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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number seven of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021, and members may attend in person or remotely use the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. For your information, the screen will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

[*English*]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on Monday, February 14, 2022, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing. They must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room, and it is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. They must also maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer in the room.

[*Translation*]

As the chair, I will enforce these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank the members in advance for their cooperation.

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either “Floor”, “English” or “French”. Please inform me immediately if interpretation is lost, and I will ensure that it is promptly restored before resuming the proceedings.

Members participating in person may proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating in the meeting via videoconference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For the members

in the room, your microphone will be controlled, as usual, by the proceedings and verification officer.

We remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly, not as I often do when I forget. When you are not speaking, your microphone must be on mute.

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain an order of speaking that is fair for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

[*English*]

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me. Please note that we may need to suspend for a few minutes as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of government measures to protect and promote French in Quebec and Canada.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

First of all, from the Department of Canadian Heritage, joining us via videoconference is Julie Boyer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions. She is accompanied by Sarah Boily, Director General, Official Languages.

Then, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Corrine Prince, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration Sector. She is accompanied by Glen Linder, Director General, International and Intergovernmental Relations.

You will have a maximum of five minutes for each speech, after which we will proceed with questions.

To our guests, I will let you know when you have about one minute left.

Before going any further, however, I must consult my colleagues. We have just lost nearly 45 minutes as a result of the vote in the House. I was going to suggest that we divide what remains of the two hours into two equal parts for the first and second panels of witnesses. Madam Clerk informs me that our technicians and interpreters can continue for a full two-hour block.

I realize that some of you have obligations after 5:30 p.m. eastern time—I'm in New Brunswick—but would it work if we extended the meeting by 15 minutes? We would then adjourn at 5:45 p.m.

Are there any objections?

Please raise your hand or signal to me.

Then we will adjourn the meeting 15 minutes after the scheduled time.

Is that correct, Madam Clerk?

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Chair, I apologize for speaking, but I requested the floor and you couldn't see me from New Brunswick. That's perfectly understandable. I'm happy to see you in good health on screen.

Mr. Chair, would you please see with all the members whether it is possible to extend the meeting by half an hour?

The Chair: That would be even better; then we could do the full two-hour block.

Before asking the question, I'll go to Mr. Beaulieu, who has his hand up.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I was going to say the same thing and ask if people would be prepared to do a full two-hour block.

The Chair: I don't think so.

I see Ms. Lattanzio raised her hand before Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Yes, same answer; I can stay until 6:00 p.m.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I unfortunately have to leave at 5:45 today. You'll still have a quorum, but I won't be able to stay. I apologize.

The Chair: Out of respect for all the members, do we agree to extend the meeting to 5:45 p.m.?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, as I am privileged to be in the same room as the clerk, I was able to do a check. According to our colleague Mr. Drouin, if there is a quorum and no one intends to introduce a motion, perhaps we could continue the meeting until 6:00 p.m., even if not all members can participate.

However, we Conservative Party members can agree not to introduce a motion in the last 15 minutes.

The Chair: All right.

Do I have the unanimous consent of all members to Mr. Godin's motion?

We have unanimous consent. No motions may be introduced after 5:45 p.m. That's perfect.

(Motion agreed to)

Madam Clerk, is that a legitimate motion? Is it in order?

● (1615)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Gagné-Frégeau): Yes, it's all in order on my end. I'm noting down the motion.

The Chair: That's perfect.

Then we'll do a full hour with the first witnesses.

Before starting, I wanted to tell you that I was present on Monday and learned Tuesday morning that I had been in contact two days earlier with people who subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. That's why I'm no longer in Ottawa. I was asked to isolate for five days. I want to tell the people who were in the room on Monday that I have no symptoms, that I have never had any and that my COVID-19 test was negative again this morning. So I wanted to tell the technicians, interpreters, the clerk and Mr. Godin, who was in the room with the members of his staff, that all is well.

Now I would ask Ms. Boyer or Ms. Boily from the Department of Canadian Heritage to deliver the first five-minute opening speech.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Julie Boyer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be speaking first.

First of all, my sincere thanks to you and all the members of the committee for your invitation and especially for the work you are doing.

Your studies are important for Canadians in general, but particularly so for federal employees. Your research and investigations provide them with guidelines for developing policies.

My colleague, Sarah Boily, and I are delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you about the government's efforts to protect and promote the place of French in Canada.

Since the September 2020 throne speech, the government has recognized that French is in a unique situation and that we have a responsibility to protect and promote it, not just in Canada, but in Quebec as well.

[English]

In fact, several initiatives are already under way to provide the government with important levers to take concrete action to protect and promote the French language from coast to coast to coast.

The most recent “Action Plan for Official Languages - 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future” was launched after extensive consultations with communities and partners in the sector. The plan represents an investment of \$2.7 billion over five years, with \$500 million of new funds intended to counter the decline in the demographic weight of francophone communities across the country.

This plan has enabled the government to make investments in key sectors essential for the vitality of francophone communities in Canada, such as immigration, early childhood education, justice, health and many others. Above all, it has made it possible to better fund initiatives to promote French, such as French immersion programs; a recruitment strategy for French teachers; French second language post-secondary scholarships; support for second language learning and minority language education through federal, provincial and territorial agreements; better support for French language services in the territories; and the renewal of the collaboration agreement for the development of arts and culture in francophone minority communities.

With one year to go, we have completed all of the initiatives included in this action plan for official languages, and we are about to begin consultations for the next action plan for 2023-28.

[Translation]

In addition to these major investments, on April 19, 2021, the federal government announced that it was planning to invest an additional \$389.9 million over three years to support official languages, starting this fiscal year, 2021-2022.

Among other things, it proposed to allocate \$180.4 million to expand bilingualism. First of all, we want to improve the French immersion and French second language programs in schools and post-secondary institutions. Second, we want to assist the provinces and territories in meeting the strong demand from students and parents for spaces in French immersion and French second language programs. Third, we want to enhance the strategy in place to recruit and retain teachers and support French language learning in early childhood.

Another \$121.3 million was committed to provide high-quality minority-language postsecondary education across Canada.

Lastly, \$81.8 million was allocated over two years to support the construction, renovation and expansion of the educational and community spaces that serve official language minority communities.

These investments will help to provide greater protection and promotion for French across the country and will contribute to the vitality of the official language minority communities.

The department is working hard to introduce a new bill to modernize the Official Languages Act and to implement the legislative, regulatory and administrative proposals outlined in the reform document entitled “English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada,” which was released last February.

• (1620)

[English]

The government has demonstrated its commitment to protecting and promoting French and will continue to do so by implementing the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

I would be pleased to take your questions.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boyer.

We will now hear from Glenn Linder, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Glen Linder (Director General, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I'd like to emphasize that I am joining you from the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

I am accompanied by Corinne Prince, acting assistant deputy minister, settlement and integration sector.

We are pleased to provide you with information on the Canada–Quebec Accord Relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens and on francophone immigration outside Quebec.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, works closely with its Quebec government counterpart, the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration, and acknowledges the respective roles and responsibilities of the two levels of government as defined in the 1991 Canada-Quebec accord. The main objectives of the accord are to preserve Quebec's demographic weight within Canada and to integrate immigrants to the province in a manner that respects the distinct identity of the province.

As a result of the accord, Quebec is the only province that publishes its immigration objectives and targets every year. However, the onus is on the Canadian government to establish the total annual number of immigrants for the country as a whole, taking into account Quebec's position on the number of immigrants it wishes to accept in all classes.

Quebec is also assigned other responsibilities under the accord, such as establishing its own economic immigrant selection criteria, setting and assessing financial criteria for sponsoring in the family reunification class, selecting refugees taken in by the government or through collective sponsorship and providing intake and integration services in the province.

With respect to federal responsibilities, IRCC administers the family reunification program and the protected persons program in Canada. Protected persons are persons whom the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada has recognized as refugees in need of Canada's protection.

The Government of Canada is also responsible for determining the eligibility of all immigration applicants to Canada. Evaluating eligibility includes health, security and criminal checks to determine whether applicants meet statutory requirements for admission to the country.

Now I would like to discuss francophone immigration outside Quebec.

The federal government recognizes that immigration plays an important role in supporting the vitality of francophone minority communities across the country. In March 2019, IRCC launched Meeting Our Objectives: Francophone Immigration Strategy, in which it outlined the government's vision for francophone immigration and reaffirmed a target of 4.4% of French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec by 2023.

IRCC has since launched new initiatives to reach that 4.4% target, notably by awarding additional points to French-speaking and bilingual applicants in the express entry system, which we use to manage permanent residence applications from skilled workers outside Quebec.

The strategy has yielded positive results. Admissions have constantly increased from less than 2% in 2017 to 3.6% in 2020. However, pandemic-related restrictions, particularly border restrictions, have had a significant impact on immigration in general and have affected francophone immigration in particular. As a result, francophones represented only 2% of admissions in 2021.

In 2020 and 2021, the department introduced a number of measures in response to the pandemic to ensure that Canada remained a top destination for French-speaking immigrants, including a pathway from temporary to permanent residence. By the time the pathway closed on November 5, 2021, the department had received 2,300 applications in the two components reserved for French-speaking essential workers and approximately 4,700 applications in the component reserved for recently graduated francophone international students.

Mr. Chair, we will be pleased to answer your questions.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Linder. All our witnesses stayed within their speaking times today.

We will therefore begin the first round of questions and answers. Each party will have six minutes.

The first questioner will be our vice-chair, Joël Godin.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses, the representatives of the departments of Canadian Heritage and Citizenship and Immigration. Thanks to them for taking part in this exercise, and I apologize for being late.

My first question will be for the people from the Department of Canadian Heritage. Before going any further, Mr. Chair, I'd like to mention that we had invited the Minister of Canadian Heritage and

that he unfortunately did not accept our invitation. So we'll put our questions to the people who work at the department every day.

Ms. Boyer, you said that the government acknowledged the decline of the French language in the 2020 throne speech. You also discussed offensives conducted by the government, which announced a \$389-million investment over two years on April 19, 2021. Investments are all well and good, but you said you had to improve immersion programs, assist the provinces and territories and support French. What specific measures have been implemented and what measures have been taken to rectify the situation since the 2020 throne speech?

Ms. Julie Boyer: Thank you very much for your question.

I'll begin by saying that that was stated in the 2020 throne speech and repeated in the 2021 throne speech. We're responding in several ways to these trends and to the decline in the demographic weight of francophones, in particular, through the Action Plan for Official Languages, which contains several measures.

In certain cases, we had to increase the amounts allocated to those programs. No correction was necessary. Instead we had to increase the amount of the envelope so we could assist more students, for example, by expanding francization programs, increasing the number of spaces in the schools and recruiting more French-language teachers—

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Boyer. I'll stop you there because, as you know, my time is precious and monitored here.

My understanding is that the only problem with the representation or position of francophones was a lack of funding. The tools and programs in place were effective, but you were simply short of money. That's actually what you're saying, isn't it?

• (1630)

Ms. Julie Boyer: Yes.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right, thank you.

Now I'll go to the Department of Immigration people.

The number of complaints that have been filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages concerning the language that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada uses to respond to members of the public has surged.

Mr. Linder, do you have a plan to correct those issues?

Mr. Glen Linder: Thank you for your question.

We take note of those complaints, of course, and we take them seriously. We're totally aware of our obligations under the Official Languages Act but also understand how important it is to provide service to clients in the language of their choice. We examine all cases brought to our attention, and we definitely—

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Linder, but it's a simple question: do you have a plan to correct the problem?

You're telling me about observations and saying you respond to all complaints, but do you have an action plan to rectify the situation?

Mr. Glen Linder: The plan is to examine each complaint and ensure that the situation does not reoccur. We verify our systems and transactions. We conduct thousands of transactions every day. We take it seriously. Every time a complaint is filed, we examine it. We follow it up and, in each case, try to correct the problem where there is one.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

We've learned that the messages the department sends out to Canadians are full of spelling mistakes. I'm referring, for example, to emails reporting positive citizenship test results.

How do you explain that?

Have you implemented a program to solve the problem?

Mr. Glen Linder: Thank you.

Once again, I don't have that information on hand. However, I can assure you we're entirely aware that immigration information must be made available in both official languages and that language quality standards must be met.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, that's what I was going to talk to you about.

Mr. Glen Linder: We definitely do follow up.

Mr. Joël Godin: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. You had two seconds left.

Now I will go to my friend Angelo Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, you have six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

I will go first to Ms. Boyer or Ms. Boily.

Can you tell us how the new version of the Official Language Act will help better equip the Commissioner to help effectively solve certain problems?

Ms. Julie Boyer: I'm going to turn the floor over to my colleague Sarah Boily, who has worked on those clauses of Bill C-32.

Ms. Sarah Boily (Director General, Official Languages, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you.

I'm going to discuss what the bill proposes with respect to the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The revision document released in February and Bill C-32, which was introduced last spring, provided that the act would grant the Official Languages Commissioner four new powers.

The Commissioner would have the power, first, to make public the recommendations of the office's investigation reports; second, to enter into compliance agreements with federal entities in accordance with their wishes to determine how to resolve situations; and, third, to make orders. As you know, orders are approved by federal courts, which, once again, permits a certain type of behaviour to be expected of federal institutions.

I've cited three powers, but there's a fourth and slightly weaker power that escapes me for the moment. However, the three powers I've named are the strongest ones proposed in Bill C-32.

• (1635)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The advancement of French is still one of the department's major objectives.

How will the new bill help in taking a more dynamic tack to achieving that goal?

Ms. Sarah Boily: I'll respond to that first and then let Ms. Boyer add what she wants to say about the promotion of French.

Several measures in Bill C-32 address the objective of protecting and promoting French. The most significant and newest are those respecting federally regulated private businesses. The government has decided that the private sector has a role to play in protecting and promoting French. Bill C-32 would grant Canadians the right to be served in French in federally regulated private businesses. That applies both in and outside Quebec in regions with a large francophone presence. It would also grant workers in those businesses the right to work in French. Those are some of the key measures in the bill.

Other approaches have been proposed to encourage and strengthen arts and culture, which enhance the vitality of French. So the media and agencies such as telefilm Canada, Radio-Canada and the museums would continue to be supported. Those are some key examples that come to mind in connection with expanding the place of French.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Would you like to add a few words, Ms. Boyer?

Ms. Julie Boyer: I think Ms. Boily has pretty much covered the issue.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: So funding of \$121.3 million should be available in the 2021-2022 fiscal year. How many projects have been selected to date?

How many of them are under way?

Which provinces and territories have committed to using that funding to carry out projects ?

Ms. Julie Boyer: First of all, we're in the process of negotiating agreements with the provinces and territories to transfer that funding so they can implement the projects we agree on in an action plan.

We'll be able to provide you with that information once that work and those negotiations are complete.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have one minute and 20 seconds left.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Prince.

Under the settlement program, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration has allocated \$835 million to the provinces and territories, excluding Quebec, to assist newcomers. Among other things, that settlement funding is being used to support francophone communities outside Quebec.

Would you please cite a few examples of how that support is taking shape?

Ms. Corinne Prince (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you for your question.

We have a number of tools under the francophone immigration strategy, starting with promotion and attracting newcomers to Canada. It all starts outside Canada, in the francophone countries of origin. We also have several tools for selection and settlement purposes, including granting citizenship.

The Chair: Pardon me for interrupting, Ms. Prince, but time is up. You may continue in response to other questions later on.

Ms. Corinne Prince: Thank you.

The Chair: Sometimes I have to interrupt people, as politely as possible, to give everyone a chance to speak.

We will now give the floor to our second vice-chair, Mr. Beaulieu, for six minutes.

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

My first question is for the Department of Canadian Heritage people.

I've noticed in the public accounts that, among the projects funded for Quebec, the development of English-language minorities program, the enhancement of official languages program and the official languages in health program are the only ones to date that offer support projects for the anglophone community.

Is that true?

• (1640)

Ms. Sarah Boily: If I correctly understand your question, you want to know if the official languages support programs benefit Quebec francophones.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Exactly.

Ms. Sarah Boily: Actually, Canadian Heritage has programs, arts and culture programs, for Quebec francophones, since we promote and expose them to a broader audience.

We also have other initiatives that are funded by the programs...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In the official languages context, they're strictly intended for anglophones. Is that correct?

Ms. Sarah Boily: I wouldn't say they're strictly intended for anglophones because some aspects are for francophones.

For example, the Conseil des ministres sur la francophonie canadienne, which consists of representatives of all governments, in-

cluding the Quebec government, is working on joint projects for the entire francophonie.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Actually, you can see from the public accounts that project funding is allocated to the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec.

First of all, exactly what's that for? And, second, is there a list or other source that provides details on funded projects?

Ms. Sarah Boily: We can definitely provide you with details on the project funding that goes directly to Quebec. I don't have that information with me today.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right, thank you.

My next question will be for a Department of Citizenship and Immigration representative.

Last December, I believe, 90% of temporary permit applications from African and francophone students were denied for countries such as Guinea, the Republic of Congo, Benin and others. The rejection rate also included individuals applying to study at Franco-Ontarian institutions. Based on what we're seeing in my riding office, there are a lot of similar cases in Quebec.

How do you explain that? I know the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration is studying the problem. I think this bias against those students is being attributed to the Chinook program.

Officially, though, the government is trying to increase francophone immigration, but the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is doing the opposite.

Mr. Glen Linder: Thank you.

As regards African student approval rates, the gap between rates for anglophone and francophone applicants is actually quite small.

In 2021, the approval rate was 33% for anglophone African students and 27% for francophone African students. It was the reverse in 2019: the francophone rate was higher.

We review every application based on the documents submitted with it. However, we're also aware that the student population is important both for our universities and as a major pool of future francophone immigrants.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Ultimately, you're saying that what we see in the media is false.

The media have reported the following refusal rates: 90% for Guinea and the Republic of Congo, 87% for Cameroon, 85% for Algeria, 88% for Benin and 80% for Senegal.

Do you think those numbers are incorrect?

Mr. Glen Linder: No, I don't think they're incorrect.

I'd say there's a very small difference between the refusal rates of anglophone and francophone students from all African countries. I'm not talking about any country in particular.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

Since the students from the countries I just named are mainly francophone, that must have a major impact.

It seems to me the minister mentioned that a study was being conducted on the subject.

Is a study under way to look into this situation?

• (1645)

Mr. Glen Linder: Yes, we're closely monitoring the issue because we're concerned about the approval rates of African students in general. We've introduced initiatives to promote student immigration from Africa. For example,...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Linder.

You'll definitely have an opportunity to clarify your answers in response to further questions.

[*English*]

Our next colleague to ask a question is, I presume, replacing Mrs. Ashton.

For her first time here, we have Ms. McPherson.

[*Translation*]

Ms. McPherson, welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

You have six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's my first time in this Parliament to be here. I have been at this committee in the previous Parliament. I'm happy to be able to join you again.

As many of you will know, I'm from Edmonton. Edmonton Strathcona is the home to Campus Saint-Jean, of course, and is the heart of a very thriving Franco-Albertan community, so I'm happy to be here and to be able to ask some questions of you.

Some of the first questions I have are around the immigration and IRCC issues we have been hearing about today. The witnesses talked about the idea that they are looking into it and that there is research being done, but I think it's very clear that we have a problem here.

Francophone communities are very clear. They know very well that immigration is critical to maintaining their demographic weight and protecting their access to critical services, and they rely on the IRCC to work with them for their very survival. The department has neglected francophone minority communities. The government's target of 4.4% of francophone immigration, established 20 years ago, has never been reached.

The francophone communities need to go beyond aiming for the same targets and, rather, to correct the situation. We need to go further because the government has failed to meet that 4.4% target. We need more ambitious targets. We need to recognize how important it is that we make up for the failure to meet those targets in the past.

What is the department willing to do? Will it be willing to listen to the communities? Will it set new targets to correct these decades of failure? What are those concrete steps? I would just like some very concrete steps on what will be done to ensure that the new targets are actually reached, not just put forward.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Corinne Prince: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

Madam McPherson, thank you very much for your question about our 4.4% target for 2023.

I can tell you that IRCC has advanced in a number of ways over the past several years to work much more closely with the francophone minority communities outside of Quebec. Last year we increased the number of francophone service providers outside of Quebec from 50 to 80 and invested many more millions of dollars in francophone services. Just a few weeks ago our minister, Minister Fraser, added nine additional resettlement agencies to assist with the incoming Afghan refugees. We doubled the number of francophone resettlement agencies in that announcement, adding agencies in Bathurst and Edmonton as well as in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, so in your province.

In addition, in order to meet the target, last year we put in place a TR-to-PR pathway initiative, with no caps on the francophone applicants, with a view to increasing the number of international students here in Canada who could apply for permanent residency. There were more than 7,000 applications for that initiative, and we hope that will go a long way to increasing the number of landings to address the 4.4% target.

I must say, however, Madam McPherson, that we are in a pandemic, and the pandemic has in fact been quite an issue, not only for francophone newcomers but for all newcomers to the country. Closed borders and the continuing pandemic have affected the number of newcomers to our country.

• (1650)

Ms. Heather McPherson: With all due respect, though, this was something that was put in place many years before the pandemic, and that target has never been met. With all due respect, as much as our lives have all been turned on their head during COVID-19, this is very clearly an indication that the target of 4.4% needs to be more ambitious and there needs to be more done to make sure it can be reached. I'm glad you were able to share some of those concrete things. I certainly hope that is sufficient to get to where I think we all need and want to get to.

In terms of francophone immigration outside of Quebec, in a section of the report that was tabled in Parliament yesterday, the data for 2021 is missing. Can you tell us what the percentage of landed francophone immigrants outside of Quebec is in 2021?

Ms. Corinne Prince: I can, absolutely, Madam McPherson.

I have data in front of me for January to October 2021, and approximately 2% of all admissions were francophone. Just the year before, it was almost 4%. As you can see, the pandemic has had a very large influence on that.

I will say, though, that economic—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Prince.

[*English*]

I'm sorry. Thank you.

To cut this meeting in two equal parts, we will have to go until five o'clock Ottawa time.

[*Translation*]

I will allow two three-minute questions and two one-minute questions for the Bloc and the NDP. That will take us up to 6:00 p.m.

I will begin with Mr. Dalton, who will have three minutes.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I think we can take more time if we go to 5:05 p.m. We can divide the time in two for the two panels. Can you check with the clerk?

The Chair: Are you suggesting two times two and a half minutes?

Mr. Joël Godin: I think we can do two blocks of four minutes and two blocks of two minutes and finish on time.

The Chair: You're right, but last time I was told that wouldn't allow for the two respective five-minute speaking times of the government and the official opposition or the two two-and-a-half-minute speaking times of the second and third opposition parties.

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me, Mr. Chair, that's not exactly what was said last time. We said that the representation of the parties in the House should be observed. You had allotted the same speaking time to the four parties, but Mr. Serré and I asked that we be allowed two minutes each and one minute for the other two parties.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Joël Godin: I suggest you allow the Liberal Party four minutes, the Conservative Party four minutes, the Bloc two minutes in the NDP two minutes.

The Chair: Is that agreeable to all members of the committee? I see it is.

If my understanding is correct, we will have periods of four minutes and two minutes.

Mr. Dalton, you have four minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

I'd like to start off by discussing immersion, which is a very good way to promote French outside Quebec. However, the demand for immersion programs is much greater than what's being offered.

I know that \$184 million is available over five years, but that's not a large amount if you divide it up. I'm a member from British Columbia. Based on my calculations, that will only pay the salaries of three dozen teachers a year. The demand is much greater than that.

Ms. Boyer, would you please tell us how the funding is allocated among immersion programs? Can you also tell us about teacher training in 45 seconds? I'll have more questions for you.

• (1655)

Ms. Julie Boyer: All right. I'll speak quickly.

That amount will be used to increase the number of spaces in the French immersion and French second language programs, particularly for early childhood, to follow the educational continuum. It will also be used to increase the number of teachers we can recruit and to encourage them to work in the provinces.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

I know it's not coming out of your pocket, but it's a large investment, considering the great demand.

Ms. Julie Boyer: It comes out of the pockets of all of us.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Precisely. That's a good political answer.

I have another question. When Mélanie Joly left the Department of Canadian Heritage, she took the official languages component with her, which led to the creation of the minister of state position, which Ms. Petitpas Taylor inherited. That divided up the responsibilities.

What are the respective official language responsibilities of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Official Languages?

Ms. Julie Boyer: That's a machinery-of-government question, but I will say that, under the act, the minister responsible for official languages is still the Minister of Canadian Heritage. However, those duties are currently assigned to the Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I see.

Ms. Julie Boyer: Minister Petitpas Taylor is responsible for official languages. I want to assure you that there has been no change in the department. The people who worked on official languages before those responsibilities were delegated to Minister Petitpas Taylor are still there and still performing the same duties.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

Delays in processing admission applications have been reported in the media. More than 1.8 million files are pending processing as a result of pandemic-related factors.

According to the minister, how many of those files concern potential francophone immigrants?

Can you answer that question, Mr. Linder?

Mr. Glen Linder: Thank you.

It's true that we have a very large number of immigrant files to process, but I'm sorry I don't have the exact number of francophone immigrant files with me today.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Would you please send it to the committee?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: It would be good if you could send them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

Our next questioner is Mr. Drouin.

You have four minutes, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

My questions will be for the Department of Canadian Heritage representatives. We'll have an opportunity to question the Department of Citizenship and Immigration people at another meeting.

I'd like to know what Canadian Heritage thinks is the definition of official language success. I want us to talk about positive measures.

When we fund programs or events, a festival or something else, we say it's good for the francophone community. How does Canadian Heritage measure the success of a program?

Ms. Julie Boyer: I'll be pleased to answer that question.

The official languages support programs provide funding for events. Every time we transfer funding through contribution agreements, for example, very clear objectives respecting participation and impact are laid out in each of the agreements put in place with our interveners. That's one way of doing it.

Going back to the action plan for official languages, because I didn't have a chance to talk about it at length at the start of the meeting, how do we know whether we succeeded or were on the right track?

We conducted a mid-term evaluation to determine where we stood in implementing the action plan. The interveners and organizations said they were 85% satisfied with management of the action plan and implementation of initiatives. So I think we're on the right track as regards results.

• (1700)

Mr. Francis Drouin: All right.

You fund programs in my riding. My community is 60% francophone. Five years ago, however, it was 66% francophone.

Yes, you funded a festival. Yes, you did that.

I imagine you're limited by the current act. We've often discussed the idea of one positive measure as opposed to many.

Do you have that kind of conversation with your counterparts, for example, with those from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, who also have to reach certain objectives.

I ask that because my community, for example, declines every year, despite your department's good intentions.

How could we legislate to ensure the federal government plays a greater coordinating role?

Ms. Julie Boyer: What a great question.

The beautiful thing about official languages is that it's a horizontal file. It's everybody's business. That means it doesn't just concern the Department of Canadian Heritage. It also involves my colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

We work very closely to implement action plan initiatives and determine how to modernize the official languages bill.

We regularly work together on many files, at high levels in the public service, and will continue to forge ahead.

Thank you for your question.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds left, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: All right.

I yield my speaking time. I can't ask a question in so little time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Our next questioner is Mr. Beaulieu.

Go ahead for two minutes, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My first question is for the Department of Canadian Heritage representatives. I'd like to get a short answer.

Are there any parts of Bill C-32 that would change the allocation of official languages funding in Quebec in a way that favours French?

Ms. Julie Boyer: Thank you for your question.

That kind of allocation is usually negotiated through an education agreement protocol. The distribution of available funding can also be negotiated with each province, although it's not something that's legislated.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I see.

Is the funding granted to the various groups, such as the Quebec Community Groups Network, allocated under the Canada-Quebec accord or is it funding that goes directly to the organizations?

Ms. Julie Boyer: It's usually funding that goes directly to the organizations and is allocated through our official languages support programs.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's it.

Under the Canada-Quebec accord, what goes through education, is—

Ms. Julie Boyer: It's for education, but also to provide services.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier you said you could send us details on grants that go to Quebec. Is that possible?

Ms. Julie Boyer: Yes, we can add that item to our list of recipients for follow-up.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: As you wish. Could we contact you to get that information, or will you send it to us?

Ms. Julie Boyer: We'll send it to you through the clerk. It will be a pleasure.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Perfect.

Thank you.

My next question is for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration representatives.

You said that refusal rates could be quite high for francophone African countries, but that those of anglophone and francophone African students for each country are the same.

What are the grounds for refusal?

The Chair: You have five seconds left, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right.

I won't have time to complete my question in five seconds.

The Chair: No, your speaking time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

[*English*]

Now, it's two minutes for Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In January, the Federal Court of Appeal found that the federal government had failed in its obligation set out in part VII of the Official Languages Act to take positive measures to promote the vitality of the francophone minority in British Columbia. Of course, everyone here knows that this was the second such ruling in just over a year.

In Alberta, we've seen the provincial government fail to protect French in Alberta. It's reneged on its contractual obligations to fund Campus Saint-Jean, and to date has refused to accept federal dollars to make up for part of that funding gap.

Without Campus Saint-Jean, Alberta will not have the qualified teachers it needs to serve its francophone students or those who, like my daughter, are enrolled in bilingual programs.

How can the federal government bypass or otherwise compel provincial governments like Alberta's United Conservative Party government to protect minority language rights?

• (1705)

Ms. Julie Boyer: I will start, and perhaps Sarah can complete my answer.

There are some projects under way, and we have regular conversations with officials from other provinces and territories on their needs for post-secondary education. We have an upcoming event that will be organized around post-secondary education in the language of minorities, to see what issues are underlying the systemic recurring problems with francophone universities outside of Quebec and whether we can find solutions to address those issues.

Sarah, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Sarah Boily: The only thing I would add is that part of the envelope of \$120 million to support post-secondary is targeting community organizations so that they can network and better identify the needs for post-secondary. There is that availability—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Ms. Boily.

Ms. Boily, Ms. Boyer and Ms. Prince, as well as Mr. Linder, thank you for your excellent comments.

Today was very interesting. You can send any information you didn't have time to share to the committee clerk, who will forward it to committee members.

We will suspend briefly to allow the second panel of witnesses to arrive.

• (1705)

(Pause)

• (1705)

The Chair: We are back for the second part of this meeting.

We now have Tanya Tamilio, president of the Centre communautaire francophone de Sarnia-Lambton, who is joining us via video-conference; Maxime Laporte, president of Mouvement Québec français; and Marie-Anne Alepin, general president of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal.

Witnesses will have five minutes each for their opening remarks and to tell us the topic they wish to discuss. I will warn them when they have one minute left.

Ms. Tamilio, you have the floor for five minutes.

• (1710)

Ms. Tanya Tamilio (President, Centre communautaire francophone de Sarnia-Lambton): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I'd like to thank you for having invited me to speak about the federal government's measures to protect and promote the French language in Quebec and everywhere in Canada.

My name is Tanya Tamilio, and I'm the president of a francophone community centre in the Sarnia—Lambton region. Our centre brings together and represents the francophone community of Sarnia—Lambton and it also coordinates projects. The centre has a francophone space for these activities. In addition, it's a point of entry to the francophone community in the Sarnia—Lambton region and acts as a catalyst for collaborative projects.

My testimony today will describe for you what French is like in the smallest towns, a reality that you have no doubt already heard about. I would also like to give you some ideas about what the government could do to help us thrive in our own language.

Let's look at what it's like in a very small town. Sarnia—Lambton is a tiny industrial town in a region that is full of opportunities for outdoor activities, near the border with the United States. There are over 5,000 francophones and francophiles there. We have four French-language and five French immersion schools that are bursting at the seams, in addition to non-profit organizations that offer activities in French and that are working to increase the availability of services in French. Our francophone community is dynamic and its francophone leaders are encouraging people to request services in French.

On December 13, 2021, the City of Sarnia received its designation under the provincial French Language Services Act. The provincial MPP told us that it came about because of the growth of our francophone community and the cohesiveness of francophones in our region. We are working hard to make it possible for francophones to communicate in our community in the language of their choice whenever possible. However, the designation would have been impossible without the support of federal MP Marilyn Gladu and provincial MPP Bob Bailey, and our great defender and mayor of Sarnia, Mike Bradley. I would also like to underscore the dedication of the Hon. Caroline Mulroney and her team. Their political support in this area was essential and I thank them for it.

As a result of the designation, we can obtain government services, drivers' licences and health cards in French. Now what, you might ask, could a small recently designated town also need from the federal government? How is one to protect and contribute to the vitality of French in Canada and regions like ours? I'm asking you to invest here.

In previous testimony, it was suggested that the principle of territoriality be adopted to promote the language. I'm opposed to that. In small franco-Ontarian towns, we've been fighting for centuries on behalf of the development of the French language. This option would be a step backwards and run counter to the many efforts to make Canada a bilingual country.

The shortage of francophone teachers is a major problem in a community like ours. The quality of our services in French depends in part on how well our young people have been educated. To prepare myself for my appearance today, I had a discussion with the French-language education superintendent for public schools. The challenge is genuine. Families have been opting for French immersion for their children but the school board lacks resources. There are no supply teachers who can teach in French and no additional educational resources to support the teachers. The social workers also don't speak French.

How can we support our school boards to ensure that students, our next generation, will be able to grow up in French rather than just learning French? Please spend more, here.

The vitality of the French language is generally part of the mandate of local community organizations and programs, and government programs to promote official languages. The federal government offers grants for core programming, which for us means \$30,000 a year to further the development of the French language in a French-speaking minority town. This amount allows us to hire an employee who works 20 hours a week, at non-competitive wages and without benefits.

That forces me to fall back on dedicated volunteers who want their children and grandchildren to grow up in French, but it's nearly impossible.

Project funds are often limited to nine months, something that a representative from Canadian Heritage mentioned earlier, meaning that this funding is helpful for a while, but we end up back where we started.

As for immigration, the statistics are there and they show that Canada needs immigration. However, why should an immigrant with no knowledge of French or English have to choose one of these two languages rather than be able to opt for both?

I think I only have 15 seconds left, so I'll stop there.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tamilio. You'll have lots of time to continue talking about your projects and about the francophone community in the Sarnia region when we get to the questions.

Mr. Laporte, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Maxime Laporte (President, Mouvement Québec français): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In 1971, the demographic weight of those who speak French at home in Canada was 25.7%. In 2016, it was 20.5%. According to the projections, it will be 17.8% in 2036, which is fewer than 14 years away. In other words, 65 years after the passage of the Official Languages Act in Canada the country's francophone glacier has melted and lost 30% of its volume.

In English-speaking Canada, with the exception of Quebec, the demographic weight of those who speak French at home was 4.3% in 1971 and 2.3% in 2016. According to the projections, it will drop to 1.8% in 2036.

The net anglicization rate for francophones in Canada was 4.8% in 1971 and 5.8% in 2016. The net anglicization rate for francophones in English Canada was 27.4% in 1971 and 40.1% in 2016.

In Quebec, the demographic weight of French as the language spoken at home went from 83.1% in 2001 to 80.6% in 2016. It will drop to 74.4% in 2036, according to the projections.

On Montreal Island, the demographic weight of French as the language spoken at home was 56.4% in 2001. Fifteen years on, it was at 53.1%, meaning that French will soon be the minority language there.

And lastly, the demographic weight of Quebec in Canada went from approximately 28% in 1971 to approximately 23% in 2016. According to the projections, it will be approximately 22% in 2036.

Francophones used to be the vast minority among those who spoke European languages in Canada. Here we are now, a few centuries later, on the brink of folklorization or even extinction. In his day, former Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier was already prophesying that the dominion would be a tomb for the French fact. And the great Pierre Bourgault talked about “a slow cultural genocide”. Beyond incendiary words, no matter what is said or done, Lord Durham's program is well under way. Slowly but surely, it is becoming a reality. You have to admit that Lord Durham is patient.

We, the old Canadians, have had enough of regression. Enough of always being even more “minoritized” and increasingly “provincialized”.

The question is: can we really reverse the trend? Given the current state of affairs, I don't really think so and I believe even less in your measures. However, we can still theorize. What might we do, in theory? In theory, we would have to make French the only real official and common language of Quebec, and wherever there still are significant agglomerations of francophones, including everywhere within the jurisdiction of the central government. But you won't do that.

In theory, what's required is a break with Canadian-style official bilingualism, which is, objectively, a fiasco. What is needed instead is a Swiss-style model. The only official language for statutes and the courts in Quebec should be French. In other words, section 133 of the Constitution Act, 1982, would have to be amended accordingly. That's something else you won't do.

What is required is for Quebec, within its borders, to have all jurisdictions with respect to immigration, language, culture and communication. Only knowledge of the French language should be required to become a citizen of Quebec. Or have you already said no to that.

As for the language of education, the “Canada clause” should be removed. Canada ought not to be able to use its spending power to interfere in fields of Quebec jurisdiction in ways that are to the detriment of French.

Subsidiarily, the kind of linguistic and institutional segregation that gives English public institutions in Quebec a clearly privileged status that is practically colonial, should be ended, as should the millions of dollars per year of overfunding for anti-Bill 101 lobbies.

Furthermore, francophones in English Canada should have the same institutional rights and privileges as Quebec anglophones. The Attorney General should henceforth abstain from ruling against Bill 101 in court, for example. In fact, the 1982 constitutional diktat should be erased and followed by a return to the bargaining table to start over from scratch.

What's left? In the current state of affairs, if Canada really cared about the French fact more than it cared about political unity, I think that what we would be looking at would be an amicable divorce, a velvet divorce, like the one that occurred in the former Czechoslovakia. Personally, I recommend divorce.

That's all I have to say for this evening. To tell the truth, I don't think we have much to say to one another. I'll speed things up for you. Moreover, it strikes me that it has been a long time now since Quebec and Canada have not had much to say to one another about the essentials, no matter how those who willingly wear blinders feel about it. For the love of French, let's stop wasting our time and money pretending.

Thank you.

Good evening.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laporte.

We will now continue with the General President of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin (General President, Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal): Good evening, everyone.

I'd like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to appear before the committee and for taking an interest in the protection and promotion of French.

I represent the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, which was founded in 1834 to defend the French language and democracy. Other Saint-Jean-Baptiste societies sprang up just about everywhere in Canada in the 19th and 20th centuries. They played a central role in all of Quebec's and French Canadians' language battles.

Lawyer Roger Lepage's testimony to this committee shook me. He spoke to you about the oppression of his compatriots in the Prairies, the assassination of Louis Riel in 1885, the Ku Klux Klan's actions, the prohibition of French-language schools in Saskatchewan and elsewhere, the education rights reluctantly granted by Saskatchewan towards the end of the 1960s, the francophone Saskatchewan students confined to old buildings abandoned by anglophones, and in particular, the lack of money for new French-language schools. In comparison to the overfunding of the anglophone school system in Quebec, one can only feel anger over what Mr. Lepage had to go through.

The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, which I feel honoured to preside over, has for over 190 years worked to promote the French language, and Quebec's culture and identity. In addition to holding patriotic events and organizing Quebec's national holiday in Montreal from its very beginnings, our organization has taken part in all facets of cultural life, including its major awards in literature, the performing arts, music, cinema, journalism and other fields.

The French language is a precious possession in America. Flowing from the mouth of our great river, it was transmitted unremittingly and lovingly from generation to generation. It gave birth to a rich and original culture that shines in the heavens of the world's cultural diversity, but today, our language is threatened, even in our metropolis.

The decline of French is more than a statistic: it is visible and felt by the population. Our major businesses, our so-called francophone radio stations, and even our French-language television channels bombard us with English songs. In many Montreal businesses, it can be difficult to get service in French. English-language CEGEP students are mainly francophones and allophones. The intensive teaching of English in elementary school is already giving rise to centres of anglicization in our French schools. English-language universities receive three to four times the funding they should. Censuses have been showing a steady decline in French as a mother tongue, and the language used at home and at work.

, Without Bill 101, we would already be well on the way to becoming a minority in Quebec. Unfortunately, as it is not yet a country, Quebec does not have the powers to take the matter in hand and restore a balance that would secure the future of French. With its powerful spending authority, Ottawa interferes in our fields of jurisdiction and injects billions of dollars into education and health, leading to an imbalance and injustice.

The Official Languages Act establishes a fictional symmetry between anglo-Quebeckers and francophone communities outside Quebec. The millions of dollars awarded each year to Quebec under this act have served to promote English, even though it's French that is threatened. English, as you know, will remain the strong majority language in North America and Canada. Anglo-Quebeckers are an extension of this majority in Quebec.

The modernization of the Official Languages Act needs to increase support to francophones outside Quebec. Their communities are entitled to it. Given the historical injustices, needs are immense. In Quebec, the Official Languages Act is part of the problem, not the solution.

You may not have been there when this act was adopted and amended, but now you have the power to change things. My question here is a real one: do you want to continue the work undertaken in 1839 by Lord Durham and the leaders of his era? Do you want to see francophones assimilated by the dominant language, or rather turn things around to secure the future of the French language?

If Ottawa truly wants to remedy the situation while waiting for us to become a country, we have three things to put forward.

Firstly, we suggest that funding under the Official Languages Act should be overwhelmingly spent on protecting and promoting French language and culture in every English-majority province and territory, and in Quebec.

Secondly, we are asking the Standing Committee on Official Languages to recommend the establishment of a college specializing in Quebec radio and television to ensure that Quebec has enhanced protection and promotion of French on radio, television and the Internet.

Lastly, we are proposing that the committee recommend that companies under federal jurisdiction be made subject to the provisions of Bill 101, in compliance with the provisions of Quebec's Bill 96.

• (1725)

Quebec is exemplary towards its anglophone communities. It's obvious in comparison to the treatment received by francophone and Acadian communities in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Alepin. You'll have more opportunities to add comments as people ask you questions.

For the first round of questions, each political party will have six minutes.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Ms. Tamilio.

Ms. Tamilio, you spoke about problems encountered in recruiting teachers for the various francophone schools and immersion programs. Do you have a solution? Where are you going to find all the teachers you need with such a serious shortage?

It takes time to encourage people to become teachers. I imagine that it must be even more difficult to find francophone teachers outside Quebec.

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Thank you for the question.

As it happens, I do have a solution.

I manage a community centre in the small city of Sarnia, but I can explain one of the problems we have with respect to teachers. For example, when people from Quebec come here to teach in French in the Sarnia region, they find themselves in a completely anglophone world when they're not at the school. So we would like to support French, but how to provide support for the people who find themselves in such a context?

We were talking earlier about IRCC and the possibility of providing language courses. It might be helpful to offer English courses to francophones from Quebec who come to our region.

We also discussed immigration. I heard someone say earlier that it would be great if we could attract more francophone professionals from abroad, particularly teachers, and have them settle in the regions.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Ms. Tamilio.

My next question is for Mr. Laporte and Ms. Alepin.

Would francophone immigration to Quebec be a major asset? Do you have some idea of the number of francophone immigrants who would have to come to Quebec each year?

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: As we have always said at the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, it's not so much the number that's important but rather the way things are done. Knowledge of the French language is really the most important consideration.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I don't know whether Mr. Laporte would like to add something.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: He's not here.

The Chair: I've just been informed that Mr. Laporte has left the meeting voluntarily.

We still have two witnesses: Ms. Tamilio and Ms. Alepin.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Okay.

I'll return to Ms. Tamilio then.

We were talking about the fact that it was difficult to find francophone teachers, but I'd like to have some idea of the scale of the problem. Is the shortage 20%, 30%, 50%?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: We spoke about immersion schools earlier, but there are French-language schools where unqualified teachers have full-time positions at the moment. They speak French, but they're not necessarily qualified for the job. That's a serious situation. There are not even any supply teachers. We're looking for parents to act as supply teachers in the school; the only requirement is that they be able to speak French.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Ms. Alepin, I'd like to ask you a question that may seem strange.

I believe that my region, the greater Chaudière-Appalaches region, is the only place in Canada, or even North America, where anglophones have been assimilated. Our region is 99.7% francophone. I know some 70-year-old people who had been anglophones when they were young and who have now lost their English. They struggle to find the right words in English and they speak it with a French accent. It's truly bizarre.

The fertility rate among francophones appears to be a little too low to maintain a workable ratio.

What do you think can be done on that score?

• (1730)

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: You may find my answer equally bizarre. I'm not a demographer, but I don't think we need to return to the past and force people to have children.

The most important question is still the rate of immigration. It would be better to control our immigration process and accept more francophones. It's essential. Not just desirable, but essential.

As we wrote in the brief, we submitted in connection to Bill 96, the percentage of people admitted as permanent immigrants to Quebec—by which I mean that they have become permanent residents—who said that they did not know French, increased from 36.6% in 2011 to 50.2% in 2019. These people did not even know any French.

Earlier, my predecessor as general president of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, Maxime Laporte, who is now the President of the Mouvement Québec français, gave you some alarming numbers.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

You ended on a roll and I think that it was important.

It's true that things are difficult in Montreal. There are a lot of anglophones, but many other languages are also spoken. My daughter is living in Montreal at the moment, and she says it's very different living in Montreal compared to the Quebec City area.

I wish you the best of luck. Even if Quebec were to become a country one day, the critical mass of Montreal would remain, and I don't know how you see the future playing out there.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: Are you asking me?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Yes.

The Chair: Please answer in 10 seconds.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: Well, as you know, we are in the minority, in an ocean of cultures including English and other languages, but the ideal is to continue to do battle and pass our passion on to our children.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry for having interrupted you, Ms. Alepin.

The next speaker is Ms. Patricia Lattanzio.

You have six minutes, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Ms. Tamilio.

Your presentation was very interesting. I even read the article that appeared in *The Observer* newspaper, which reported that you had recently obtained a designation.

Could you tell us more about this designation, and about what you did, and what this new designation means for you?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Thank you for this question.

Earlier on, I spoke about the increased funding for human resources. In 2018, some volunteers went out and got some elected representatives on our side. They spoke with municipal, provincial and federal representatives. We didn't have to persuade Ms. Gladu, because she was already convinced that it was important for our region. We also reached out to francophone organizations in the region. I should remind you that it is indeed a small region. We have only six organizations that provide activities or services in French to the francophone community. That's not including federal services. There were consultations with people working in mental health, for example. We don't have services like that here in Sarnia. I say "here", but I live in Montreal. But this doesn't exist in Sarnia. Community organizations provide it.

So in 2018, we submitted the application.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: What kind of application? For the designation, was it to municipal elected officials?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay.

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: At the time, when we submitted our application, we spoke with all the officials and obtained their support.

Ms. Lattanzio, in Ontario, there is a group called the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. We don't take any action without them. They provide our political support. We consult this association before doing anything.

So we consulted that association and they gave us some very good coaching to ensure we weren't forgetting anything.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: You're talking about how difficult it is to receive services in French. What services are unavailable in your minority community? Can you give us some examples?

• (1735)

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: At the moment, there are no services. It's going to begin in 2024.

Let's take the example of a newcomer to the Sarnia region who doesn't speak English and only speaks French. Persons like this who are settling in Ontario need to replace their licence plates. The province administers this, but there's no one who can serve them in French. They can't even replace their licence plates because they don't speak English.

We experience these sorts of minor problems every day. With the new designation, we will be able to effect some changes in cases like these.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: What about medical services? How does that work in Sarnia?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: At the moment, there are no medical services available in French, except for the interpretation service. If you go to a hospital, you can request interpretation in Mandarin. It's a telephone service provided by the Bluewater Health hospital.

Prior to obtaining the designation, we worked with the chief executive officer of this hospital, Mr. Mike Lapaine, a francophone. We asked him whether he could at least consult his employees to see if any of the staff could speak French. There were graduates of French immersion schools, and people with university degrees who had studied elsewhere and were back in the region. We wanted to know, for example, whether in the ultrasound department there were people who could speak French, or nurses who could speak French, and if so whether they could be identified? That would mean that a francophone entering the hospital could find out who could speak French. Nevertheless, for them, it meant additional costs.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Let's switch from the medical field to education. In your introduction, you said that your region had four francophone schools and five immersion schools. Are the four schools you mentioned elementary or secondary? Also, how do things work in terms of education? Do you offer bilingual, immersion or unilingual programs?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: We have two francophone elementary schools where, as in Quebec, the teaching is in French all day, except perhaps for 20 minutes in English. We also have two high schools that follow the same teaching format.

And then we have five immersion schools, four of which are elementary and one secondary, I believe.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: You said that there was a shortage of teachers. Do you have trouble finding French-speaking teachers for the two high schools and the two elementary schools?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Yes, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Who teaches French in these schools then?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: If they can find any, the schools ask francophone parents or francophone professionals to do it...

The Chair: I'm sorry to have to interrupt you, Ms. Tamilio.

The next speaker on the list is our second vice-chair.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My first question is for you, Ms. Alepin.

With the help of some numbers, Charles Castonguay, Frédéric Lacroix and others demonstrated the decline of French everywhere in Canada and Quebec. Most of the decline in Quebec was in Montreal.

Could you talk to us about how the anglicization of Montreal is being experienced on the ground?

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: First and foremost, I would say that if we really want to secure the future of French in Quebec, we would have to teach French to and integrate 90% of newcomers to maintain our demographic weight. It's mathematics. The witnesses spoke about it.

To get there, the government of Quebec has been working to make French the official common language. That, in fact, is the difficult job that we are trying to do. It's only to be expected that newcomers would tend to want to integrate with the majority. Even though francophones are in the majority in Quebec, anglophones are in the majority in Canada, and even more so in North America. That's where the major challenge lies, because it's also a source of confusion.

As you know, the government of Quebec is trying, through Bill 101, to make French the only official and common language of Quebec, while respecting the historical rights of the anglophone community. For as long as Quebec is part of Canada, however, it will be subordinate to the federal government elected by the anglophone majority, which in an earlier time imposed a constitution and the Official Languages Act on Quebec. The purpose of the latter is to make English the official and common language. The federal language policy ensures not only that anglophones can receive services in English—already done by Quebec—but also that anyone who wishes can use English in public.

Secondly, as I said a little earlier, the decline of French is really perceptible. It's not just a matter of statistics. We conducted a major survey with the *Journal de Montréal's* survey office, in the course of which it was exceedingly frustrating to see that half the time, services were only offered in English, with no one able to do so in French. To find this in Montreal is certainly alarming.

• (1740)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Meaning that French is far from being the common language in Montreal. Is that correct?

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: The language of transmission must not be forgotten. Here too we are talking about the language used at home, the mother tongue. A form of transference is now in evidence. There is the language learned at home, the first language or mother tongue, followed by the language of work.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Tamilio.

Earlier, she said she had heard someone talk about territoriality. On this topic, Mr. Guillaume Rousseau said that what Quebec wants is to make French the common language in the province. Outside Quebec, wherever there might be a critical mass of francophones, the federal government could at the very least ensure that services be available primarily in French. This does not mean that there would no longer be services in French in areas where there was only a small francophone minority.

I think that the federal government needs to redress the wrongs. At certain periods, there were laws that prohibited the use of French just about everywhere. There should be even more services in French and the rule of "where numbers warrant" should be discarded.

I just wanted to clarify that, but I don't know how Ms. Tamilio sees it.

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Beaulieu.

That's what I had understood. The intention was to provide more resources in places where there are large francophone communities. For us, it might be the Toronto area, which is about two and a half hours away. It's not exactly next door.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It will always be important to have French-language services where you live. I find it admirable to see you fighting this battle under such difficult conditions.

If I still have some time left, I'd now like to address Ms. Alepin.

In the rest of Canada, communities are struggling to receive services in French and to have francophone schools. You spoke about the testimony given by Mr. Roger Lepage of Manitoba, who appeared before you.

How can this situation be explained? Is there francophobia everywhere in Canada? How do you see all that?

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: A process was set in motion a long time ago. It would appear that the workings of assimilation are still grinding away. I don't know whether I would call it francophobia, but it has become clear that the Official Languages Act will not necessarily be helpful to us.

The act will help the minorities, but here in Quebec, French cannot be seen as the minority language. At the moment, Quebec is still in Canada. The impression is that there is a double standard. There's a form of ambiguity about it. We can't be considered as...

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Alepin. I apologize for interrupting you.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: That's all right.

The Chair: You will be able to continue later.

[English]

The next person to ask questions will be Ms. McPherson.

Ms. McPherson, we have six minutes for you.

• (1745)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. This is really very interesting.

As I mentioned in the last panel, I represent a community in Alberta that has a very high percentage of francophone speakers, so I see this as vital for ensuring that French happens across the country and that we are supporting it in communities like Edmonton Strathcona and other communities outside of Quebec.

The first question I have is for you, Ms. Tamilio. The vitality of French in my province of Alberta relies on new Canadians. Alberta is fortunate to have good immigration now from francophone Africa, but these new Canadians face more than just language discrimination. They are also facing racism in our communities.

How would you like to see the government support new Canadians from the continent of Africa as they deal with racism? What should Heritage Canada do and what should IRCC do to support these individuals, who are so vital for French to exist in a minority setting like Edmonton Strathcona?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Right now, in place, Patrimoine canadien and IRCC do have anti-racism programs in Sarnia, and I happen to be so lucky as to be able to sit in on this. Lambton College, our local college, accepts approximately 1,600 international students per year. There, they are working on retention of a potential 400 of those students in our area.

Now, we're here to speak about French, and very few of those students speak French. I've already gone and asked and begged to see if there was anybody there who spoke French, but the majority of them are coming from India. We are launching strategies to welcome and retain them, but that's specific to our area, and that's with some of the funding out there that's offered from the federal government.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

From my perspective too, one of the key draws for francophone speakers from Africa is Campus Saint-Jean. Our university is a draw for that immigration. The fact that we cannot agree with our provincial government...

My colleague from the Bloc brought up francophobia. I would say that while it might not have francophobia, our provincial government is certainly not co-operative and does not see the value of protecting or fighting for our francophone Albertans.

My next question is on the targets of the Commissioner of Official Languages or the government. We heard from the Commissioner of Official Languages that the federal government missed its 4.4% target for francophone immigration outside of Quebec. It's never met that 4.4% target since it was set in 2003.

Is this a realistic and sufficient target to maintain and to allow progression of the demographic weight of the Francophonie in our communities?

Again, I would open it up to both of our witnesses, but perhaps, Ms. Tamilio, we could start with you.

I believe our friend from the Bloc is not needed.

Thank you.

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: That's great. Thank you.

Indeed your 4.4% has not shown an impact in our area. I sit on another board, which is the Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest.

Ms. McPherson, is it okay if I go back to French?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: In this group, we realized that we had to increase the rate of francophone immigration. We are still wondering, however, how to go about it.

One of the problems we have at the moment is that when newcomers to Ontario land at Pearson airport in Toronto, they go straight to kiosks where the employees speak English. That's when they are offered places to live, and they are not necessarily directed elsewhere. IRCC noticed this and attempted to address it by placing some francophone employees at these kiosks. However, these are not full-time. Newcomers arriving therefore don't really have a choice. If the first person who greets them is an anglophone, the newcomer will go to the region to which the anglophone is encouraging them to settle.

To answer your question, the 4.4% rate needs to be increased not only for the Sarnia region, but everywhere in Canada.

We do in fact have immigration services in the Sarnia region. People who arrive in Ontario and speak neither French nor English only have the right to learn one language. So if they arrive in a region like Sarnia, they can't learn only French, because they could not even go and request a passport in that language. People therefore automatically request English-language training. If they want to learn French afterwards, they will have to pay for their courses.

We are asking the federal government to provide funds so that newcomers could learn both languages free of charge.

• (1750)

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I know I have very little time left, but, Ms. Alepin, is there anything you'd like to add very quickly?

[Translation]

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

I'd also like to thank Ms. Alepin.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: I had raised my hand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Alepin. That's all the time we have.

We will now move on to the next round of questions.

The official opposition party and the party in power will get three minutes each. The other two opposition parties will have a minute and a half each. We could talk about this for a long time, but that's all the time we have.

By some happy coincidence, the next person to ask questions is from Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Gladu, you have three minutes.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks also to all our witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Tamilio.

Ms. Tamilio, I'm very pleased to see you. You have a great deal of experience in connection with increasing the size of our francophone community.

What would you say to the smaller communities that would like a stronger French presence and more services in French?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: That's a good question.

Given the shortage of workers here, I would suggest that you help us increase the size of the francophone labour force by means of access to education in French, from early childhood to postsecondary.

I would also suggest meeting francophone immigration targets while providing the communities with the tools they need to integrate newcomers.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Excellent. We are currently working on modernizing the Official Languages Act.

What do we have to do to improve this act, Ms. Alepin?

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: Thank you for asking.

First of all, we have to stop treating the French language in Quebec as if it were not a minority language. It's in the minority in Canada.

At the moment, anglophone institutions in Quebec receive funding, which further speeds up the decline of French and creates an imbalance. We need to recognize that Quebec is in the minority in Canada. That's the most important thing. No matter what we do in our act to defend our language rights, the fact is that the continued existence of the French language will truly be threatened. Without that admission, you'll continue to contribute to its decline, and even its loss, over time.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Ms. Tamilio, You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: Perhaps a central agency should be designated to coordinate the implementation of the Official Languages Act.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

I'll leave you my 20 seconds, Mr. Chair.

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

Next up is Mr. Marc Serré, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages.

You have the floor, Mr. Serré, for three minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many thanks to the witnesses here today.

My first question is for Ms. Tamilio.

Thank you for your efforts. It's always very difficult to find volunteers and funds, as I know. Organizations like the Coopérative des artistes du Nouvel-Ontario, or CANO, Nipissing Ouest, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, le Centre culturel La Ronde, and all of the francophone cultural organizations have a lot of work to do.

We said earlier that some provinces were not necessarily supporting minorities. Several are not. In our 2020-2021 main estimates, we allocated \$180 million to second-language learning in immersion courses and \$121 million to postsecondary education.

Ms. Tamilio, in your particular case, what can we do to work more closely with the provinces, and Ontario in particular? Ontario granted you a designation under Bill 8 on French language services in Ontario, which is excellent, but what can be done for the province to receive federal funding to support the education sector, which is a provincial jurisdiction?

• (1755)

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: You're talking about the education sector and the community sector. I can only give you my opinion for the community sector. Once again, these are funds the sector needs. Perhaps the schools should also receive more funding so that they can state their precise requirements. My only recommendation for the education sector would be to help them by giving them more funds.

Mr. Marc Serré: The Department of Canadian Heritage also allocates funding to community organizations. Is there a way for the province to work more closely with the community?

Ms. Tanya Tamilio: As I mentioned earlier, on the community side of things, we receive \$30,000 a year. If we want to undertake any projects, we have to request funds for these specific projects. So if we factor in the time required before receiving approval for our funding application and the fact that we have until March 31 to complete the project, we sometimes have six months left to organize a special project for the region's francophone community.

Why couldn't the government gather our project ideas together and give us funds from the core programming reserve rather than require us to submit applications for short-term projects? It could simply give us the funds and the means to go into the communities to promote the language.

Mr. Marc Serré: I have 15 seconds left. I simply want to thank you for your efforts.

I would also like to thank Ms. Alepin, from the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal. Saint-Jean-Baptiste day is regular-

ly celebrated in Ontario. I'm proud to be a francophone and I too celebrate it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: I hope that one day you'll be able to help francophones outside Quebec, because your comments sometimes work against us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

The next speaker is in fact the second vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for a minute and a half.

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

The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal was founded in 1834 by the Patriotes, who were engaged in an armed conflict. There were patriots in Ontario too. The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste has always supported francophones outside Quebec. But since the implementation of the Official Languages Act, and since the Laurendeau-Dunton commission, it has never again been invited to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

What do you think about that, Ms. Alepin?

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: I'll begin by thanking you for having invited me today.

Several Saint-Jean-Baptiste societies have defended the French fact outside Quebec, and some still do.

Nonetheless, it's true that the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal has never been invited to appear in the past. But I must say that I'm pleased to be here today.

We feel that the only way to secure the future of the French language in Quebec is by means of independence, the control of one's own territory and laws; and ultimately, the control of one's own country.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: The struggle of the French language outside Quebec is an important one. The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, I wanted to say, truly supports you.

I would also like to congratulate you and Ms. Tamilio.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Alepin.

[English]

Next is Ms. McPherson for one minute and 30 seconds.

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's very fast, and I want to follow up on the questions around immigration outside of Québec.

You pointed out how critical francophone immigration is in Québec, but can you imagine—and clearly you can—how important it is for communities outside of Québec, how important it is for minority communities to welcome francophone immigrants in large numbers, enough to maintain the communities' vitality?

We had officials from Immigration Canada earlier, who failed to admit their failure to meet those immigration targets.

Madame Alepin, what do we need to do to change our current course on this?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Anne Alepin: I believe you've just answered your own question.

You are altogether correct: the French language absolutely has to be the priority. This means setting a priority on welcoming francophones. If that's not possible, other integration measures will have to be introduced.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: I just wanted to say *merci*, and I'm sorry I'm not asking in French. It's unfortunate, but in Alberta it was very difficult in the 1970s to get French immersion language availability for people who were in school. My parents were unable to do that. I'm glad my children are able to take French immersion.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Alepin and Ms. Tamilio, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for your energy and for the information you've given us. If there is information that you did not have the time to tell us about, you can send it to the clerk of the committee, who will then distribute it to all the committee members.

Ms. Tamilio, as the chair, I'd like to ask you for a small favour on a whim: if you see any Arseneaults, Bernards or Grondins at your community centre, say hello to them from me. They are probably members of my family, which lives in the village of Balmoral in New Brunswick.

Once again, thank you for your energy. It was truly refreshing to hear your testimony. I'm much obliged.

The meeting is adjourned.

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