. We don't have those networks. Our institutions are recently established and new. We're starting from scratch, in some cases.

When I saw these figures, my head was spinning. I wondered what I was seeing. It was like a winning lottery ticket.

The difference between the amount given to anglophones in Quebec and the amount given to francophones outside Quebec is enormous. This must be reviewed. I urge you to review this.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Poirier.

I have a question for Mr. Bussièrès.

I gather that the Université de Hearst wants to become a university by and for francophones. It's a bit like the Université de Sudbury.

Can you talk about the importance of post-secondary institutions by and for francophone and Acadian communities?

Mr. Luc Bussièrès: Thank you for the question.

First, our part of Ontario is the Far North. Sudbury is in the Mid-North. Several witnesses have referred to this.

If the question were asked here, in the Far North, we would say that, obviously, it has made a difference. In the consultations regarding the creation of the Université de l'Ontario français, which took place starting in 2017, we were asked what we thought about it. At that time, we responded that, if we didn't have this type of educational institution in the Far North, we would have strongly argued for the right to have something of that nature. We would certainly support the creation of an equivalent entity for central south-western Ontario, which really didn't have many services. Those are two examples. Now we're wondering about this matter in Sudbury because of what happened with Laurentian University. That could be a third example.

Francophones have the reflex and the right to make requests, to do things their way and to ensure that their needs are met.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bussières.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bussières, last Tuesday, we asked some of your colleagues at the Campus Saint-Jean of the Université de Moncton point blank if what happened at Laurentian University could also happen to them in the short or medium term. They painted a rather bleak picture of the situation.

In the case of your own university, do you share their views?

Mr. Luc Bussières: Thank you for the question.

In 2017, when the Conservatives came to power in Ontario, there was obviously an ambition to look at the situation in all sectors and all departments. At that time, Premier Ford's office called a meeting that focused on our university and its sustainability, given our financial challenges. As I said earlier, a few too many years of deficits had accumulated. At one stage, we had money, but at that point, we didn't have any.

Since then, we've been able to turn things around. However, as I said earlier, we've done so mainly as a result of two temporary solutions: the race for one-time grants to get through the year and a major international recruitment effort.

In 2013, we didn't have any international students. Now, international students make up 60% of our student population. It took a tremendous amount of effort to reach this point. We had to put together a bunch of new services and show a new level of awareness. We're very pleased and very proud of what we've done. However, we've somewhat reached the limits of our ability to respond.

The situation here has always been a concern, as I said, and it remains one. It's fragile. If you add something like the COVID-19 pandemic or any other unpredictable situation of that nature, it becomes even more of a concern.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: In your presentation, you spoke about the need for more federal government support. You also talked about the need for new permanent programs. I just want to make sure that I fully understand this.

You're talking about support programs from the federal government, not training programs at your university, right?

One may be linked to the other. One can lead to the other. Isn't that right?

Mr. Luc Bussières: Yes, that's right.

We would need to develop programming at the university. I brought up the fact that we're a small university that provides three specialization programs. We would like to develop this further. When we talk about a university such as the one in the community of Hearst, Kapuskasing and Timmins, we consider it a bit like the universities in large communities, where people are proud to have a university and where there are expectations. We create expectations, but we let people down, in a way. We can't develop these services to meet the expectations of the people in our regions and in minority communities.

We need permanent funding programs to help us overcome this funding shortfall. When it comes to one-time funding, we must work to get a grant and then meet the related expectations. This doesn't give us the chance to work on the long-term development of the university.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: That's the difference between the core mission and specific projects. I imagine that project-based funding also becomes tiring on an administrative level, since it creates ups and downs.

Ms. Brouillette, you spoke about the federal government's responsibility, particularly with respect to official languages and linguistic duality. You said that the colleges and universities that your association represents are in a particular situation and that they have specific obligations, which entail special costs.

I'll go back to the idea that Mr. Poirier brought up earlier, which is the need for an asymmetrical mechanism. Ms. Adam also spoke about this at a recent committee meeting. The goal is to move away from the accounting mindset, where only numbers matter, and to consider the mission and importance of the educational institution for the vitality of the francophone community.

I imagine that you also welcome this asymmetrical mechanism. Is that right?

• (1625)

Ms. Lynn Brouillette: That's right.

I think that we need to look at things from various angles if we want to implement mechanisms to support the network of francophone colleges and universities, whose challenges vary greatly from region to region.

To address some of the issues raised by witnesses, I also want to point out that education programs provided in French outside Quebec amount to only 10% of the programs available in English.

That's why English-language programs are so attractive. That's what we mean when we talk about the vitality of communities. Our institutions must implement all sorts of programs and services to support the communities. Dyane Adam also spoke about this last Tuesday. All these services have costs, which are related to the vitality of communities.

In our opinion, clearly the delivery of these programs and services falls under federal jurisdiction. If the federal government manages to properly define its jurisdictions, it can use them to implement mechanisms to support the communities.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I must have about 10 seconds left, Mr. Chair. Is that right?

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I just want to welcome a new participant with Mr. Williamson.

The Chair: That's great. That's what I would like to have done, but there's no time left for him to ask a question.

My dear witnesses and committee members, that is all the time we have for the first part of the meeting.

On behalf of all the committee members and the skilled staff supporting us, I would like to thank the witnesses for your contributions. I would also like to tell you that, if any of you have not submitted a brief, you can still do so and send it to the clerk.

My thanks go to Mr. Poirier, who was here as an individual, but who was also a former member of the provincial legislature and a former President of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. Thanks also to Lynn Brouillette, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, who was accompanied by Martin Normand, Director of Strategic Research and International Relations. My thanks also go to Luc Bussi eres, the Rector of the Universit e de Hearst.

I will suspend the meeting for a few moments, to give us time to welcome the new witnesses and do the sound checks.

A very good afternoon to our witnesses.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1630)

The Chair: Let us resume the meeting.

Welcome to meeting No. 39 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We are in the process of conducting a study entitled: "Federal support for French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in a minority situation".

I want to again welcome all the committee members and the witnesses.

I will repeat some of the rules, for the benefit of the witnesses who are just joining us.

All your comments must be addressed through the Chair. You may speak in the official language of your choice, as interpretation services are available.

If you have a technical problem, please advise us and we will deal with it quickly.

[English]

I remind all participants and attendees that you cannot take photos or screen captures.

[Translation]

So let me welcome the witnesses and thank them for accepting the invitation to be part of the second hour of this meeting.

With us, we have Linda Cardinal, Emeritus Professor at the University of Ottawa, as an individual, and Daniel Giroux, President of the Coll ege Bor eal. We also have Fran ois Hastir, C.Ad., Executive Director of the Regroupement  tudiant franco-ontarien.

You will each have five minutes for your presentation. I am sure that you have seen the little card that will be used to advise you that you do not have much time left.

Mrs. Cardinal, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal (Emeritus Professor, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, distinguished guests and colleagues, good afternoon.

By way of introduction, I would like to point out that, in my area of research, namely language policy, education is a favourite topic of research for many scholars, both in Canada and around the world. Education in the minority language is also a right that minorities hold very dear. It is through that education that a major part of the production and the reproduction of a minority environment reveals itself, its identity, its aspirations and its prospects for development.

The Universit e de Moncton is a good example of a university that participates fully in the development of its community. We can also mention the Universit e Sainte-Anne, in Nova Scotia, the Universit e de Saint-Boniface, in Manitoba, and the Universit e de Hearst, whose Rector has just spoken to us. With the same hope, we anticipate that the Universit e de l'Ontario fran ais will play the same role.

We must also remember the key role played in the development of French-speaking communities by francophone colleges all over Canada, but particularly in New Brunswick and Ontario. An important issue was also raised in connection with higher education in French, namely governance by and for francophones. Without doubt, that type of governance distinguishes most of our institutions.

Other institutions have chosen to find a home in major universities, such as the Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta, the Dominican University College at Carleton University and the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles at Simon Fraser University. Finally, we have the University of Ottawa and the Université Saint-Paul, which have chosen institutional bilingualism. In general, we are currently talking about governance by and for francophones. That is the preferred choice of the major educational institutions in the Canadian francophonie.

In my comments today, I would like to review with you the ways in which that governance is achieved, in order to ensure that Canada's institutions of higher learning in French can take more control over their development. I also have a recommendation to bring to your attention, namely that the Government of Canada adopt a policy to support post-secondary institutions in minority situations, pursuant to part VII of the Official Languages Act.

I will use the rest of my presentation to explain that policy to you.

First, I would like to say a few words about our context today. In this context, the players are aligned in such a way as to embrace the official languages as the result of a realization of the difficult situation of French, both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, particularly during the pandemic. Furthermore, federal and provincial elections are on the horizon and certain demanding financial issues threaten to dampen our ardour. However, a major movement to modernize the Official Languages Act has been gathering momentum for four years, and the document entitled "English and French: towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada" has recently been published. Those are major factors that must be emphasized.

We could also add the historic coming together of francophones in Quebec and Canada, the Government of Quebec's forthcoming adoption of a policy supporting the Canadian francophonie, the Sommet sur le rapprochement des francophonies canadiennes, which will take place next week, and Bill 96, that seeks to modernize Bill 101. As we can see, many courses of action are available.

The Government of Canada and the French-speaking minorities agree that recognizing the principle of substantive equality must guide the renewal of and the progress towards the equality of French and English. There is no need for me to tell you how important this principle of equality is, because you have been talking about it previously. Undeniably, it applies to higher education in French in this country. I would put the University of Ottawa in a category by itself by virtue of its size. But, in general, all of the French-language higher education institutions in Canada, outside Quebec, have no more than 3,500 students. That gives rise to major financial issues. The University of Ottawa, in fact, is a member of the Group of Canadian Research Universities, the U15. When it talks about its financial problems, it's talking about problems that are not at all the same as those in other institutions.

• (1635)

As I have a minute left—

The Chair: Actually, you have 15 seconds left.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: So here's what you will be asking me about.

The policy I am proposing has three components. The first is the basis for the policy, because a public policy comes in three parts: the vision or the basis, the policy instruments, and the target population. The basis is to fundamentally recognize the key role of universities and institutions of higher learning in the development of communities. A policy would be built on that approach.

I look forward to your questions.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Cardinal. We will certainly have questions for you in the next hour.

We now move to Daniel Giroux, from the Collège Boréal.

Mr. Giroux, you have five minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Daniel Giroux (President, Collège Boréal): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to send my regards to Marie-France Lalonde and Paul Lefebvre, who are old friends of the Collège Boréal.

Ontario has 24 public colleges. Only two of the colleges are francophone and the Collège Boréal is one of those two. The Collège Boréal has 38 access centres, located in 26 communities all over Ontario, from Windsor to the small community of Hearst, about which you heard a presentation earlier. So we cover a huge territory. Each year, we receive a report that measures five areas: student satisfaction, graduate satisfaction, satisfaction on the part of the employers who hire our students, graduation rate, and employment rate in the students' field after they graduate. Those are our five performance indicators.

Ontario's 24 public colleges have been receiving that report for 21 years. For 19 of those 21 years, the Collège Boréal's report has shown it to be the best among Ontario's 24 colleges. For such a small institution, that is incredible. It demonstrates the power of the francophonie.

I want to bring up two points about the Collège Boréal. The first is about the scholarships that make it possible to study in French. Some were designed for immersion programs in anglophone school boards. The main campus of the Collège Boréal is here in Sudbury, as is an anglophone college. Francophone school boards are still losing students. In fact, 50% of them still choose to study at the anglophone college, in programs that the Collège Boréal also offers.

Let me give you an example. A number of years ago, I registered in a commerce program at Laurentian University. I had the choice of studying in French or in English. At the time, I was 18 years old and I did not recognize the importance of continuing my studies in French. What encouraged me to do so was the scholarship for French-language studies. When I graduated at the age of 22, I really did recognize the extent to which those studies had opened doors for me, in terms of culture, mastery of the language and career possibilities.

At 18, students are bilingual. They can choose to study in French or in English. We can make that choice easier for them. Scholarships for French-language studies, which no longer exist, would be absolutely critical. Some institutions can afford them, but the small ones cannot. This is my first recommendation. In my day, in 1988, the scholarship was \$1,000. A scholarship to study in French, at a cost of less than \$3,000, would really change things for francophone school boards.

The second point is about core funding. By that, I am referring to the Official Languages in Education Program, the OLEP. We have been receiving exactly the same amount of funding since 2003. That is to say that, 18 years later, given a cumulative inflation rate of 2%, the funding we receive is practically 45% less than we received in 2003. Some catch-up is therefore needed in terms of core funding. I am not talking about targeted funding, but about the core funding that allows us to become organized, to make preparations and to structure good programs. Funding is absolutely critical. Core funding, the OLEP, must, at a minimum, be increased to match the inflation rate.

Thank you for your attention.

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

I believe that all members of the committee and everyone involved were able to see how proud you are of the Collège Boréal.

We now move to François Hastir, from the Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien.

Mr. Hastir, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. François Hastir (Chartered Administrator and Executive Director, Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I would like to thank you for inviting us before you today to represent francophone students.

The Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien, or RÉFO, is the voice of the more than 22,000 francophone students registered in one of Ontario's French-language and bilingual post-secondary education institutions. Our organization was founded in 2009 as a direct reaction to the problems of assimilation in bilingual institutions. You will understand, therefore, that I will be talking a lot about that subject today.

Last February, Laurentian University announced that it was seeking protection from its creditors under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, the CCAA, an act designed for private companies. It subsequently abolished 28 programs in French, laid off

100 or so professors and staff members, and terminated its agreements with its affiliated universities.

Laurentian University stated before this committee that only 10% of students would be directly affected by the cuts that have been announced. Our organization does not share this view and, in that context, I would like to tell you about our former president, Marie-Pierre Héroux.

Marie-Pierre has been a committed student since high school and is in her final year of the history and French studies programs. Originally from Eastern Ontario, she chose Laurentian University because of its bilingual model and, over the years, she has developed a deep attachment to the community of Sudbury.

Unfortunately, the two programs in which Marie-Pierre was a student were abolished. All the professors she had since she entered university were laid off. The French-speaking residence in which she lived also shut its doors. In her own words, all the reference points that she had created for herself in her university experience disappeared overnight.

However, Marie-Pierre received confirmation from Laurentian University that she will be able to earn the remaining credits she needs from a very limited selection of courses, the number and content of which are still unknown. In the eyes of Laurentian University, therefore, she is not considered to be a student directly affected by the cuts. However, let me ask you, as Canadians, as former students and as parents; do you really consider that Marie-Pierre is not suffering any direct consequences from those cuts?

Does the very question not answer itself?

Today, Marie-Pierre is looking at transferring to Ottawa and leaving a region where she might well have made a life for herself. She feels significantly insecure as to how her studies will continue and as to the value of her future degree. Unfortunately, Marie-Pierre's story is not unique and shows the limits of bilingual educational institutions. This is because not only is French-language programming still not a priority for those institutions, but also because bilingual status for them means that a number of programs are under the direction of those from the majority community, who are not equipped to understand the complexity of francophone realities.

The culture in these universities tends to analyze the obsolescence of course offerings using criteria such as the number of registrations, the economic benefit and the costs of maintaining them. Although those criteria are important, they do not assess the real contribution of those courses to the cultural and linguistic vitality of francophones or their role in combatting exodus and assimilation. Thus, a number of the now-abolished programs were essential in creating initiatives and organizations that are vital for the Franco-Ontarian community.

Finally, although the bilingual educational institutions offer courses in French, they provide a university life and a campus where most activities take place in English. For the students, this contributes directly to assimilation. It is therefore critical for the federal government to work hand-in-hand with the province to ensure the development of independent university institutions run by, for and with Ontario's francophone communities and students.

It is also crucial for the federal government to ensure that a situation like the one at Laurentian University does not happen again. To do so, it can act on three fronts.

On the legal front, the government can pass legislation preventing other public educational institutions from seeking protection under the CCAA. It can also ensure that the redrafted Official Languages Act better defines the obligations of institutions that receive funds from the OLEP or from programs designed for OLMCs.

On the financial front, the government must demand better accountability for the transfers from the OLEP. Specifically, it must ensure that the money provided is not spent on purposes other than those set out in the program and the roadmap. We also suggest a specific envelope in that agreement for francophone organizations working in education. That envelope would allow them to increase the scope of their initiatives to combat assimilation, to strengthen francophone cultural identity among the students, and to provide more data-gathering tools in order to assess the linguistic vitality on bilingual campuses.

Finally, to deal with the specific situation at Laurentian University, we ask for a financial support program to be established with the province as soon as possible, so as to put a hold on the courses and programs provided at Laurentian University and to financially support the transfer of those programs, courses and resources to the Université de Sudbury, an entirely francophone institution.

The RÉFO will submit a brief to you, following up on today's appearance and addressing the topics discussed in greater depth.

Thank you for your attention.

I will be glad to answer your questions.

• (1645)

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

We now move to the time for questions. Let me advise members of the committee that the first round of questions will be for six minutes and the second round will be shorter.

Mr. Dalton, you now have the floor for six minutes.

• (1650)

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you.

My thanks to all the witnesses for their testimony. Their passion for the issue is very clear.

Last week, we were told that, in 1982, when the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was created, 37% of secondary students continued to post-secondary level. Today, that figure is 72%. Many more secondary students are continuing their studies to post-secondary level.

However, the Charter protects the language rights of students at secondary level, but not those of students at post-secondary level. This is a problem that concerns us all.

Could you tell us more about the vitality of the communities and the number of registrations in francophone post-secondary institutions in Ontario? Last Tuesday, we heard from representatives of

the Campus Saint-Jean and they reported an increase. Has there been a drop, is it stable or has there been an increase?

Mrs. Cardinal, do you have any comments on the subject?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you for the question.

Ontario has seen a major recovery in terms of education in French. However, more remains to be done. When we lose an institution like Laurentian University and there is no way of replacing it, we would expect an institution for francophones to be established elsewhere, in Sudbury for example, where one is run by and for francophones. Access to education in French may well decrease.

At the University of Ottawa, about 15,000 francophone students succeed in reaching higher education, although, we agree, it is not always in French. However, the University offers a range of programs in French and we have just established a new undergraduate program in pharmacy.

But it is an ongoing problem. In Ontario, access to advanced studies is critical as a result of Regulation 17, as Mr. Poirier was saying. The problem exists all over the country, specifically in New Brunswick and Quebec. Francophones have some historical catching-up to do in terms of higher education. The situation remains fragile. We can see that access to post-secondary studies in French could very easily decline.

This requires constant action from governments, specifically provincial governments, because, as we know, higher education is in provincial jurisdiction. So it is tricky for the federal government to become involved. However, some provinces have to recognize their role in funding higher education in French.

The federal government has a role to play, which is why I proposed a policy to you earlier. Institutions in minority situations have one very important feature that is not found elsewhere. This is the role that these institutions play in the enhancement and the vitality of the communities. These universities and colleges have become the new cultural centres in the Canadian francophonie. The institutions are central to the arrival of immigrants and to relationships with employers.

Today, universities in minority situations are not simply religious colleges providing programs in canon law. Now, those universities offer a range of professional programs. We want young people to learn that vocabulary in French, so that they are then able to train the middle class in their fields.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I hope you don't mind if I interrupt you. Thank you very much for your comment.

Mr. Giroux, you mentioned that federal funding has not increased since 2003. We have heard that from other participants. It is frustrating. It gives me the impression that the federal government lacks both vision and effort when it comes to Canada's francophone minorities. You talked about various ways of helping them. Specifically, you mentioned scholarships and core funding, and we have heard that from other witnesses as well.

We sometimes hear that, if the province gives \$4 million to the Campus Saint-Jean, for example, there is an expectation that the feds will also give \$4 million.

Do you feel that the federal funding contribution should be separated from the provincial contribution?

If not, do you have any other comments on the subject?

• (1655)

Mr. Daniel Giroux: Thank you very much.

I am also an accountant by profession, and there is no doubt that the more direct transfers we receive from our partners, the better off we are.

We have other agreements, for research specifically, under which we receive direct funding from the federal level. By the same principle, I believe that it could come directly from the federal level. The same goes for scholarships. We work directly with our partners at federal level on other initiatives, such as with anglophone school boards wanting to establish French immersion programs.

I feel that it can be worked on in a number of ways in order to provide direct funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Giroux and Mr. Dalton.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

I have several questions and I'm going to start with Mrs. Cardinal.

Mrs. Cardinal, thank you very much for joining us today.

At the moment, what are the federal government's obligations under part VII of the Official Languages Act?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Its obligation is to commit to enhancing the vitality and development of official language minority communities. That is its key obligation and, under part VII, it must also take positive measures in that regard. For example, the funding in the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 is a positive measure through which it can fulfill that obligation.

We might consider that its commitment to higher education falls under part VII of the act. This is because funding, either core funding or specific funding, is a positive measure used to fulfill its obligations to the official languages.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Is it written exactly like that, or is that an interpretation of the federal government's obligation in terms of post-secondary education under part VII of the act?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I feel that part VII is important because the commitment to enhancing the vitality and development of official language minority communities may include funding a commu-

nity centre, but it can also include funding research programs in a university. The federal government is very involved in research.

The federal government cannot be asked to accredit training programs for paramedics or social service workers, because those are in provincial jurisdiction. However, by supporting higher education, it can be involved in a whole range of areas, because doing so is a positive measure.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: This is reflected in the budget and in the previous action plan, which allocated \$500 million to community organizations for exactly that purpose.

Thank you very much, Mrs. Cardinal.

Mr. Hastir, I really appreciated Marie-Pierre's story. It certainly touches me greatly. We talk a lot about Laurentian University and what is happening in the north.

What do you, as young people, think are the major problems in francophone post-secondary institutions?

If I can ask you again, do you feel that young people are sufficiently represented at the decision-making table on the boards and senates of francophone and bilingual universities?

Mr. François Hastir: With respect to the first question, we have to distinguish the problems in francophone institutions from those in bilingual institutions, because they are quite different.

In the bilingual institutions, the glaring problems are related to the issue of assimilation, even if the courses are provided in French. Because student life is predominantly lived in English, students who arrive at the post-secondary level will very often develop a network that is mostly English-speaking, be it their circle of friends, the network of professors or the university network. It will also follow them.

At the same time, what we often see and hear from students is that programs are not always offered in French in those institutions, and that it depends on the program. At the University of Ottawa, programs are offered in French when there is a critical mass of students, but in other programs, if the university considers that it does not have the critical mass, the students will have to take certain courses in English. If they want to do their studies in French, it will take them five or six years instead of four. These issues are significant for students, and taking courses in English contributes to the assimilation once again.

In francophone institutions, the problem is a little different. We were talking about it earlier, in terms of the funding disparity. Funding is often based on the number of students enrolled and the number of courses and programs offered. But francophone institutions are often in small, rural and remote communities. This must be taken into consideration.

Clearly, the other aspect that must be taken into consideration is the reputation of the universities. Francophone universities, such as the Université de l'Ontario français, which was created from scratch, or even the Université de Sudbury, which exists but is less well known because it comes under the umbrella of Laurentian University, will not have the same reputation, nationally and internationally, as institutions such as York University and Queen's University.

Finally, when we talk about funding, it must also be for research. I'm sure Mrs. Cardinal will be able to speak to that as well, because our problem is that professors are often encouraged to publish in English because more can be published as a result and more money goes to the university. This is the case in bilingual institutions. It means that there are fewer teaching materials in French.

As for the question of whether students should play a greater role in the universities, we think that is obvious. It would allow for greater accountability. It would also allow for more dialogue and collaboration on decisions. In bilingual institutions, it would allow for separate anglophone and francophone representation, rather than having one common body that sometimes speaks more for the majority than for the minority.

• (1700)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Hastir.

Mr. Chair, if I have a few seconds left, I would ask Mrs. Cardinal to comment on what Mr. Hastir said.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Mrs. Cardinal.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: We are talking about the institutions whose governance is by and for francophones. When I say that universities in minority communities are the new community centres, it is precisely because they have become levers for the economic, social, cultural and artistic development of the communities. Traditional cultural centres have played an important role. Some have become performance venues, for example. However, in terms of development, the universities make it happen. That is why we need to put these universities back in charge.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Are the OLMCs consulted—

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, your time is up.

Thank you, Mrs. Cardinal.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

My first question is for Mr. Hastir.

Mr. Hastir, I find your comments really interesting.

I have often been told that primary and secondary immersion schools lead to the assimilation of francophones. I have heard this less about post-secondary education. Mrs. Cardinal seems to be of the same opinion.

Can you tell us a little more about that?

Do you think that federal assistance should really support post-secondary institutions by and for francophones?

Mr. François Hastir: I can speak briefly about that. We receive complaints every year. We have annual conferences where students are present, and these discussions come up every time.

One example is that students have not received their services in French. They have access to the course in French, but all the course materials are in English, so they have to adapt. Some courses are not offered because there are only seven or eight francophone students. So they are transferred to a class where there might be four or five anglophones. We hear these stories often and they keep coming up.

Unfortunately, it's very difficult to get statistics on that because the province doesn't collect them now, and we, as an organization, don't get the funds to collect them. That is a problem. Even though we have the complaint forms and so on, with all the other tasks that are not funded, it is much more difficult to gather the data.

That's why I was saying earlier that it is important to have a budget allocation for community education organizations to collect and compile all the data for educational institutions.

To answer your second question, namely how the federal government can assist other than financially, I can tell you that education falls under provincial jurisdiction. So the federal government can hardly come in tomorrow morning and say it wants to create institutions by and for francophones.

However, if we really define the obligations attached to the funding from the OLEP or other programs intended for OLMCs, there is at least one way to ensure that the money is not used for other purposes. Right now, the federal government transfers the money to the provinces, which then use it in a variety of ways.

In fact, I have been trying to find statistics on how much Laurentian University receives from the OLEP funding. It's hard to get those numbers because most institutions don't want to disclose them. Even the province doesn't want to disclose it. Once transferred, that money can be used in a variety of ways.

In the case of Laurentian University, we saw that the money was used for purposes not directly related to the OLEP. So it's really important to use it properly.

I think there have to be legal obligations attached to the money that comes from the reform of the Official Languages Act. We need to tell the institutions that are receiving federal money for official languages programs that they have obligations with respect to the services they provide.

• (1705)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Earlier, Ms. Brouillette, from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, said—I'm paraphrasing her—that communities can only be strong if their institutions are strong as well. This refers somewhat to the concept of institutional completeness. In Quebec, Frédéric Lacroix has spoken at length about this.

We know that, in Quebec, anglophone universities receive 30% of the provincial budget allocated to post-secondary institutions, and over 38% of federal research grants. In Ontario, francophones make up 4.7% of the population but receive only 3% of the envelope, much of which is scattered among bilingual universities.

Mrs. Cardinal, how do you explain this imbalance? What do you think about the concept of the double majority? We know that the Official Languages Act is based on that, assuming that there is an anglophone majority outside Quebec and a francophone majority in Quebec. Sociologically, the vitality of the English language is the main concern in Quebec.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: In fact, Mr. Beaulieu, I think we should refer to Ms. Joly's document entitled "English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada," because the concept of substantive equality is a game-changer.

We are no longer talking about the double majority and so on. It is recognized that French is a vulnerable language in Canada and that it needs to be strengthened. Without it being strengthened, the equal progression of French and English is in question. The formal equality is being called into question.

In that sense, Ms. Joly's report provides relevant avenues for furthering the federal government's role in promoting substantive equality, particularly in promoting French, including outside Quebec.

It is also interesting to note that Ms. Joly's report refers to the importance of institutions managed by and for francophones. It talks about institutional completeness and post-secondary educational institutions.

In my opinion, this report has everything it needs for firm action.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I will examine the report more closely.

However, I saw nothing in terms of action. I saw no intention to change or to recognize that Quebec should be the master of its own language planning. I saw nothing in terms of tangible action that leads to this recognition that French is the minority language everywhere.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Your time is up.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all our guests for joining us today.

Professor Cardinal, at the end of your presentation, you were very keen to explain your proposal for a policy in support of part VII of the act. The policy would have three components: vision, policy instruments and target audiences.

Can you tell us about that proposal?

• (1710)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Boulerice.

A public policy is indeed based on those three components.

First, there is the vision. We have repeatedly asked the provincial governments to recognize that there are specific needs in terms of higher education in French in a minority setting. We expect this recognition from the provinces.

As I said earlier, the federal government should recognize that post-secondary institutions do not just train people, but that they also play a key role in their communities and contribute to institutional completeness. That is why I am referring to part VII of the act.

If we accept this vision, which somewhat reframes the thinking on the support provided to higher education institutions, we will then have funding instruments. We could then consider creating a core funding program to stabilize the situation of institutions.

We could also develop a support program for research, because the federal government is very involved in this area. The Association francophone pour le savoir (Acfas) has just proposed a support program for researchers in the Canadian francophonie, the Service d'aide à la recherche en français (SARF). The Association will try to have Canadian Heritage fund this service.

Centres of excellence in research could also be created in all francophone institutions in minority settings in Canada. These centres of excellence would enable the small institutions to conduct research that would be beneficial for the institution. This is what the Université de l'Ontario français wants to do. Some researchers at the Université de Moncton are actually doing it. In my opinion, this is part of a vision for the future of francophone universities.

I also mentioned the funding of one-time projects, such as our current ones. Such funding instruments will help make federal action in higher education more consistent, and embellish that action with the acknowledgement that higher education institutions play a key role in the development of their community.

The third component of the proposed policy support is the target audiences of universities, which are changing. Traditionally, the target audiences have been students and faculty. However, in terms of the new role of universities, all universities want to play a social role, but small universities do so in a particular way, because they have to deal with the vitality. The target audiences for small universities are employers, community groups, cultural groups, artists and creators. In a word, the target is the community as a whole.

The target audiences therefore become new stakeholders in the higher education community. Using the example of the Université de l'Ontario français, which represents a hub for all groups, we have seen that universities can play a unifying role in bringing a community together. Teaching and research will go hand in hand, and students will work with community groups to develop projects to serve those same groups.

Large universities dream of doing this, but have difficulty making the shift because of their size. The Université du Québec network is a really important case in point in this area, because each of its universities contributes to regional development. This has been recognized.

The federal government could also play a really worthwhile role through a policy that would attune its action, that would give it greater consistency and that would no longer pit it against the provinces. There's a whole area of federal-provincial relations. The subject of higher education in French should be a permanent item on the agenda of the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie. Earlier, we heard from Ms. Brouillette from the ACUFC, which will be holding a summit on higher education in French. Perhaps this will lead to an action plan.

The various types of actions must be coordinated to ensure that they are consistent. We must also ensure that, if English and French have meaning in Canada and if we recognize the role of universities for the majority, we must also do so for universities for the minority.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You also touched on the role that colleges and universities can play with respect to immigration.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Yes, even small institutions are trying to attract international students. The example of Université de Hearst is fascinating in this regard.

International students are a major source of funding for all universities. That is why, during the pandemic, all universities decried the loss of international students. It may be less the case in Quebec, but in a minority setting, the loss of international students creates deficits.

That said, universities cannot be thought of solely in terms of customers and the market. In minority communities, not only do universities welcome professors and students from immigrant backgrounds, but they are also places that allow immigrants to feel included, particularly through welcoming activities. At the moment, we are recruiting teachers because there is a lack of francophone teachers in communities outside Quebec. We would like to see more immigration, because we want people from immigrant backgrounds to fill the shortage of teachers.

What I would like to see is a major international program for French instructors and French-language teachers, to recruit teachers who are ready to come and work anywhere in francophone Canada, including Quebec. Immigration is so important for the future of francophone communities, and universities are key to this recruitment.

• (1715)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you for your passion for the subject.

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Cardinal is well known for that.

Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

We will start another round of questions, but the comments will be shorter, because I'll have a comment to make at the end of the session. So Mr. Godin and Mr. Lefebvre will have four minutes, and then Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Boulerice will have two minutes.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the three witnesses. I may not have time to address each of them, because I only have four minutes.

Mrs. Cardinal, I find your comments to my colleague Mr. Boulerice very interesting. I listened carefully to your presentation. Throughout the study that we have conducted on this topic, I have been making observations. I don't want to get into the political dimension, but today I have come to the unfortunate conclusion that the federal government and the provincial governments across the country do not have the motivation, commitment and will to promote linguistic communities and give them the tools to improve access to services and to increase their visibility. I am talking about French in particular. I am from Quebec, but this is a major problem in the rest of Canada.

In their testimonies, witnesses have confirmed that students want to study in French. The clients are there, but the services are not. They are not given access to a variety of programs, which is unfortunate. I would like to hear what you have to say. You spoke earlier about target audiences. I think we're getting ahead of ourselves. As you said, the first part of a supportive policy is to establish a basis and a vision.

Do us a favour and explain how we can ensure that the priority for elected officials, both at the provincial and federal levels, is to promote and support both official languages in Canada.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Listen, I would love to prepare the programs for all the political parties.

Mr. Joël Godin: I don't want to get into the political realm, Mrs. Cardinal.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: You should all have the same concern.

The tools we have right now are Ms. Joly's report and the modernization of the Official Languages Act. All the provinces also have laws. So there is no lack of tools.

Some of my legal colleagues would like to see more pressure to include higher education in French in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That said, section 16 of the charter guides the federal government's actions. In short, we have many instruments in Canada. It's the political will—

Mr. Joël Godin: The problem is that it is not working. We make cuts, then we try to rebuild. Yes, there are policies at the federal and provincial levels, but give us a way to get results. Right now we are not getting results.

Laurentian University is a problem, but soon it will be Campus Saint-Jean, or Université de Moncton. It's time to react. We have to stop being comfortable with programs and laws. Give us the tool that will enable us to be effective.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: My policy would be a good tool. Action needs to be consistent. Perhaps consistency is what is missing.

How did we actually arrive at a crisis like the ones affecting Campus Saint-Jean, the Université de Sudbury or the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto? There is always the political context. As a political scientist, I can't help but talk about politics. That said, it's always a question of political context. The next time there's a speech about fiscal restraint, we may have a hard time making our concerns known. We will have to—

• (1720)

Mr. Joël Godin: It has to become a priority.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Yes, we will have to keep hammering home our message, but we need consistency and action. You say you don't want to get into the political aspect. That's fine, but then we need all the players to sit around the same table, say that this is a priority for them and agree to coordinate their efforts and work together to go beyond their particular interests and aim for a collective interest, which is the—

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mrs. Cardinal.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages is your forum. We all have the same objective. That's what I always say to all my colleagues.

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

The floor now goes to Mr. Lefebvre for four minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will share some of my time with my colleague Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Godin wanted results, evidence. Personally, despite the difficulties I encountered, I was able to do all my studies in French in Ontario. I am therefore proof that it is possible. We have challenges to overcome, of course. There will be challenges for my children as well.

I would like to ask Mr. Giroux from Collège Boréal a few questions.

You talked about the success you've had with the annual report on colleges. My congratulations. It's a success story that we celebrate in Sudbury and elsewhere in Ontario.

Could you tell us about Collège Boréal's financial situation and the challenges you are facing? How are you managing?

Mr. Daniel Giroux: Thank you for the question, Mr. Lefebvre.

As president of Collège Boréal, I am often asked the same question: people ask me how I manage 38 sites in 26 communities and how it can be viable.

As Mrs. Cardinal mentioned earlier, the educational institutions are really part of the community. Collège Boréal doesn't just offer regular post-secondary education programs. We also offer employability services as well as immigration programs, in both settlement and language training. We provide training for lifelong learning. Across Ontario, more than 5,000 people a year take training in French as a second language.

When there are eight or nine different programs and services in places like London or Windsor, we have a critical mass. That means there is an interest in the francophone. We then work in partnership with the school boards. That's when we become profitable and sustainable. It's a lot of work.

However, it's not just post-secondary education. Due to lack of funding and growth, as well as declining tuition fees, it would be impossible for us to survive if we relied solely on regular post-secondary education programs.

As a result, many post-secondary institutions, both colleges and universities, depend on international students to balance their budgets. And when there are crises, as has been the case recently, it's not only a challenge for the universities, but also for some of the larger colleges. Centennial College in downtown Toronto, for example, has 54% international students. In this sort of crisis, financial viability is being sorely tested.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It's getting really difficult. I know that you are very diverse in Sudbury. You are doing a great job.

Mr. Hastir, thank you for your presentation and your leadership. It is excellent. We need more leaders like you.

You talked about actions that the federal government could take legally or legislatively. You talked about the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA). I have a private member's bill on that.

Could you tell me why you think these steps are important?

Mr. François Hastir: Actually, it's to make sure that we don't set a precedent in this case and that other universities or public institutions don't do the same thing.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The provinces must also ensure that institutions are sustainable and well funded. I completely agree with you on that.

Mr. François Hastir: Let me add something. The next time there is a crisis of this kind, we must ensure that there is co-operation before the building is bulldozed.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I agree with you 100%.

I believe that there is not much time left for my colleague Mr. Arseneault.

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left.

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

Mrs. Cardinal, the provinces seem to be moving away from their responsibilities, in order to get more money from the federal government, and this is causing a lot of concern.

What are you hearing from the various francophone post-secondary institutions across the country outside of Quebec about co-operation and negotiations with the provinces?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: The problem is the great disparity between the provinces. The reality is different from one province to another. That's why we need to bring everyone to the same table and establish a consistent approach. At the moment, the priority, horizontally from east to west, including the north, is to support higher education in French.

• (1725)

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

We'll go to Mr. Beaulieu for two minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me come back to the concept of institutional completeness. What I find surprising is that very few studies seem to have analyzed the proportion of funding granted to francophone institutions in relation to the demographic weight of francophones in the various provinces. I have read only one study to that effect, by Frédéric Lacroix and Patrick Sabourin.

Do you think it would be a good thing if each province had studies on institutional completeness?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: We must not forget that the concept of institutional completeness is a creation of the francophone minority outside Quebec, and we are very proud of it. We are the ones who popularized it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It was during the battle for the Montfort Hospital.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: It was long before that, in the 1960s, with Mr. Breton. I have been proud to defend this concept for a long time. Thank you for using it in the Quebec context.

Yes, studies are needed. I know that the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne has a study under way on funding. The problem is the difficulty of accessing those figures. The funding is spread out across the provinces, and it takes a lot of hard work to try to figure out where the money is going. Is it true

that money for post-secondary education is being used to clean up roads, for example?

Ms. Joly's white paper suggests that the provinces need to be more accountable for the funding they receive. We must not allow the provinces to become unaccountable. In that sense, I am quite supportive of a dialogue between the provinces and the federal government to better understand where the money is going.

That said, there are disparities between provinces. The investment in higher education is lower in Ontario than in other provinces. It is all related to the vision of higher education that is unique to each province. Is higher education considered a market or a social service? In Quebec, it is a social service; in Ontario, it is a market.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Cardinal.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We'll go back to Mr. Boulerice for the last two minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask Mr. Giroux a question.

I, too, was shocked to hear that, since 2003, funding from the OLEP had been frozen by successive governments. That's a 45% decrease, if you consider the rate of inflation up to 2021.

What would you propose in this regard? What is the time line for catching up?

You may well say that it has to be done right away.

Mr. Daniel Giroux: That's an excellent question.

I believe it needs to be well planned. We need to see at least 30% more funding. Then we may have to catch up. We can't keep having this discussion about funding again every five years. In the base funding, we have a catch-up period to be established. Then the increase has to keep up with inflation. Based on our calculations and planning, a 2% increase would allow us to continue to expand programs.

Earlier, we talked about developing instructional materials. We are a French-language college, and yet we're unable to purchase 50% of our textbooks in French. Half of our books are in English. OLEP is supporting us to help translate materials, but it's not easy. For example, for the electrician programs, the codes change every year. They have to be translated every year, and it's extremely expensive. The grant gives us the support to deliver services equivalent to those provided by English-language colleges.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I'm curious about one thing, Mr. Hastir. When colleges and universities close or cut programs, do the students you represent go to English-language universities or are they forced to move to Quebec or Ottawa, for example?

Mr. François Hastir: It depends on the program. Some enter the English stream. Some go to Quebec or other areas. In this case, we're witnessing an exodus and an increase in costs for students. This also has a societal cost, obviously.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's all the time we have.

We have just finished the final round with that response from Mr. Hastir. He said he was going to submit a brief to us as well, so I want to thank him for that. I invite the other witnesses to do the same, if they wish.

On behalf of the committee members, I thank all the witnesses for their participation and contribution to this study.

I remind you that we heard Linda Cardinal, emeritus professor at University of Ottawa, who testified as an individual. We also heard Daniel Giroux, president of Collège Boréal, and François Hastir, certified administrator and executive director of the Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien.

We're taking the time to bid farewell to the witnesses, but I ask my colleagues to stay behind, because I would like to present a ruling from the Chair.

My fellow committee members, in this sort of situation, we're accustomed to discussing these matters in camera. However, the end of the parliamentary session is approaching and we have three meetings left before we adjourn for the summer. As you know, we've recently been trying to discuss what to do with the three meetings. So as Chair, I have made a decision on it, which the clerk will submit to you by email. I'd like you to respond to it by 2:00 p.m. tomorrow.

At the same time, we will take into account what you presented at the beginning. You said that there were one or two other witnesses who wanted to appear before the committee. So if all committee members want it, that is always a possibility. However, I have heard several times from people that they would like to have a report, so it should be completed and submitted. We also have an opportunity to hear from other witnesses on the motion that we have already begun dealing with, because we have one and a half meetings remaining.

I didn't have that information before. I got it at the beginning of this meeting. I'm going to very quickly present what we agreed on with the clerk and the analyst. I must say that the analyst has been working very hard to be able to present us with a report on this

study on post-secondary education in both official languages. The report will be submitted to you on Tuesday, June 15, at around noon. Since you will not necessarily have had time to read it, we felt that each paragraph of the report could be read in camera and discussed. It will be a short report, about 15 pages, and we will submit it to you on Tuesday, June 15.

To expedite the process surrounding the report, if we do wish to table it, I would ask you, committee members, to send in the recommendations that you wish to include in the report. You have heard from all the witnesses who have appeared, so there may be specific recommendations that you'd like to see in the report. As indicated in the email, we ask that you send those recommendations to us by 1:00 p.m. on Monday, June 14. We can then consider them in our discussions.

With respect to the three remaining meetings, you did mention two potential witnesses. However, even if those witnesses have made a request, you know that the clerk has to take steps with respect to headsets and all that. So it won't be possible to have witnesses on Tuesday. Therefore, we will meet in camera on Tuesday. We will have the report on the post-secondary education study in hand, so we can move forward.

That being said, for planning purposes, I'd like you to send us your comments by tomorrow on the email that you are going to receive by the end of the day.

We've already gone over the scheduled time for the meeting. You know that we now have to stop at the hour mark. I know that many of you may want to debate or discuss this, but unfortunately we'll have to try to find a way to come to a consensus, a decision by the Chair or a decision by committee members.

Once again I would like to thank the witnesses who took part in our proceedings.

I also want to thank all staff members on the committee, including the technicians, the clerk and the analyst.

• (1730)

With that, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a great day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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