



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 026

Wednesday, June 8, 2022

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Wednesday, June 8, 2022

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is in a hybrid format, and members are attending in person or via the Zoom application.

[*Translation*]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person should follow the directives of the Board of Internal Economy.

[*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 the order of reference of Monday, May 30, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

On behalf of the entire committee, I would now like to welcome today's witnesses, who represent the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA: Liane Roy, president, and Alain Dupuis, director.

Ms. Roy, this is your first in-person appearance before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Welcome to Parliament Hill.

As you know, we will allow you five minutes for your presentation. Then each of the members of the political parties that form this excellent committee will have a chance to ask you questions.

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

Ms. Liane Roy (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

We are very pleased to appear before you today to discuss Bill C-13. We have also come here with a sense of accomplishment.

For five years, we have committed ourselves to this grand effort to provide Canada with a strong, modern and respected Official Languages Act.

We are now on the threshold of a historic change for Canada's linguistic duality. I can't help but think of all the people, here in Parliament and in our communities, who have helped to advance this major project.

You have received FCFA's brief outlining the final amendments that we consider important to ensure that the modernized act actually changes the situation in the way we all hope. In the few minutes allotted me, I would like to focus mainly on the underlying reasons for those amendments.

The purpose of the first amendment is to clarify the role of the Treasury Board as the central agency charged with coordinating implementation of the Official Languages Act as a whole. Under our proposed amendment, Canadian Heritage would be stripped of its coordinating role, which clashes with that of the Treasury Board, while retaining its policy role and authority to design and administer programs. We would also eliminate the provision enabling the Treasury Board to delegate its coordination responsibilities to other federal institutions. This would preclude future governments from deciding that every institution is individually in a better position to manage the application of the act internally, a situation that would result in the lack of consistency and central coordination that we currently condemn.

The second amendment would provide for strong language clauses to be included in the agreements under which funding is transferred to the provinces and territories. As you are aware, failure to include such clauses has frequently deprived francophones of services in their language. It is the reason why British Columbia francophones have been fighting their employment assistance services case in the courts for more than a decade. The purpose of our amendment is to put an end to this problem, specifically by authorizing the federal government to deal directly with our communities if a province or territory resists the idea of language clauses.

The third amendment would clarify the objective of the francophone immigration policy the federal government will have to adopt. That objective must be to restore the demographic weight of our communities clearly and unambiguously. This is important because immigration is already by far the main, if not the only, source of demographic growth in our communities.

Fourth, since the concept of "positive measures" included in part VII of the act has been challenged in the courts, it should be clarified once and for all so that federal institutions are more aware of what they are required to do. The wording of the bill should refer to "necessary measures" instead of measures that federal institutions consider appropriate.

In addition, since Bill C-11, the purpose of which is to modernize the Broadcasting Act, includes highly detailed provisions on consultations, the FCFA requests that those provisions also be included in Bill C-13.

The fifth amendment concerns the scope of the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages. We applaud the fact that Bill C-13 grants the Commissioner, for the first time, the power to make orders and impose penalties. However, one wonders why that power is limited to certain parts of the act. The Commissioner should at least be able to make orders respecting federal institutions' obligations under part VII.

Lastly, the FCFA is very pleased that Bill C-13 acknowledges that French is not on an equal footing with English and that it must be protected and promoted across the country, including in Quebec. However, the FCFA recommends that the definition of the term "francophone minorities" be revised to ensure it is clearly interpreted when applied to francophone communities outside Quebec.

Members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, this may be the last time the FCFA appears before you to discuss the modernization of the Official Languages Act. Whatever else may happen, let us hope this process can be completed in the next few weeks. If we are successful, let it go down in history that we dreamed big dreams for the French language, for linguistic duality and for Canada. Our children and grandchildren will thank us for it.

• (1635)

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

To begin the first round of questions, I give the floor to the first vice-chair of the committee.

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

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis, thank you for being here.

Right off the bat, I want to assure the FCFA of the Conservative Party of Canada's cooperation and attention, which I feel I've clearly demonstrated throughout the invaluable meetings we've had leading up to your appearance here today.

My first question is for you, Ms. Roy.

At the end of your remarks, you said you would like the Official Languages Act modernization project to be "completed in the next few weeks". I'd like to know what that means for you.

Ms. Liane Roy: It's very important for us that the work be done quickly but well. Every week's delay in the process turns out to be very costly for the various communities. As you know, the new Action Plan for Official Languages is being prepared. The longer the

bill's adoption is delayed, the greater the impact on financial issues concerning our communities will be.

• (1640)

Mr. Joël Godin: You say that, if we don't pass the Official Languages Act modernization bill quickly, you'll become victims under the next Action Plan for Official Languages. I want to reassure you that the government has just begun consultations. I don't think the one prevents the other. I also don't think the FCFA will be hurt in the process.

On March 23, a witness appearing before the committee said that the bill "clearly outlines the Treasury Board's central agency role". Do you think Bill C-13 adequately responds to what that witness said?

Ms. Liane Roy: No. We're asking that it go a bit further with regard to the Treasury Board. We'd like it not to apply solely to what's included in Bill C-13, and that it extend to the act as a whole. It's important for us that a central agency implement the act as a whole, coordinate the act as a whole and ensure accountability for the act as a whole.

Accountability is a very important aspect. We have to have a holistic overview, a general overview, of everything that's done regarding official languages across the entire machinery of government, and, in our view and that of our lawyers, the Treasury Board is capable of doing that.

Mr. Joël Godin: Ms. Roy, I completely agree with what you say. I think the Treasury Board must be in charge of applying the act as a whole. It's the only one of the various departments named in the act that can both demand accountability and be accountable.

Do you know who said those words? It was the Minister of Official Languages. She was appearing before the committee on another matter, but she also discussed Bill C-13.

You said we had to proceed quickly, and I completely agree with you. However, we have to do things right because we're drafting a bill for the next 50 years. You say you have a sense of accomplishment because you've been working on the modernization bill for five years. The government has been working on it for five years too, but nonchalantly at times. You mustn't blame us for delaying the process. Our objective is that the act guarantee that Canada is a bilingual country for the next 50 years.

I would ask you please to stop pressing us to work harder. We have to do things right, but it's mathematically impossible to do that in the three remaining meetings. We have to be realistic. We want to do things right. I think we should target late 2022 instead. I think we can make ourselves available for that. Once again, for example, today we're extending the committee meeting by half an hour as a result of some voting-related parliamentary restrictions.

I'd like to know if the FCFA can be open and understand that we're taking the time to do things right. The FCFA represents a segment of the stakeholders concerned by Bill C-13, but other groups and sectors are affected as well. Part II of the Official Languages Act concerns businesses.

Ms. Roy, what is the FCFA's position in light of the discussion we just had?

Ms. Liane Roy: As you know, we've been working on this for five years, even more. We began thinking about it in 2009. So it's been a very long time.

Many of you have witnessed the various efforts we've made: the model bill the FCFA presented in 2019, the involvement of our committees in Ms. Joly's consultations, our participation, as you know, in the studies conducted by the official languages committees of the House of Commons and the Senate, our in-depth analysis of Ms. Joly's official languages reform document in February 2021, our actions concerning Bill C-32, which was introduced in the last Parliament, and so on.

There's nothing surprising about our position. Our demands haven't changed; we believe we've said what we had to say. Now it's up to you to do the work.

Mr. Joël Godin: Since you're saying it's now up to us to do the work, I'm going to ask you to trust us. We're going to do a thorough job and occasionally draw on your organization's resources, since you are invaluable partners.

However, I want to tell you that we'll be working with other groups. With regard to language clauses, we will consult the provincial and territorial governments to determine how those clauses can be applied in a manner consistent with the areas of jurisdiction.

We now have a bill, and we're working on it. I don't think there's any chance of another election in the next few months.

• (1645)

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

Ms. Kayabaga, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank the witnesses. It's a pleasure to have them here again.

I'm going to continue on the same subject my colleague addressed.

I know you've taken part in many consultations with the minister, and you initially made many recommendations. We've now reached the point where your recommendations are really very relevant. You mentioned in your opening statement how important it was to move forward. It has to be clearly said: we've been conducting consultations for a long time. We've been waiting for years for a bill like Bill C-13 to be passed.

Can you tell us today how important it is for the bill to be passed quickly?

And do you know there's a review system that applies to every statute implemented within government?

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you very much for that question.

As you know, the FCFA has 21 member organizations. We've submitted many proposals to the committee and government over the past five years. As I said earlier, we drafted the model bill, which included more than 100 proposals for modernizing the Official Languages Act. We've also conducted a number of exercises to establish priorities with our members over the past five years. That's what led to the six amendment requests that we submitted to you.

What's important for us in all this work is that our requests be foundational and that the effect they have cut across the entire federal government by improving the status of French in all files. We would like all of these requests to be included in the bill because we feel they are all priorities. The process must be conducted properly, but quickly. We're trying to avoid a whole host of problems that may arise if the process takes too long. Earlier I mentioned the next Action Plan for Official Languages, but there are many other conditions. Perhaps my colleague Mr. Dupuis would like to provide some clarification on that.

Mr. Alain Dupuis (Director General, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): For example, the policy on francophone immigration promised in Bill C-13 is essential. As the demographic weight of our communities has been in free fall for decades, we need a strong and clear francophone immigration policy so we can establish new targets and, above all, implement new immigration programs that meet the specific needs of francophone and Acadian communities. That's a very specific example.

Our communities have major labour shortages in education, early childhood and health. All the public services of all the levels of government are short of bilingual personnel.

In addition, our country has major French-language issues that must be resolved. In the meantime, we need a bill to be passed so the necessary policies can be put forward.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I'd like to go back to the same question: what will be the impact on funding for francophone communities if this bill isn't passed within a reasonable time frame?

Ms. Liane Roy: We could miss the 2023 budget cycle. We brought up the action plan earlier because the next action plan will run from 2023 to 2028. The budget cycle is very important. If delays occur in passing the bill, the act could be out of sync with the action plan, which is the essential official languages tool.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: As you can understand, we must pass this bill as soon as possible to avoid any negative impact on francophone minority communities, which have a range of needs.

The government recently began consultations on the next Action Plan for Official Languages. If, as a result of procedural problems caused by the opposition parties, Bill C-13 isn't passed before the next action plan is introduced, what further impact will that have on francophone communities across Canada, but especially outside Quebec, which are currently in the minority.

• (1650)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I hear the messages of the political parties. However, what's important to know is that the communities are ready, and they have clear ideas that we want to put forward. We expect the committee to do its job. I think it's truly possible to make transpartisan gains on official languages. We hope that members of Parliament will cooperate and pass the bill. I would very much like us to be able to examine the content of the amendments we propose. We want to work with everyone, and we want to spread these ideas with the help of all the political parties around this table.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Earlier we discussed the possibility of continuing consultations with other organizations than the FCFA. What other communities can you suggest we consult so we can move forward within a reasonable time frame?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Then I thank you once again for appearing before the committee.

The Chair: You have time to answer the question, Ms. Roy.

Ms. Liane Roy: We've conducted exhaustive consultations thus far in order to present our priorities to you. So I think we're done with consultations.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next speaker will be the second vice-chair of the committee, Mario Beaulieu.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Good afternoon. It's pleasure to see you.

As you know, we support all your requests concerning the francophone and Acadian communities. Quebec has its own requests. Perhaps you've heard the demands the Quebec government recently submitted to us.

The federal government has committed to extending some of the provisions of Bill C-13 to include regions outside Quebec that have a strong francophone presence, particularly as regards federally regulated businesses. Have you had any discussions with the government on that issue?

Can you also tell us how regions with a strong francophone presence are defined?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We took part in the consultations of the expert panel that Ms. Joly organized. Under the model we proposed, citizens in all regions of Canada where there are francophone communities would be able to obtain services in their language from federally regulated businesses and would also be able to work in their language in those businesses.

It's important for us that eastern Ontario and northern New Brunswick not be the only areas designated as regions with a strong

francophone presence. People must be able to access services in their language where there are significant numbers of francophones. This would be somewhat along the lines of the federal government's designated bilingual offices. In regions where offices are designated bilingual, the same standards would have to apply to federally regulated businesses.

This isn't an exclusively territorial model that applies to two regions with a strong francophone presence. It's a model under which, for example, CIBC would have a designated branch in Vancouver offering French-language services where employees could work in their language. Under this model, which hasn't yet been defined, there's a way to ensure that all francophone communities benefit.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a more general question.

As I said earlier, the Bloc Québécois supports the vast majority of your requests. From what I can see, that's also the case of the other opposition parties.

For example, we support the idea of extending the Treasury Board's control to all parts of the act. That's not what we currently see in Bill C-13.

Do you think we'll achieve those gains? That should be the case if all the opposition parties vote for these proposals and pass the bill. Do you think you have a good chance of realizing those gains?

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes, I'm hopeful we can for all the reasons you just cited.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're also calling for the immigration targets to be raised. We're also asking that they be raised for Quebec. You've seen what happens to students coming from francophone Africa. Large numbers of applications are rejected, those of students wishing to study at francophone universities in Quebec and those of applicants wanting to study in French outside Quebec. Even the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration claims there was discrimination, and it's hard to come up with a different explanation.

Now, even if we managed to raise the targets, it has to be said that they've never been met in the past 25 years. So what do we do to set targets that help to restore our demographic weight and to ensure they're met?

• (1655)

Ms. Liane Roy: As we recommend, we have to have a holistic francophone immigration policy and to look at everything that can be done in this area.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Do you agree that there should also be mandatory and binding targets, that is to say that the department should be required to meet those targets?

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes, you need targets.

We recently conducted a study to propose targets that would help restore and increase the demographic weight of francophones. Those targets were established based on a demographic study. So they're based on a scientific approach. Since that's Mr. Dupuis' area of expertise, I'll let him give you those details.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: On page 12 of the brief we distributed to you, we propose much clearer wording for the immigration policy.

Under Bill C-13, the government would commit to "maintaining or increasing the demographic weight" of francophones. Instead, we think that the purpose of the policy should be to restore and increase their demographic weight. Furthermore, the francophone immigration policy should not be "one of the factors that contribute" to achieving that target; rather it's the policy that establishes the objective of re-establishing the demographic weight of francophones. The word re-establish has a restorative connotation. The bill should, first, take into account the loss of demographic weight that our communities have experienced in the past 20 years and, second, increase that weight. This means that we will need much higher targets. We currently have a target of 4.4% of francophone immigration outside Quebec, whereas we've never reached more than 2%. That means we must quickly increase—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We really need more binding targets. As we've seen, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration plainly contravenes the Official Languages Act in Quebec. I protested so a lawyer could simply to have the right to plead in French before the immigration tribunal. There's a lot of work to be done.

It appears my time is up. We'll discuss this again later.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. I know that six minutes goes by quickly. Everyone has good questions, and the answers are interesting.

The next speaker will be Niki Ashton, who is joining us live from Manitoba, in the west.

You have the floor for six minutes, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank the representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, for the clear message it has sent, not for itself, but for our country's francophone communities, large and small, which, like the one in my home, are among the most marginalized.

Now I'd like to make a few comments because I'm quite troubled by some comments I've heard from the Liberals during this meeting and in recent days.

The amendments that the FCFA has sought in the past few months clearly represent the changes requested by francophone communities on the ground and their vision. That's the message I hear from the child care centre here at home; it's the one I hear from the francophone community of Saint-Boniface, and it's the one I hear from the francophones I'm in touch with across Canada. We take the amendments the FCFA is proposing seriously so we can represent francophones and protect their language rights in

Canada. We must respect the FCFA not only by listening to it, but also by considering the amendments it has put forward.

I'm honestly surprised to hear the government claim it's doing everything within its power to present a modernized act, since, to date, it has shown no support for the FCFA's amendments. The amendments supported by the francophone communities, particularly those outside Quebec, must obviously be taken seriously. They are amendments that will change things for our communities. They will enable some to develop and others to survive. The FCFA's message must be taken seriously.

Parents and communities here at home have fought for my generation to have a chance to learn and live in French in our country. I believe that successive federal governments, including Liberal governments, have lost that vision. I'm nearly 40 years old, and, as a result of the labour shortage and the lack of investment and support for programs, I don't even have a chance to enrol my children at a francophone child care centre in a community that theoretically should afford that opportunity.

We have to acknowledge that there has been a decline in French in Canada and in the political will of the federal government, which doesn't seem to want to listen to francophones' suggestions for improvements to the act. I'm proud to stand up for francophones here at home and across the country who say that Bill C-13 is important but that it must be improved and who propose specific solutions for that purpose.

However, I'm quite troubled to hear government comments to the effect that we don't have the time to make these essential amendments to the bill. I consider this important, and I believe we've heard members of this committee from other parties say that we must respect the FCFA and adopt its amendments if we want to change the situation during this historic period for our country.

I don't have much time left, but I would like to ask a question about language clauses because that's very important to me. We've often discussed early childhood and education. How important is it to include a provision among the language clauses of this bill to protect French-language services across the country?

• (1700)

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you for your question.

We consider language clauses very important. They are one of the six priorities we've presented to you. First and foremost, they enable the federal government to agree with the provinces and territories on ways to support their linguistic minorities. They also provide a way for the federal government to invest directly in francophone and Acadian communities where there's no agreement. The direct investment that we propose is also consistent with the federal government's constitutional spending power, including in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

As you said, our communities expect governments to agree to support the francophonie, but, if that's impossible, they should absolutely have access to public services in their language. As you know, we're too often forgotten as a result of federal, provincial and territorial dynamics. The importance of supporting francophone minorities is often forgotten or overlooked.

I was an assistant deputy minister in the New Brunswick government a long time ago, in the 1990s. That's more than 30 years ago. We were already calling for language clauses to facilitate our work as provincial public servants. For the governments...

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

You'll be able to continue your remarks later. I allowed you a little more time because your speech was really interesting.

We will now begin the second round.

Mr. Lehoux, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupree.

I'm pleased to hear you say you're a former deputy minister. Does this bill resolve the issue of unilingualism among senior public servants?

I think the commissioner discussed this in the report he released yesterday. He even cited some fairly recent examples. What's your reaction to that? Are you comfortable with the idea of setting bilingualism requirements to improve bilingualism in the public service?

• (1705)

Ms. Liane Roy: That's very important for us. Anything that promotes bilingualism and the French language in Canada is important for us. We will support all measures that do so. Of course, our priorities focus less on that aspect, since it's important for us to have foundational and systemic measures everywhere.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Would you agree to consider such an amendment?

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes, we would.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you.

Some organizations would like to see an amendment to facilitate access, at very modest cost, to federal buildings that become available. Would you be in favour of such an amendment drafted so it's well framed and entrenched in the act?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes, that's a long-standing request of the school boards, particularly francophone school boards, which would like to have access to surplus real property. Sometimes it's very hard to find buildings and to access them. If that were included in the act, it would be an obligation...

Mr. Richard Lehoux: We know that the federal government sometimes disposes of certain buildings. So you would agree to that measure being included in the act.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Immigration was discussed earlier. We talked about adopting more binding amendments than what's sug-

gested. There are indeed clauses in the bill, but we could further reinforce that aspect, which is very important in supporting the francophonie across Canada.

Ms. Liane Roy: What's important for immigration is that it help to restore and increase the demographic weight of francophones. If we implement a policy on francophone immigration, it must be done to restore and increase the demographic weight of the francophone community.

Mr. Dupuis has all the details and statistics on that issue. I'll let him continue.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: The wording of what we're proposing is on page 12 of the brief we distributed. It's clarified there.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Going back to the order-making powers of the commissioner, we know that a certain importance is attached to the commissioner in this bill. What arguments do you think would help to give the commissioner more powers?

He would have certain powers under the bill. Could we go further? What tack would you take?

Ms. Liane Roy: We also want those powers to extend to part VII of the act. Perhaps we can show you clearly what's on page 20 brief.

Do you want to discuss that, Mr. Dupuis?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: On page 20, we propose to expand the commissioner's order-making power by granting him a new power under Bill C-13. We want to extend that power beyond part IV of the act, which concerns services, and part V, which concerns rights respecting language of work, among other things.

We would also like this order-making power to be expanded to part VII to enable him to determine whether a federal institution has failed to take necessary positive measures or to consult the communities, or whether a department has failed to consider the negative impacts of a decision on official language minority communities. The commissioner could then order that institution to redo the work, conduct further consultations and reconsider positive measures.

This would have a major impact on francophone communities. With this power, certain court cases could be avoided. Some have gone as far as the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I'd like to discuss one final point pertaining to the role of the Treasury Board or the Department of Canadian Heritage regarding revision of the act.

Are you in favour of the idea that this would be the role of the Treasury Board, not Canadian Heritage?

The Chair: Please answer briefly.

Ms. Liane Roy: I'll be brief, Mr. Chair.

As I said in my opening statement, it's important for us that a central agency be responsible for the entire act and ensure coordination and implementation of the act as well as accountability. That's why we think the Treasury Board is in the best position to do that work.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roy and Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

I promise I won't introduce any motions today.

I just want to say I understand my NDP colleague's comments. However, if I had been in her position at the last meeting, I would've presented the amendments she wanted to make in her motion. However, she didn't do that.

Once again today, I can say I've received no counteroffers on the length of the committee's study on Bill C-13. This is important for me because it's a form of obstruction of Parliament to introduce 100 amendments or summon a large number of witnesses without the committee having an opportunity to consider the crux of the matter. I'm still waiting for a counteroffer from the opposition parties respecting the time we'll take to study this bill. This is important, and stakeholders want it.

Now getting down to brass tacks.

Ms. Roy, you established the central agency principle. I remember meeting your predecessors, when we discussed the Dion plan and the Privy Council Office.

Why should the Treasury Board be the central agency responsible for implementing the Official Languages Act rather than the Privy Council Office?

• (1710)

Ms. Liane Roy: We and our lawyers have examined all the functions of each of those central agencies. On pages 3 to 7 of our brief, we explain why we think this should be the role of the Treasury Board. We think it's very important to have this central agency, which already has this mandate for other provisions. That's why we think the Treasury Board should do it. It's important that the role be performed by an agency that can compel certain things and go even further.

The Department of Canadian Heritage currently plays this role. We know that Bill C-13 employs the same language as the old act, words like “encourage” and “promote”. We think that doesn't go far enough.

We need an agency that will approach official languages and all federal institutions in a comprehensive manner, one that will make implementation, coordination and accountability possible.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We know that “promoting” and “encouraging” haven't worked in the past. While the Treasury Board can intervene, it has frequently failed to do so on certain principles of the act. Which is why the new bill should provide that the agency “shall intervene”.

What do you think we can do to correct the wording of the act? You've proposed a number of amendments. You initially proposed 25 of them, but cut that number down to 6.

How did you go about cutting 25 amendments down to 6?

Ms. Liane Roy: Following all the consultations we've conducted of our members over the last five years...

Mr. Francis Drouin: Pardon me for interrupting. Whom did you consult so you could cut 25 amendments down to 6?

To put the question more clearly, did you consult my colleague Mr. Samson or my colleague the former Minister of Francophone Affairs for Ontario, for example?

Whom have you consulted in the past few months, since Bill C-32 became Bill C-13?

Ms. Liane Roy: First, we consulted all the parties as well as our members; we referred to the model bill we had proposed and to all the studies we had conducted in the context of the meetings of the standing committees on official languages of the House of Commons and the Senate. However, since the Bill C-32 case in particular, we've exhaustively consulted all the parties, members and communities. We've also consulted people who aren't members of the FCFA but who work in the official languages field. So we've consulted all...

Mr. Francis Drouin: Pardon me for interrupting. I understand the principle of your consultations.

We propose to invite all the provincial premiers to testify on the matter of language clauses. Do you expect them to accept our language clauses?

Would you expect Blaine Higgs to agree to the language clause in an agreement on early childhood, for example?

The Chair: Please be brief, Ms. Roy.

Ms. Liane Roy: As we said, I think we can try. We've made some proposals in our brief, and we've also proposed alternatives. For example, if language clauses aren't accepted, we can propose another solution whereby the federal government could address the communities directly on matters of concern to them.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

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

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

As you know, Quebec contributes a great deal to the vitality of the francophone and Acadian communities—teachers, markets for francophone artists outside Quebec and so on—and I think that's a good thing.

If French continues to decline quickly in Quebec, as it's doing—Statistics Canada forecasts that the number of mother-tongue francophones will fall to 73.6% of the population within 15 years—do you think that will weaken the Canadian and North American francophonie as a whole?

Ms. Liane Roy: It's obviously important for the whole country to have a strong French presence in Quebec. We want the French language to be a real presence in our communities and for that presence to generate all types of opportunities for exchanges, closer relations and so on.

Consequently, it's important to maintain a demographic weight across Canada and to ensure that the French language...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You understand that the current version of Bill C-13 will require a lot of improvements in order to meet your targets. However, it's even further from meeting Quebec's targets and demands that French be the common language and the language of integration for newcomers.

Have you sensed that in the Quebec government's demands?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We speak on behalf of francophone communities outside Quebec, but certainly our destiny is intimately bound up with the future of French in North America. Consequently, additional steps must be taken to support French in Quebec as well.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Quebec's objective is actually to secure the future of French in Quebec, but also to support francophone and Acadian communities.

We discussed immigration earlier. According to the observations of researchers like Charles Castonguay, the assimilation rate of newcomers who settle outside Quebec is just as high as that of francophones as a whole...

The Chair: Please be brief, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: How could we counteract that situation?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I think that the more the demographic weight of francophones declines, the faster the assimilation will be. It seems obvious to us that newcomers who settle here, with their skills and their vision of this global francophonie, can only strengthen and vitalize the broader francophone community and help us moderate assimilation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dupuis. I apologize for interrupting. Two and a half minutes go by quickly.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In its January judgment in the appeal involving the Commissioner of Official Languages, the B.C. federation and Employment and Social Development Canada, the Federal Court of Appeal clearly held that the insertion of linguistic clauses resulted from the exercise of the federal government's spending power. In fact, the absence of a binding linguistic clause in the agreement respecting the transfer of employment assistance services had harmed the francophone community of British Columbia.

In your amendments, you propose binding language clauses. Do you therefore consider those clauses constitutional, particularly in light of the judgment of the Court of Appeal?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes.

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes. Our goal isn't to create publications that aren't constitutional. We want the federal government, when negotiating agreements to transfer funding to the provinces and territories, to be required to consider the challenges facing francophone minorities.

We understand why the government can't require the provinces and territories to accept a language clause if they're opposed to it, but, as you know, the federal government has likely forgotten us and doesn't include us in most negotiations. Our intention is therefore at least to compel the government to act, even if there's no guaranteed result. Our proposal is definitely constitutional.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'd like you to take my remaining time to discuss how important it is to learn about what happened in British Columbia so it doesn't happen again.

• (1720)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Ms. Liane Roy: All right.

Do you want to answer, Mr. Dupuis?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes, on page 9, we define what a language clause should include, in particular a requirement that the province consult francophone minorities and stakeholders to allow their priorities to be taken into account and to provide funding to meet their needs, which is very important. Sometimes they're consulted, but no provision is made for funding specifically to meet their needs. Furthermore, responsibilities should be enumerated for accountability purposes. We often don't know where the money transferred to the provinces goes. Lastly, there must be a statement of the federal government's right to intervene where the clause is not complied with.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis.

I want to draw on your vast experience, Ms. Roy. I'm intrigued by some of the points you made in your statement. You raised a few other problems, as well as the 2023 budget cycle, since that may affect the next budget.

Have you requested anything during this cycle that you're sure you want to see in the next budget?

Ms. Liane Roy: No.

Mr. Gourde, when I referred to the 2023 funding cycle, I was talking about the Action Plan for Official Languages because it's a five-year plan and consultations for the next action plan, for 2023-2028, are under way. That's why I said that. If we want major investments to be made in the francophone immigration policy, for example, we must ensure that the bill harmonizes with the action plan. That's why I mentioned the 2023 budget cycle.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You submitted that to the Department of Finance.

Ms. Liane Roy: No, we submitted nothing. I'm talking about the consultation process concerning the Action Plan for Official Languages, which is conducted by the Minister of Official Languages. That process is ongoing and will wind up in the fall so those funding requests can be entered in the 2023 budget cycle.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Going back to Mr. Drouin's question about the amendments, why have you prioritized 6 of your 25 amendments? Did you think the others weren't as good? Did you think they were less likely to be accepted?

Ms. Liane Roy: No, we wanted our amendments to be foundational and systemic and to cut across the federal government. That's why we chose those six amendments. We selected amendments that would enable real change so we wouldn't wind up in the same situations we've found ourselves in since the present act was passed. That's why we studied the matter at great length, as you know. Together with our lawyers and our members, we tried, taking these basic principles into account, to come up with amendments that would lead to structural and systemic changes in the machinery of government.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The success of this reform, of Bill C-13, will doubtless require a great deal of political will.

Did you examine the mandate letters that the Privy Council or the Prime Minister's Office sent to the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Official Languages for the new parliament? Is it possible they persuaded you to focus on certain clauses?

Ms. Liane Roy: The mandate letters were one of many factors we considered in the research we conducted so we could propose wording that conveyed what we expected from the bill.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mandate letters often reveal a government's political will to solve a problem.

Did you sense that political will?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes, I think they reveal a political will.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What I want to know is whether you looked at the mandate letters.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes, absolutely.

All our amendment requests are based on well-established principles in the bill but are intended to provide clarification in order to go further.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Is it possible the mandate letters influenced your decision to cut the number of amendments from 25 to 6?

• (1725)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I'd like to correct an assumption here. We never said there were 25 amendments either. A few years ago, we drafted a model bill in which we conducted a complete analysis of the Official Languages Act. Many of these requests were included in either Bill C-32 or Bill C-13, and now the six remaining amendments represent what's still to be done to produce the best possible bill for francophone and Acadian communities.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Going back to...

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you. My question will be too long and won't leave enough time for an answer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our meetings normally adjourn at 5:30 p.m., but there's general agreement that we can continue until 6:00 p.m., since all committee staff, technicians, the clerk, analysts and members are also available until 6:00 p.m.

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

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our guests for coming.

I'd like to hear your opinion on certain provisions of the new bill.

Do you believe that the consultation procedures set out in the new subsections 41(8) and 41(9) should be clarified?

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes, they should be clarified. Our proposal on that is that the wording of Bill C-11 should be added to Bill C-13, as I said in my opening remarks about the Broadcasting Act. We did that because all the political parties had already approved it.

As you know, we want to move forward on this quickly, and it had already been agreed to by all the parties. That's why we are proposing that what Bill C-11 says about everything pertaining to consultations should be reproduced in Bill C-13.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay. So you are not proposing any other changes with respect to consultations.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: No. For the time being, these are the consultations referred to in part VII of the Official Languages Act. We incorporated all of the text describing what a consultation by a federal institution should look like.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'd like your opinion on another matter.

Will Bill C-13 provide enough measures to ensure that federal public servants will be able to work in the language of their choice?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Currently, I don't believe there are enough measures in Bill C-13 to guarantee the exercise of this right. We would therefore be in favour of any measures that would enable public servants to work in French within the federal public service.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Would you also be in favour of any measures that would enable them to work in English within the federal public service in Quebec?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I think it's up to Quebeckers and Quebec stakeholders to address that issue. It doesn't apply to us.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I understand that, but I was just asking for your opinion.

Ms. Liane Roy: At the FCFA, the values we support are those of the various minorities around the table. It's not up to us to comment upon what is appropriate or inappropriate for another minority. We have been advocating the “by and for”, as you know, for a number of years now. It's up to them to decide how they see it.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: How will Bill C-13 help to modernize part V of the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We haven't studied part V of the act very much, and that's why we haven't proposed any amendments for the time being.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: So you like the wording of part V of the act as it is?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: For now, yes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: All right.

Should Bill C-13 extend the right to take legal action to all parts of the Official Languages Act?

• (1730)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We believe that the language rights of official language minority communities should be defended and that the minorities ought not to be excluded from access to a legal remedy if they feel that their language rights have not been complied with.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Let me re-state my question. Should Bill C-13 extend the right to a legal remedy to each part of the act?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We do not unfortunately have an answer to that question, but we could provide the committee with a complementary document dealing with this issue.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I have a final question for you. Should the new powers enabling the Commissioner of Official Languages to issue orders be extended to other parts of the act?

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes. We strongly advocate, suggest and recommend that they also be extended to part VII of the act.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay.

What new powers would you like to see in the act?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: In fact, it would be the extension of an existing power. The power to issue orders should apply to part VII of the act. At the moment, it applies only to parts IV and V of the act.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio. You'll have an opportunity to ask further questions later.

We'll continue now with the next speaker.

Mr. G n reux, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages in 2009 when we began to think about amending the act. Since then, public opinion has changed considerably, including at the F d ration des communaut s francophones et acadienne. And then, it was as if we were in a funnel. A new bill was introduced and you came up with your own bill. Now, we have a bill to which you are proposing six amendments, including one that's very important, about the Treasury Board. The government will inevitably have to make choices when the time comes to approve and adopt the final wording of the act. Of the six major amendments you are proposing—and that I definitely agree with—which do you think ought to be prioritized?

In a way, it's like a negotiation. I believe we have to be frank and avoid putting our heads in the sand. Will the six amendments be adopted? In the best of all possible worlds, they might. The first amendment being suggested, about giving a better explanation of the Treasury Board's role, represents a fundamental change in how official languages would be dealt with in the government of Canada. I personally want that too. But will the government agree to do so given that it did not do it in its bill? Is the first of the six amendments you are proposing the top priority?

It's a complex question. Be careful about what you answer, because there are lots of people listening to us.

Ms. Liane Roy: Oh, oh!

Mr. G n reux, as I mentioned earlier, we conducted an in-depth study to ensure that everything we would be asking for would be foundational and have repercussions across the federal government. We have a substantial piece of work that contains several recommendations, on the basis of which we ended up with the six amendments that are a priority for us. We looked at things from every angle in order to come up with these six priority amendments.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Moreover, the work that you've accomplished over all these years to reach these conclusions is phenomenal. The time will come for the government to draft the definitive version of the bill, and it will likely or even inevitably be adopted in this definitive version, because there is currently an agreement between the NDP and the Liberals. So I'll ask you once again: if the bill did not include the six amendments that you are proposing, would it be satisfactory to you?

Ms. Liane Roy: As I mentioned, what we're really trying to do is ensure that what we're asking for takes these fundamental changes into consideration so that they can improve the status of French in all areas.

But if you feel that one of our requests is less important than the others, we would appreciate it if you could inform us of your point of view.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: We're going to have to negotiate.

Ms. Liane Roy: If so, we will be able to explain why we feel it's essential.

I don't know if that's possible in a committee like this one, but that's what I would tell you, because for us, all six amendments are a priority.

• (1735)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: After all these consultations and all the work that you've done, and after all the work that the government, the opposition and the Standing Committee on Official Languages have done—the committee has carried out studies over the years—the government has come up with a proposal. It did not include the six amendments you have put forward. That gets me thinking, and I'm wondering whether the government really wants to assign this government-wide responsibility to the Treasury Board. And yet, it's what you are asking for, and I agree with your proposal.

We experienced this in the past. We've been talking about it since 2009. I think one of the realities we're currently facing with the federal government is that the machinery of government itself is one of the worst students in the class on providing service to Canadian francophones. All kinds of mistakes are made in all kinds of areas for all kinds of reasons. Not only that, but the act is not necessarily enforced.

I personally agree with giving powers to the Commissioner. What worries me is that the government itself would never have to fulfil its own obligations to the French language. In many instances, it disregards it. Even today, ministers submit reports only in English. We've been talking about this for 25 years. The government's failings are never penalized by the Commissioner, because he can't penalize the government. I haven't spoken to my colleagues about this, but I'm prepared to tell you that we are in favour of these changes.

Other witnesses will be coming to testify in connection with the study we are currently conducting. The Liberals would like to get this done within 15 hours, but we think it's going to take a lot longer than that, without necessarily drawing things out needlessly. I think we had agreed it should be adopted by Christmas. That was our goal.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, thank you for your insightful comments. I even allowed you a little extra time.

The next speaker is Mr. Angelo Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to clear something up: we never said that we wanted to get it done in 15 hours. My dear colleague, we consistently asked you how many hours you would be needing, and we never got an answer. I would therefore appreciate it if you could refrain from putting words in our mouth. That's unacceptable, as you know very well.

Ms. Roy, my first question is for you.

In the debates on Bill C-13, the opposition parties directly quoted the FCFA more than a dozen times, and referred indirectly to your suggested amendments on several occasions.

Are the obstructive tactics and dilatory measures being used by the Conservative Party and the NDP in keeping with what you want to see in the bill?

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you for your question.

I'll repeat what I said earlier. For us, what's important is that the work be done quickly, but properly. It's important to conclude the debates on the amendments quickly because, as you know, the process of modernizing the Official Languages Act began in 2017. We have therefore had more than enough time to conduct our consultations, establish these six priorities and propose them to you.

For all kinds of financial and other reasons, it's important to us that things should move quickly.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I am very happy to hear that.

You've repeated it more than once, but you need to say it even more often here at the committee. For you, it's important for the work to be done as quickly as possible. That's exactly what we think. And yet, the opposition thinks that we want to get it over with as quickly as possible because our interests differ from theirs.

My next question, Ms. Roy, is the following. Even though the opposition parties are saying that they want to modernize the Official Languages Act, on several occasions they blocked attempts to move the study of Bill C-13 forward more quickly. On the other hand, the Senate has adopted a motion to begin a pre-study of Bill C-13.

Do you think that a pre-study of Bill C-13 would have been useful in allowing more representation for groups like the FCFA?

Ms. Liane Roy: Mr. Iacono, I believe I'm going to ask you a question, because there's been a great deal of discussion since we've been here. Could you tell us what you think about our six amendments?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm sorry, Ms. Roy, but we get to ask the questions, and it's up to you to answer them. Moreover, questions should be directed through the Chair.

We are here to undertake a study because we believe that it's important. We want all the communities and all the interested parties to tell us what they think so that we can make progress.

If you don't have an answer to that question, I'll ask the next one.

What scenario would you have preferred for the adoption of Bill C-13?

• (1740)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Our view is that Bill C-13 is a good bill, but that it requires the clarifications that we are requesting. These are the six basic amendments that would do more to protect French-language minority communities in Canada. We believe that it's essential for the six amendments to be included in the bill. We think that they will make the bill stronger.

We are recommending a central agency that has an overview of the act's implementation, and we have been requesting this for years. We are proposing francophone immigration to enable us to restore the demographic weight in our communities. We are proposing a commissioner who has the tools needed to require remedies. We want meaningful positive measures that will strengthen our communities. What we don't want is a telephone call from a federal institution telling us that they've consulted us, but that does nothing to change a department's programs or policies.

The communities are asking for all these things, and they have been appearing before this committee for a long time to argue their case.

I trust that our message will be heard and that Bill C-13 will go some way towards providing us with an act that has the teeth needed to protect French for future generations.

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

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Beaulieu now has the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. I'll speak quickly.

Getting back to the six proposals, you've been putting forward persistently for quite a while, it's noteworthy that the government has not included them in Bill C-13.

Why do you think the government will eventually agree to them?

Ms. Liane Roy: I think they might be getting more receptive to discussion of late. We will therefore continue to...

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I said earlier that the best approach is to succeed in having them adopted here, and we will work on getting that done.

I asked a question earlier about integrating immigrants. The more people there are who speak French, the more likely we are to integrate them and maintain the use of French.

For example, the Government of Quebec is requesting that the Governor in Council and federal institutions work to keep French the predominant language in Quebec. If there were a requirement to promote the predominance of French in federal institutions located in regions where there is a higher francophone density, would that not help to counteract the assimilation of francophones? The law is one thing, but French is often brushed aside. Do you think that this measure would have a positive impact on federal institutions in francophone regions outside Quebec?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We think it's important to persist in trying to strengthen French in the public service and federal institutions. That's why we did not propose a uniquely territorial model for the use of French in federally regulated businesses. We need French in federal businesses everywhere. That's also true for services. We fought hard for the standing order in part IV when people wanted to shut down bilingual offices. Fortunately, the government listened to us and imposed a moratorium on closing bilingual offices providing access to services in French. We don't think there should be any decline in French, but rather advancement from every standpoint.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: We are, for example, asking that senior officials in federally regulated private businesses should understand French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, it's over to you now for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by making a comment in response to all the questions I've heard. I find it rather worrisome that the government representative avoided asking for details about the amendments we were discussing today. Instead of attacking the opposition parties, I believe it would have been more useful to try and understand how the interests of francophone communities could be supported and how Bill C-13 could be improved.

• (1745)

I have another question about the language provisions. The minister had indicated that these provisions could be considered for inclusion in agreements with the provinces by viewing the matter through a language lens, a term borrowed from the idea of a gender lens, to consider the impact of decisions on groups seeking equity. The rationale for this suggestion came from the introduction of positive measures to promote the rights of francophones.

Do you feel that a commitment to use this kind of lens is enough to protect the rights of the communities and access to services in French?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Our view is that language provisions definitely have to be included in the act and they can't be optional. I believe that there is already an official languages lens approach mentioned in Treasury Board studies on all the new policies and programs.

Unfortunately, simply ticking a box to say that it did not have a negative impact is not the same thing as promising to meet the specific needs of the Canadian francophonie in a specific province or territory and how it is going to be done. What's needed is something more fundamental that is binding.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Could you say something to us about the historic opportunity this bill provides to effect fundamental changes like that?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton, but you've run out of time.

If you have anything else to add in response to the questions that you didn't have time to mention, you can always send it in writing to the clerk, who will pass it on to all members of the committee.

I'm going to reduce the amount of speaking time for the Conservatives and Liberals to four minutes each.

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

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to clarify something before continuing. We heard comments from the party on the other side of the table.

I would simply like to mention to you, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis, and everyone listening, that if we find ourselves having to take action urgently, it's because the bill that was tabled does not meet the needs.

I have a question for the Liberals.

Do you intend to approve the bill as is or are you going to table some amendments?

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you need to direct your questions to the Chair first, as you know.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're right, Mr. Chair.

So, Mr. Chair, could you ask the Liberal Party whether it intends to table any amendments?

The Chair: We are also fortunate to have the opportunity and the luxury of having excellent witnesses, and you can ask them questions if you wish.

Mr. Joël Godin: Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis, You spoke about immigration, and I think that aspect is highly important. You suggested targets to make up for lost ground. I fully agree with you. I would like to assure you that we agree on the six amendments that you have proposed. We are going to support you on that and will present them.

In connection with immigration, in the amendment that you proposed, you said the following in paragraph 44.1(2)(b): "a statement that the Government of Canada intends with the policy to ensure the restoration and growth of the demographic weight of French linguistic minority communities in Canada."

In my view, this lacks teeth. Wouldn't it be preferable to have more binding requirements obliging the government to take action in order to achieve outcomes?

Ms. Liane Roy: Of course, by asking for the Treasury Board to act as a central agency for all parts of the act, we are requesting accountability for the full implementation of the act.

We took it for granted that there would be accountability measures for everything that we were proposing. That being the case, we support anything that will help to achieve that objective.

Mr. Joël Godin: We agree.

Philosophically speaking, and in general, we believe that the bill has three objectives. It's intent is to promote and protect the French language, which is the more vulnerable of the two official languages. I would add that it is in decline.

What will the current bill do, on the day after it receives royal assent, to stop the decline of French here in Canada?

• (1750)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Several measures in the bill will get things moving. Is there something more we can do to stop the decline? Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Joël Godin: What suggestions do you have?

We are here to give the bill more teeth. That's our goal. What can you suggest to us that would, on the day the bill is adopted, stop the

decline of French? It is certainly something that needs to be addressed urgently.

I believe we have already discussed the idea that there should be an amendment to review the act every five years rather than every 10 years. Could you talk about that?

Ms. Liane Roy: The six amendments we are proposing would help stop the decline, or at least slow it down. If we build it back up and increase the demographic weight of francophones, it will certainly help stop this decline.

That's only one example, but what we are proposing is a combination of things. That's why we've been talking about pivotal systemic changes in our six recommendations.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

You had 15 seconds left.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll make use of them, Mr. Chair.

If you have any other suggestions about how to give this bill more teeth, we'd be more than receptive. Please send them to the chair.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I think the committee needs to think about one question: are we living in a country where it's possible, universally, to learn French?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

Mr. Drouin has the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague from the opposition party for asking certain questions.

We're going to propose amendments. Needless to say, we need to know when we are going to do the clause-by-clause study of the bill. The options suggested are 28 hours, 22 hours, and 15 hours. So my question to him is, how much time do we have to study Bill C-13? He should know when the government is going to table amendments.

I'm sure that we will be able to support some of the amendments proposed by the FCFA and that we'll be able to debate others. That means we need to know when we're going to debate these amendments. At the moment, we know don't know when we're going to do it.

I'll get back now to the heart of the matter.

I'd like to raise the issue of immigration. One of your amendments is to replace, in the preamble, "that immigration is one of the factors that contributes to maintaining or increasing" with "to ensuring the restoration and growth of" the demographic weight of those communities.

It seems to me, Ms. Roy and Mr. Dupuis, that you spoke about the importance of the Action Plan on Official Languages. But an act without funding is an act that fails. In your view, how important is it to have funding to support Bill C-13?

We've seen it in the past, and I've heard it from your predecessor. The Action Plan on Official Languages was frozen for several years. That was harmful. The question of immigration is a difficult one. I've heard teachers in New Brunswick say that their little kiosks are set up right beside the big Quebec kiosk. It's very hard for them to attract francophone immigrants. The act needs to change, but what can be done to attract more francophone immigrants?

For me, it's like talking about my child's survival. It's important to me.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: It's going to be absolutely essential to properly fund this policy, up to a few tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars, through separate programs that will meet the immigration needs of the communities, with the leverage and powers required for francophone communities to select whom they want. An economic program is needed to meet the labour needs of Canada's francophone communities. You also discussed resources for the communities to do promotional work abroad, and also to build capacity for processing visas abroad. At the moment, the office in Dakar is overwhelmed. It processes visas from 16 or 17 sub-Saharan African countries, most of which are francophone. We need to rethink the country's francophone immigration policy from A to Z. We need a policy, the resources, and the leverage to take action.

We have never done these three things, and that's why we have failed.

• (1755)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Exactly. The provinces use a point system for immigration, among other things.

If the federal government were to adopt the amendments that you are proposing with respect to francophone immigration policy, in Bill C-13, do you think it would meet its objectives? If not, can we allow those provinces interested in francophone immigrants more latitude? What's important, no matter who is responsible for immigration, is to have francophone immigrants come to Canada.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I think we need to develop a policy that has national targets, as well as quotas. If we give immigrant selection powers to the provinces and territories, then fixed criteria and quotas for francophones are needed so that all of our communities can grow.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues, for these excellent questions.

Thanks also to the representatives of the FCFA. Some members of this committee have worked alongside you for a long time. We've been able to observe all the progress you've made. That's five years of history and experience. I believe everyone around the table noticed it.

Official languages always generate heated debate. I'd like to thank you today for your excellent work. What happened here today is very important.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm going to be brief, Mr. Chair. I have sent in a motion that we should be able to discuss on Monday. I did not present it today. I wanted to have the time for us to debate it.

The Chair: That's fine. Thank you..

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>