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Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)):
Good morning. Welcome to this meeting.

[Translation]

Good morning, and a very warm welcome to you all.

Today, we will be continuing our study on bilingualism in the public service. As part of this important debate, we have the opportunity today to hear from representatives of the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for coming.

Mr. Emond, the association's president, will be making a ten-minute presentation. Obviously, it does not matter too much if you go over ten minutes. Mr. Emond, thank you for being here today. I am going to ask you to introduce your colleagues to us and then to move on to your presentation. Following that, we will have a question and answer period with you and your colleagues.

Mr. Robert Emond (President, Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, firstly, allow us to thank you for having given us the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of APEX, the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada. Let me take this opportunity to introduce you to my colleagues. I am accompanied today by Mr. Pierre de Blois, our executive director; Ms. Colette Nault, special advisor to the executives; and Mr. Paul Choquette, visiting executive.

Our mission is to promote excellence and professionalism in the public service, which comprises around 4,000 executives, approximately half of whom are association members.

APEX takes a keen interest in the matter of official languages, particularly since this aspect closely affects executives' work throughout their careers in the public service. The association also recognizes that the bilingualism of public service executives is a crucial factor in the delivery of services to Canadians in both official languages as well as in the creation of a productive and harmonious workplace in which public servants are respected and valued, and also encouraged to improve their language skills throughout their careers.

Our presentation today will consist of two parts. We would first like to express our general reaction to Mr. Mitchell's discussion

paper. We will then share with you a number of recommendations from APEX that build on Mr. Mitchell's vision.

Firstly, let us focus on APEX's general reaction to the discussion paper. The discussion paper is an excellent report on all aspects of the current situation. While the paper satisfactorily reflects APEX's official language concerns, it goes even further by offering a vision of what the situation should look like in 2010 with its description of the respective roles that the centre, as well as federal departments, agencies and employees, will have to play, without however prescribing the way to get there.

APEX endorses all the recommendations made in the report concerning employee accountability. We also endorse the four principles stated, as well as the specific measures identified to apply a credible, new approach to language training, including ongoing funding and institutional support.

We share Mr. Mitchell's view that "the temptation to regard language training as a problem rather than a critically important opportunity to build the public service of the future" constitutes a major risk and challenge for both the public service and the country itself.

In our view, given the departure of many public servants over the next few years, a window of opportunity is open to bring about genuine change, providing that the Mitchell recommendations are implemented in their entirety. We should not make the mistake of focusing on just some of the recommendations in isolation without considering the possible negative repercussions on the coherence of the overall system. For example, if we were only to implement the recommendation to overhaul the bilingualism standards, without taking into account the recommendations concerning culture, continuous learning and so on, we could end up with a public service that is even less bilingual and even less conducive to the use of French in the workplace.

[English]

APEX feels that top management of the public service, namely the deputy ministers and the associate deputy ministers—and we would include heads of agencies—need to set the example by being functionally bilingual. They should also be held responsible for setting the tone in the workplace. We believe that without a truly bilingual workplace, even a major investment in training will prove to be ineffective in the long term.

We also believe it is necessary to review the language profile of assistant deputy ministers in unilingual regions. It is our view that it is not realistic to require a high level of bilingualism for EX-4 and EX-5 positions in regions of the country that are designated unilingual, since people cannot maintain their skills in a language they seldom use. We therefore recommend that passive bilingualism be explored for these positions and that a language profile should be based on four skills instead of the current three.

We believe it is not cost-effective to invest major sums of money in training executives who are very close to retirement when there is not enough funding to train the next generation. We therefore recommend that executives who are within three years of retirement be allowed to opt out of language training. It would then be the responsibility of departments and agencies to set up appropriate transition measures.

APEX also recommends that federal public servants outside the major urban centres be given access to quality language training. We acknowledge that this recommendation will require a considerable infusion of funds; however, we believe this should be viewed as an investment in the future of our public service and our country.

We also recommend that the public service acquire greater expertise concerning accommodations for people with learning disabilities. This would apply to course and test designers, to teachers, and to the testers.

Finally, language training and testing should be included in the training and development plans of employees and departments and be dissociated from the staffing process with its inherent rigidity.

We have sent to the clerk of the committee three documents: a case study of an executive suffering from dyslexia that clearly illustrates the excessive rigidity and lack of expertise in the current approach, and also the reports on two APEX-organized round tables, with all the main official languages' stakeholders, on learning difficulties and official languages. In our view, these reports clearly describe the issues, the efforts made, and the successes to date.

In closing, thank you for your attention. It's an honour and a pleasure for us to have the opportunity to share with you our views on such a critical matter.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (0910)

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

We are now going to go to the questions. I would remind committee members that the first round will be a seven-minute round, that is seven minutes for questions and answers, and that any subsequent rounds would be five-minute rounds.

Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

Welcome, Mr. Emond, to you and your colleagues.

Mr. Emond, the Treasury Board's policy regarding language requirements for members of the executive group requires that EX-4s and EX-5s—senior management positions—meet a CBC language requirement by March 31, 2003, and says that the EX-3 positions are to be designated bilingual imperative as of April 2005, and that EX-2 positions are to be designated bilingual imperative in 2007 in regions that are designated bilingual for the purposes of language of work and in unilingual regions if duties include supervising bilingual positions in a bilingual region.

Therefore, as April 2005 approaches, the largest pool of executives to date—the EX-3s, numbering 614 as of 2002—will be affected by the Treasury Board's policy concerning language requirements for members of the executive group.

[*Translation*]

What is APEX's position on tightening up linguistic requirements for members of the executive group?

Mr. Robert Emond: With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I will make a preliminary remark.

[*English*]

Then I will ask Mr. de Blois to add to it.

We believe bilingualism is a critical dimension of the federal public service. Our concerns, however, have to do with imposing what may be an unrealistic requirement, particularly in those positions where the individual incumbent does not have the capacity to use the second language. It is for that reason that in one of our recommendations we refer to ADMs in unilingual regions. It's a very difficult challenge for someone who goes through learning a second language and then finds himself or herself in an environment that does not permit its use. The retention problem is substantial.

But as a matter of principle, where there is a need particularly in respect of serving the public, and a need to provide for facilitating use of both official languages in the workplace, we endorse that position. Our concern is more with the degree and the requirement of CBC, which—particularly in terms of the final cut, which is the oral interaction—creates problems.

● (0915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. de Blois, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Pierre de Blois (Executive Director, Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada): The government consulted our association when this new measure was introduced. As our president noted, the association had more concerns about the measure being applied to associate deputy ministers working in unilingual regions than about its application to EX-3s working in bilingual regions. Language retention is an important issue. We recommended to the government that it implement its new policy progressively over several years, and the government took us up on that recommendation. However, we still have concerns about government's ability to provide adequate training to people who want to become EX-3s, as opposed to people who have already reached that level.

We believe that it has to be determined whether we really are in a position to provide adequate training to people who wish to become executives. That is the gist of our presentation.

[English]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Just as a follow-up, does the tightening of the language requirements for members of the executive group close the door for unilingual persons who have good potential to become EXs in the public service?

Mr. Robert Emond: I would say it potentially can create barriers. Again, this is why we believe the investment should be in the replacements.

[Translation]

I myself have more than 32 years' experience in the public service, and I know that, in the course of one's career, opportunities abound to perfect one's second language.

[English]

We have, and have had in place for many years now, a program that permits many public servants to acquire the second language. The problem occurs, when one imposes imperative staffing and the requirement to meet the CBC levels on appointment, if the individual—who may be extremely talented—comes from an area where he or she has not been able to retain them. It's one of the reasons why we believe sending executives within three years of possible retirement on language training is a less appropriate investment than trying to ensure that individuals with the high potential I think you're referring to have the capacity to acquire, and quite frankly retain, the second language skills.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You see the CBC level as problematic or creating a pretty high standard. What do you see as a solution to that?

Mr. Robert Emond: I think Mr. Mitchell has put his finger on a possible solution.

[Translation]

As a Franco-Ontarian, I grew up speaking both languages. The problem lies in the fact that when a level C standard is required, the test places a great deal of importance on someone's ability to speak the second language in a very academic fashion.

[English]

As a Franco-Ontarian, you know how to avoid using the subjunctive, for example. It's a problem when you impose a requirement that may or may not be realistic.

Jim Mitchell's recommendation to perhaps consider the capacity to ensure that one can effectively understand the conversation of someone who is speaking his or her first language when it is the listener's second, along with the ability to speak reasonably well the second language, may, I think, be part of the solution.

It represents, of course, a bit of a return to the past. If you go back far enough in the Public Service of Canada, we used to have four dimensions we would test: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. I think that is something those responsible for designing either the standard or the test should take into account.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. André, you have the floor.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning, Mr. Emond, and good morning to all the witnesses who are here with you today. I have a question about the bilingual bonus.

Given that executive positions in the public service are, by definition, bilingual positions, I fail to understand why a bilingual executive gets paid a bonus.

I asked the following question at the last meeting: if a secretary applies for a position and has the right level of computing skills for the job, will she get a bonus for having the level of computing skills required for the job? I do not think so. She would not receive a bonus, because she simply meets the job requirements. What is the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada's position on the bilingual bonus?

Secondly, you spoke about increasing the training budget for bilingualism. The following thought crossed my mind. Would it not be simpler if people who were applying for an executive position in the public service were already bilingual? According to the job requirements, the person ought to be bilingual. It is a basic requirement of the job. The training budget could be redirected to skills upgrading for people wanting to become executives. Would that be a more effective approach? Perhaps. Would it be more in line with the fundamental values of our society?

The problem that we have at the moment is the following. Take the example of a young person who studies and who wants to become an executive in the public service. He tells himself that, even although he is not bilingual, he still has a chance and should apply because he will be given training. Furthermore, were the young person in question bilingual, he would get a bonus. This reasoning is inconsistent to the fundamental values of our society. It flies in the face of bilingual requirements. I would like to hear your comments on this subject.

Mr. Robert Emond: Thank you. Mr. Chair, firstly, public service executives do not get a bilingual bonus.

Mr. Guy André: But there are bilingual bonuses.

Mr. Robert Emond: Not for executives. Secondly...

Mr. Guy André: Who gets the bilingual bonus?

Mr. Robert Emond: Employees other than those belonging to the EX group, be they unionized or not.

As regards the issue of the bonus, we believe that people ought to have the requisite skills to carry out their work. We are not, therefore, in favour of bilingual bonuses. We feel that the money could be better spent if it were invested in training, which brings me to my next comment.

We believe that it would be preferable to find a way to integrate second-language development into life-long professional training, as opposed to opting for a training course that lasts for a given period of time. In many cases, the latter approach tends to lead to people focusing on passing an exam; they then return to their workplace and do not use their second language. People would be far better served by life-long learning and development.

● (0925)

Mr. Guy André: I have already mentioned the need for more stringent linguistic requirements for public servants in order that employees entering the public service are bilingual.

Mr. Robert Emond: We agree, but I think that we have to be realistic. We are talking about public servants here. What you say is well and good in the national capital region and in bilingual regions. However, elsewhere in the country, the situation is different. Allow me to come back to the example of associate deputy ministers that we raised earlier. If an EX-4 in St. John's, Newfoundland, receives language development training and passes his exam at the C-B-C level, but then goes back to work and never speaks French...

Mr. Guy André: That is what happens at the moment.

Mr. Robert Emond: It is not very realistic to insist that the person maintain a C-B-C level. We have to find a means of ensuring that bilingualism is respected in the public service, be it when providing service to Canadians or when supervising employees. We have to adopt a more practical approach than the one which we have at the moment.

Mr. Guy André: I get the impression that we are going around in circles here. The official languages policy was introduced a good few years ago. We provide training, yet we know that people who learn their second language lose it again shortly afterwards because they go back to a workplace where it is not possible to use their second language. As a result, they lose the ability to function in that language. That leaves me wondering.

If it were a fundamental requirement, more efforts would have to be made to recruit bilingual employees in order to ensure that from the first day on the job, they could provide service in both languages. People would realize that it is of paramount importance to master both official languages if you want to work in the public service. At the moment, it is of secondary importance. Indeed, people who are unilingual know that they will be able to learn the second language and they'll get a bonus. If they fail to learn the second language, it is not too much of a problem because they still have a job.

The process has to start in primary school and high school. Bilingualism has to be a value.

Mr. Robert Emond: Obviously, in an ideal world, that is how it would be.

Mr. Guy André: We could focus on such an approach...

Mr. Robert Emond: Yes, we could focus on that approach.

Mr. Guy André: ... rather than saying that we need more money for training.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. André. You can continue your questioning in the next round.

Mr. Godin, over to you.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I too would like to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses.

It is a little disheartening to hear you speak of how things would be in an ideal world. If all of this is no more than a dream, we are not yet out of the woods.

I would like to ask you a question. I do not know whether you have the answer. Quebec has around 7 million inhabitants, and as in the rest of Canada, there are executive positions there. In Quebec, what percentage of executives do not speak any English?

Mr. Pierre de Blois: I do not have the figures in front of me. I know that there are some, but not many. They are in the minority.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are saying that there is a minority of executives who do not speak a single word of English.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: Some of them have received language training, just like their English-speaking counterparts, and they face the same difficulties as their English-speaking colleagues when it comes to exams and learning because of limited access to adequate training.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What do you mean by "not many"?

● (0930)

Mr. Pierre de Blois: I would say that there are less than 10 per cent.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In Quebec, speaking English is a prerequisite to being given an executive position. What does somebody have to do if they want to become an executive, yet come from Trois-Rivières, Rivière-du-Loup or Gaspé, where only French is spoken? The answer is that those who wish an executive position learn English. If they do not, their chances of getting such a position are very slim. It would seem that when a position is advertised, the candidate who speaks English has a better chance of getting the job than somebody who does not.

Elsewhere in Canada, French can be learned at a later date. People have the opportunity to learn at a later date, but in Quebec, people have to learn English straightaway. As my colleague Guy André pointed out, that is the crux of the problem. It is rather like saying to someone who wants to become a mechanic or a welder that he does not need to learn his craft until he has got a job. I have never seen that happen.

Under the legislation, people have to provide service in both official languages. There seems to be something missing here. Some people are saying that they do not need to learn their second language because the government has promised them that they can learn it later on.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: Allow me to raise two points. Firstly, Quebec, New Brunswick and the national capital region are regions which have been designated bilingual. I would think that this is something that somebody wishing to enter the public service would know. People ought to know that if they want to move up the ranks in bilingual regions, they have to become bilingual.

Secondly, at this point, I do not know if we are in a position to make bilingualism a prerequisite for becoming a public servant, because not all public service positions require the employee to be bilingual.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am talking about executive-level positions.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: Regarding senior officials, as Mr. Emond said, we must emphasize training if we want the public service to be accessible to everyone in this land. People must also know that if they want to become senior officials in Quebec, in the national capital region or in New Brunswick, they will have to become bilingual if they are not bilingual already.

Let us come back to the question that Mr. André put a while ago. Why are we emphasizing training rather than recruiting bilingual people from the start, in other words, why not apply imperative staffing to all positions? This question should be put to the government. However, I think that the solution is that the public service should remain accessible to all citizens and that we must therefore give the people some training.

In our opinion, we must offer training to younger people, to those who are new in the public service and who show an interest in learning a second language. In the current system, there is practically no language training available, unless you have a bilingual position. This is crazy. As there are not enough funds to give training to someone who does not have a bilingual job, we wait until that person has won a competition and gotten a bilingual job before sending them to language training. Then we lose this person for a year, which is very costly.

Many people do not get access to a bilingual job before reaching the age of 45 or 50. People aged 50 and over are sent away for a year to language training. We must find a way to provide continuous professional development to young newcomers to the public service, and not give a year's training to people who have won a competition and gotten a job that requires both languages. People should be given training continuously during their careers until they become bilingual. Thus, when they win a competition and get a senior official's job, especially in bilingual regions, they would already be qualified for the job.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thus, you are saying that in the public service, there's no training given at the beginning of one's career. No language training is given to unilingual anglophones who are new to the public service, who have unilingual jobs and who want to learn the other language. Nor is any language training given to francophones who get jobs outside of Quebec, for instance in New Brunswick, and who want to learn the other language. No training is

offered until a person is at least 40 years old and has a job that requires both languages.

● (0935)

Mr. Pierre de Blois: Basically, departments can offer training to people but they do not have the necessary funds. There simply are no funds. I do not know the statistics—we should request them from the Public Service Commission— but I am convinced that in at least nine cases out of ten, if not more, the only persons who have access to language training are those who, at a given point, win a competition and get a bilingual job. Such people have to go through training. However, there is not enough money to train, gradually and systematically, young newcomers to the public service who want to become bilingual. Thus, departments only spend their money when they have to.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are there not some people who think that they do not need to learn the other language? I think that this mentality must change. It is a part of the job. It is not bad to learn another language. In some countries, people learn six languages. We have two languages to learn and we have been struggling to do so for 400 years.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Simard, please.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, gentlemen.

First, I'd like to make a few comments on Mr. Mitchell's study. I think we agreed with Mr. Mitchell a few days ago that his study wasn't necessarily one of the best. For example, his sample of 20 people at the end of their careers was a real problem for us. These were the people with the least motivation. Actually, Mr. Mitchell did admit that it was perhaps a problem.

Second, you mentioned unilingual regions. I'd like to know what a unilingual region is. I imagine that Manitoba, where I hail from, is considered a unilingual region. On the other hand, there are still over 100,000 French-speaking people there. You also said that the required quality of French could be decreased. It seems to me that the francophones in Manitoba deserve to be served in a language as adequate as the one used for those in Ottawa, for example. I don't agree at all with you on that matter. Let's look at the percentage of bilingual positions in the public service in the Canadian west. In British Columbia, 3.4 per cent of the positions there are designated bilingual; 4.2 per cent of all positions are designated in Alberta; 3.7 per cent of positions are designated in Saskatchewan and 7.9 per cent in Manitoba. As there are so few bilingual positions, it would seem to me that the people in them should speak the second official language adequately. I do not at all believe that we should reduce the quality of language. People living in those regions have the right to be served in a language as correct as the one used for those living in Ottawa.

Could you comment on what I've just said, please?

Mr. Robert Emond: First, I'd like to say that Winnipeg is a bilingual region. There are bilingual regions other than those mentioned by Mr. de Blois. I'm not saying that we should reduce the quality of language, but I think that the standards and tests applied to those people who must reach the C level, especially for oral interaction, are not realistic.

It's not a matter of offering service of a lesser quality to francophones in a bilingual region elsewhere in the country. People must be able to communicate.

I'd like to come back again to our concerns about the tests that I find very demanding in some cases. I actually believe that Mr. Mitchell pointed that out. I would ask Ms. Nault to comment on a case she is aware of. There are people who can communicate very well in their second language but who fail the test.

I want to be very clear. I'm not saying we should decrease the quality, but I think we have to be practical. It's a matter of communicating with citizens and employees.

Colette, could you share your example with us?

Mrs. Colette Nault (Special Advisor to Executives, Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada): I'm a senior advisor to the executives and I can share a case with you which is pretty representative of other cases that I witness in my job.

There was this gentleman suffering from dyslexia. When I met him, he had been on language training for two years and had been evaluated seven or eight times. I used to teach languages. I spent 20 years in the area of language training within the federal government. I spoke to him in French. He was quite able to exchange views with me in French. He was quite able to explain what his problems were and ask me for advice.

One of the characteristics of dyslexia is that in a stressful situation, a dyslexic person has a lot of difficulty communicating.

• (0940)

Hon. Raymond Simard: But you're talking about an exception, here. I don't want to talk about exceptions. I think we have to talk about what goes on in the public service. I'm sorry but I only have seven minutes.

You stated clearly that people did not have the opportunity to practice as they should in the regions, for example. It seems to me we should encourage the use of the second language. Instead of decreasing language skill requirements, it would be better to encourage the use of the second language as the language of work in those environments and make sure that people have an opportunity to speak their second official language.

Mr. Robert Emond: We agree with you completely. That's one of the reasons we recommended that deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and heads of agencies should be bilingual. I also think that the Mitchell report, on page 4, sets out the problem very clearly, and it is a problem I had personally.

[English]

Second, the fact that the working environment everywhere but Quebec is English-dominant means, in practice, that francophones have an easier time acquiring and retaining second language competency in the workplace.

[Translation]

If we can't change the dynamics and facilitate the use of French in the workplace outside Quebec, it will be very difficult for anglophones to retain second-language skills. I completely agree with you. We have to promote the use of French even more.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Do I still have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

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

Hon. Raymond Simard: Perfect. My last question will be for Mr. de Blois.

Mr. de Blois, you stated before that people were trained only once they obtained a bilingual position, for example. I agree with my colleague Mr. Godin on this. When you make a commitment to work for the federal government, you must understand that the public service is bilingual. It seems to me that you shouldn't wait, as an employee, to win a bilingual position before you start learning the second official language. I don't understand that logic. It seems to me that it's a job requirement, one of the important requirements if you want advancement in the public service.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: Mr. Simard, I'm going to tell you that I'm one of the old people with low motivation that Mr. Mitchell interviewed. I think you're right.

You have to do two things. First, you have to tell the Canadian public at large that the public service is accessible to all and that you can become part of it if you want to. At the same time, it has to be said that there are many positions in the public service in the regional areas such as Winnipeg, Ottawa and so on, especially at the executive level that require you to eventually become bilingual if you want to access them.

Where you have a problem, once again, is that the budgets are not big enough to allow the departments to offer language training to a young motivated person who wants to become an executive one day and who joined the public service as a unilingual employee. The only opportunity that young person has to become bilingual is to eventually obtain a bilingual position and get sent off on language training. All we're saying is that the system has to be reviewed in its entirety because it's not working.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: We're beginning the second round. We will now have five-minute exchanges with our guests.

We will continue with Mr. Pierre Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): I thank our witnesses for coming today.

I think everyone agrees on the fact that Canadians should have the right to be served in both official languages. That is a principle that bears no compromise.

The question we're examining today is whether this can be done without penalizing the majority of Canadians who are not bilingual and who want to make a contribution to their country by working in the public service. That is the balance we are looking for.

• (0945)

[English]

You said earlier today three things that struck me.

One is that executives in non-bilingual regions should not necessarily have to reach the same degree of linguistic competency as they are forced to reach right now. Second, you said that the existing C-level requirements are not realistic. Third, you said that people who are approaching retirement should not be forced to take language training they will probably never put into practice.

I'm wondering whether, if these three recommendations were put into practice, the consequence would ultimately be a reduction in bilingual service to the public, or could these recommendations be put into practice without reducing the quality of bilingual service provided to the end-user, the Canadian taxpayer?

Mr. Robert Emond: On your first point, our recommendation was very specifically aimed at ADMs.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: At unilingual ADMs?

Mr. Robert Emond: Yes, as you pointed out.

The issue with the existing C, if properly approached to find a solution, is not in my opinion going to compromise at all the quality of service to Canadians in either official language. I personally do not see that happening. Again I come back to the issue of some of the artificiality around the C level respecting oral interaction.

As for the question of the individual who is within three years of retirement, it's more a matter of making the best investment possible of limited funds than of saying these people should somehow not be required.... We believe you make the appropriate investment of public funds to achieve the best effect. Sending somebody off on language training who's within three years of retirement—the person may take 12 months or maybe 15 months, and we have a case where somebody spent 22 months—doesn't strike me as the appropriate use of tax dollars. Make the investment in the right place.

That should not lead to any compromise in service to the public. There's an obligation to ensure that citizens are entitled to receive services in their official language of choice. I have worked in an awful lot of different departments and agencies, and there are a hundred ways to achieve that objective.

I have to emphasize again that we in no way are here to say there should be a decrease in the quality of service. It's a matter of ensuring the system.... Most of this is referred to in Mr. Mitchell's report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's right. I am in total agreement: the quality of service must be the highest possible.

[*English*]

At the same time we have to find a way of doing it so that our language policies serve the people, not the other way around. I worry that we have done the inverse. We have policies in place that have become so bureaucratic that we are serving the language policy instead of the language policy serving us.

You discussed executive-level positions in non-bilingual regions and people being within the last few years before their retirement, but the third point you made earlier in response to my question was that the level of proficiency that is required is not realistic. I would like to hear more about that. I have spoken to francophone professors who are responsible for carrying out these tests and teaching students to reach these goals, and they have told me the same thing. They have told me the requirements that are being set out are not realistic.

I would like to know if it is possible to reduce the level of competency that is required without reducing the quality of service that comes out to the end-user.

●(0950)

Mr. Robert Emond: I wouldn't use the word "reduced", although it does sound like that, probably. I would say "adjusted".

[*Translation*]

For example, if I sell my cottage, which is somewhere around Gracefield, and I am talking to the people in that area, I am not going to speak to them as I would to a language professor or a second-language evaluator who insists on my passing the test.

If I go to New Brunswick, I don't have to use very academic French to communicate with the people there. That doesn't mean that by doing that you're reducing language skills. You should take into account that you need to offer high-quality services in both official languages. Of course, you have to recognize that most transactions with ordinary people don't involve EX level public servants but actually people from the CR, PM and AS groups. These positions are mainly classified B-B-B.

[*English*]

We don't want to reduce. We would like to see an adaptation of the system that will encourage more use of the French language within the public service while ensuring that services to citizens are delivered effectively and with high quality in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Your turn, Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would also like to thank you for being here. Welcome, all.

As a Franco-Ontarian, I must say that your acronym, APEX, always gives me a start. It had a whole other meaning in Ontario.

If you don't mind, I'd simply like to have you clarify a few numbers. In the EX-5, EX-4, EX-3 and even EX-2 categories, there is a total of some 1,200 people or maybe less.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: No. The EX-4s and EX-5s are assistant deputy ministers; there are about 250. There are some 700 or 750 EX-3s. The total is 1,000 people, tops.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Of those 1,000 individuals, how many are not functionally bilingual at this time?

Mrs. Colette Nault: Last year, fewer than 5 per cent of them did not meet the requirements.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Mr. Chairman, I simply want everyone to understand that of 170,000 public servants, the senior public servants we're talking about represent a very small number. When the media get hold of these questions, they lead us to believe that everyone working for the government must be bilingual.

Within that small number of individuals who are not bilingual, the number of people who would really have problems with language training is even smaller still. So we're finally talking about some 20 or 30 public servants. I wouldn't want us leaving here thinking that we're dealing with a huge problem.

I'd like to look at the question of training programs. Mr. Mitchell mentioned them. The option suggested by Mr. de Blois is interesting, in my opinion. I think we should examine those things. Maybe you shouldn't wait to obtain a position classified as bilingual before starting your training.

Some members here in the House are on a training program and I think that it's absolutely extraordinary that very quickly, in a few months, not only do they manage to become perfectly bilingual but also to express themselves. Which leads me to wonder what the problem is with our training programs. It doesn't seem to be working in an exemplary fashion. Mr. Mitchell seems to be looking at turning to private enterprise and the parapublic sector. We have community colleges and universities that excel in that area.

Can we in any way solve this problem once and for all? You say, based on your research involving over 300 executives, that they consider the quality of the training to be unequal. If we were to tell you today that you had to start offering training programs tomorrow, which programs would you choose?

• (0955)

Mrs. Colette Nault: I'd like to say something about what's not working in the area of language training.

It's clear that it works for the vast majority of public servants. Those who find that it's not working are probably older people who have relatively major learning problems.

One of the most important problems shows up with individuals living in remote areas. If the individual lives in Thunder Bay, for example, and has to take language training because he just got a position, then he'll most likely have to go live somewhere else in some metropolitan area because that training is not being offered where he lives. That creates many family problems.

I'll come back briefly to what Pierre was saying. What we're looking at is a bilingual institution where people know what the standards are, where the employees have access to language training and where that training is part of the training and development plan.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I understand that, but we don't have much time left. As far as the 70 people who are not bilingual—and we're not talking about tons of people—isn't there some way of buying them Cadillac programs to get things moving and get them bilingual?

Mrs. Colette Nault: Honestly, the people I see have been on private courses for two years. These are people who have been given the Cadillac and who can't pass the test. They can communicate in the second language, but they can't pass the test.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godbout.

It's Mr. Côté's turn.

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning Mr. Emond; thank you for your presentation. Good morning to your colleagues as well.

I find it somewhat amusing to listen to Mr. Godbout. He has fallen back into the old Liberal habit of playing fast and loose with figures. It's all very well to take an example, a specific category, and come up with a few numbers. But we are talking about some 4,000 senior-level managers. So, if we take the 5 per cent mentioned earlier, that

would represent not 50 or 70 people. It means at least 200 employees.

That said, you raised an issue when you discussed training budgets, namely the fact that it is a matter of political will, and symbolism. The Official Languages Act is 35 years old, if memory serves. We have heard of people being close to retirement and still not mastering both languages. Had there been the political will to provide this training from the very outset, a 50-year-old employee who had entered the public service at age 20 would have had 35 years to perfect his knowledge of the second language. Therefore, it is a matter of political will. Moreover, investments must be made in the right areas.

Then, there is the awareness of the second language. As has been mentioned more than once, because of their location, people in Quebec are often more bilingual than those who live elsewhere in Canada. I can understand that, in a remote area of Saskatchewan or another province, there are fewer opportunities to speak French, which proves once again how important it is for the government to stand firm. It must provide guidelines to direct senior management and the rest of the public service towards a functional bilingualism by making sure that training is always available and by hiring people who already meet a minimum standard in the other official language.

My question is a simple one. We are discussing bilingual regions and bilingual positions. I remember a time when I used to send my income tax return to Rivière-du-Loup. I don't honestly know if there is an anglophone community in Rivière-du-Loup but, if there is one, it must not be very big. It would be easy for me to assume that the management positions in Rivière-du-Loup are bilingual and that the region is considered to be bilingual. How do you determine if a region or a position is bilingual? I wonder about that.

I have one final short comment. Mr. de Blois said earlier that in Quebec perhaps 10 per cent of managers—I know that this is an approximate number—have not passed the tests and are not quite functional in the other official language. Ms. Nault and Mr. Emond cited a Canada-wide figure of 5 per cent. When we compare the two figures, it looks like there are more anglophone managers than managers in Quebec who are functional in the second language; I find that somewhat surprising.

• (1000)

Mr. Pierre de Blois: You have asked a number of questions.

The figure that I cited was approximate. I was trying to demonstrate that it represented a minority. We did meet with the managers in Lac-Saint-Jean and Bas-du-Fleuve, people who had been given language training, but who were having a hard time maintaining the quality of their second language, as would be the case for someone in Saskatchewan. That is a given, since they spend 95 to 98 per cent of their life in French.

We agree with what you have said about the training.

Why is a management position designated bilingual? We have been talking about services, but we have neglected to mention a very important aspect of the language of work. A public service manager must also supervise employees in the language of their choice, because that is their right. If you are a senior manager with a staff of 200 to 600 people, some of them francophone and some anglophone, you must be able to communicate with these people in their language. That dimension is often forgotten, and that is why I wanted to highlight it here. It is an important dimension and explains why some positions are designated bilingual.

What is more difficult, aside from the training issue, is the matter of French as a language of work. As a matter of course, French is spoken at work in Quebec. That is not often the case in the rest of Canada. It may happen in some national capital region offices or in New Brunswick, but, generally speaking, the language of work is English. Until French is used more extensively in the working environment, we will continue to provide training, and the anglophones who are trained in the second language will not have too many opportunities to use it.

Also, if you attend a management meeting where a few anglophones do not speak French, or if you are not sure that you will be understood by the anglophones at the table, you will speak in English. So French will be used even less frequently.

We must encourage the use of French in the workplace. As Mr. Emond said, and as our association has stated publicly, there must be linguistic requirements for deputy ministers and heads of agencies. It makes no sense for the official language requirements to stop at the assistant deputy minister level. If a deputy minister does not speak or understand the French language, how are francophones expected to make themselves understood at a national management meeting? There are some parts, not only of the act but also of the regulations, that act as disincentives to the use of French, and, by extension, to a truly bilingual work environment.

The Chair: Thank you. That is all the time that we have, Mr. Côté.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with you about the deputy ministers. Among the few people whom you mentioned earlier, who do not speak English—even though their numbers are few—are some who cannot speak to their deputy minister.

•(1005)

Mr. Pierre de Blois: Absolutely.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They can't do it at all. There is no logic to it; they are trying to promote bilingualism in the public service yet the boss is not bilingual.

I asked how many deputy ministers do not speak English. There is not a single one. It's not a matter of there being just a few: there are none at all. We can already see the difference between the two groups.

I have a great deal of sympathy for the case that you described, which is a special one. I am still having trouble with the story about my fisher in Shippagan. My colleagues here have already heard the story. He had applied for a position. He had been working on a boat for six years and had gone to sea. When his position became full-

time, he was required to be bilingual. He failed the exam and lost his job because he couldn't speak English to a cod or a flounder—or some other type of fish—because he was a fisherman, you see.

My little story might sound funny, but what is the difference between a fisher who has been fishing for six years and who loses his job because of a strict bilingualism requirement, and the forty-year-old employee who can apply for a management position even if he is not bilingual, whom we should feel sorry for, and to whom we must provide the position and training? What is the difference? That person has a family and already has a job. He already works for the public service. All he is seeking is a promotion. The other one had been working for six years: he was working on a ship at sea, and he was shown the door because he failed an exam.

I still have a hard time digesting that, Ms. Nault. I still haven't digested that fish. Not at all. No one has acted to correct the situation. It is hard for me to sympathize with senior public servants who claim that they are a different kind of Canadian and that as such, they are entitled to a management position, and should be exempt from training because they are too old.

There was no remorse for the fisher who had been plying his trade for six years. The public service told him that he was out of a job and that the family man could go home and draw welfare. No one felt any sympathy for him.

The Official Languages Committee submitted this case to the minister. Nobody would touch it with a 10-foot pole. I would like to ask you, in your capacity as special advisers to the executives and as representatives of the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada, to explain why, since no one has yet managed to do that.

Mr. Robert Emond: Mr. Chairman, I whole heartedly agree with the honourable member. That is an unreasonable situation. That is why we have recommended a more rational distinction between language training and staffing of some positions. For some reason, the staffing of that position was probably imperative, which means that the requirements had to be met when the appointment was made. But in my opinion, what you have described is unreasonable.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I need some help on this. Why is it that in Yarmouth, in Nova Scotia, the same fisherman does not need to speak French, whereas in Shippagan, in New Brunswick, where the population is 100 per cent francophone, he must speak English?

There is a problem somewhere and that is where sympathy is lacking. When you come from a region like mine, how can we be sympathetic to the public service when we see how they behave with bilingualism? This is the question: who should be working there and who should have these jobs?

Mr. Robert Emond: Having spent part of my career working in Human Resources, more particularly, at the Public Service Commission, I can say that there are always situations that make no sense. We have to ask ourselves why and then act to correct them.

I have a great deal of sympathy for the individual whom you have described. It doesn't matter if the position is a level AS-2 or EX-4. You have to be practical. I do not think it is necessary to be bilingual to speak to the fish. In any case, I am not sure, but someone should take a look...

Mr. Yvon Godin: ... at his manager, who is supposed to be bilingual.

Mr. Robert Emond: I agree. If the individual had supervisory responsibilities, then I would not defend the decision that was made. I have a great deal of sympathy for that person.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It was only an example. Sometimes things leave a bad taste.

Mr. Robert Emond: I understand quite well.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to come back to a basic issue: your recommendation. If I understand correctly, you say that the public service should have a program that would allow our employees to learn a second language as soon as they are hired. When they apply, they would have the necessary training for jobs requiring the knowledge of both official languages. Is that what Mr. de Blois was saying? Is that your main recommendation?

Mr. Robert Emond: Yes. We should invest differently in the public servants, particularly in the young recruits. Once again, we have to be practical and reasonable. We should not invest in language training for someone who works in Vancouver, if that person does not want to become a career public servant, because billions of dollars would be spent needlessly.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to ask one last question. It would be a short one.

The Chair: You can ask it later.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I won't ask any questions later.

The Chair: You won't be asking questions later? I would prefer it if you waited until later, if you do not mind.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We are wasting time. I will ask it now.

The Chair: If you promise to do it quickly, then go ahead.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You agree that someone who is not interested in a management position should not be able to complain after the fact because he is not eligible. The choice will have to be made from the outset.

•(1010)

Mr. Robert Emond: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Very well.

Back to Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Emond said it was difficult for him to maintain his fluency in his second language. I am also a francophone, but my experience is probably different.

I was born and lived most of my childhood in an anglophone environment. I became a public servant at the age of 28. I started in Sudbury, in an area where francophones make up about one third of the population. At the time, my position was designated anglophone. It was at about the same time that the \$800 bonus was introduced. I

did not pass the bilingualism test. I took a one month course provided by the public service. I was then able to pass the test and was given a bilingual position along with the \$800 bonus.

However, after that, I worked in an anglophone environment. One third of the population was francophone, but the language of work was English. Then I came to work here, in Ottawa, and also in Cornwall. In all three offices, the language of work was English. As you can see, my mastery of the second language has suffered.

What can you do with people like me, because we are everywhere? With so much invested in training, how can we help public servants to maintain their language skills?

Mr. Robert Emond: Speaking personally, I agree completely with you.

I think that we need to find a way to encourage the use of French by francophones. As Mr. de Blois said, people tend to forget.

I am a francophone and I have been involved in management committees in various departments for 20 years. I have worked for both francophone and anglophone deputy ministers. People tend to think that if you speak French, the message will not get through. Instead of forcing our anglophone colleagues to keep up their French skills, we tend to use English. That is a reality in the federal public service.

A number of initiatives have been taken. In the department where I worked, for example, the deputy minister insisted on holding one meeting a week in French, and that was that.

Issuing directives will not change the culture. We need to find a better way to facilitate the use of both official languages to communicate.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What would be the best way to do that?

Mr. Robert Emond: In his report, Mr. Mitchell suggested a very good idea. I think that I would use a lot more French in management meetings or with my employees if I was confident of being understood. If I had the impression that the anglophones I was speaking to understood French well, even if they were not totally fluent when they spoke, I would prefer that to the way things are done now. I would just reiterate that we train people to pass a test but not necessarily to communicate. I believe that Mr. de Blois mentioned the notion of language of work. That is a problem for employees.

In my experience, francophone employees working for an anglophone supervisor, whether they are bilingual or not, tend to use the supervisor's language. It is human nature.

Tremendous progress has been made over the years, but I think that Mr. Mitchell has a very good vision for the future.

•(1015)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Are there any statistics on the problems people encounter after the initial test? I believe that there is another test two or five years after the first language test. What percentage of people fail the second time, or after two years? Are there statistics on that? I have seen cases in the public service where people pass the test, but they could not pass it again two years later. That costs us even more money.

Mr. Robert Emond: We would need to ask the Public Service Commission to provide us with the numbers. In my experience, there are many people who take the test again after five years and fail.

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon, I will stop you there. Our researcher will request that information. Thank you.

We will go now to Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André: I want to come back to the dream. The Official Languages Act, as you know, has existed for over 35 years. We both know that. The idea is to ensure that both official languages have the same status in federal institutions.

Has the percentage of bilingual public servants increased in western Canada since the Official Languages Act was brought in? As well, you indicated that deputy ministers were not required to speak both official languages. You agree that this should be a requirement.

I agree with you on that. But what obstacles are in the way right now? I think that you have brought pressure to bear. You have taken steps to deal with that problem and things do not seem to be moving very much. So what are the obstacles that you are facing?

You also said that employees tend to use the language of their supervisor. One solution might be to hire francophone supervisors in the Maritimes and in western Canada as a way of increasing the level of bilingualism.

Mr. Robert Emond: I would add the National Capital Region as well.

Even when a supervisor is perfectly bilingual, that is the general tendency. Once again, we need to find a way to change the culture.

With respect to obstacles at the level of deputy ministers and heads of agencies, one of the problems is that people sometimes need to be recruited from outside for very valid reasons. I have examples of that. Even if the person is a unilingual anglophone or francophone, that possibility should remain, because otherwise we might lose the skills we need in certain areas.

To begin with, there needs to be a training plan for these people, so that they become bilingual within a limited time. Otherwise all the discussion will take place in English when the deputy minister is anglophone and speaks no French. There is no doubt of that. The possibility of hiring these people should remain, but we need to make sure that they become bilingual within a limited time. It is only reasonable.

As to the percentage of positions, do you have an answer to that, Pierre?

Mr. Pierre de Blois: To answer your first question, there has been progress since the beginning.

Mr. Guy André: Yes, there has been progress. I am looking at the statistics, which you have as well.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: As a public servant for the past 34 years, I can assure you that there has been tremendous progress in the public service regarding the use of French and the extent to which French-speakers are represented in the top jobs. The Official Languages Act has helped French develop as a working language in the public service. This is undeniable.

But the fact remains that there is still room for improvement. We still haven't reached the point where we can say that the public service is an organization that works effectively in both official languages. It provides services in both official languages, but does it function in both official languages? This is an important distinction that needs to be made. And that is why we are especially focusing our energies on the matter.

• (1020)

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Mr. Guy André: You are asking for additional funds for training. From what I understand, you want more ongoing training for young employees of the public service. How do you see this being implemented?

You also mentioned that not everybody is motivated to learn a second language to the same extent. What would be your position on this should an ongoing training program be implemented?

Mr. Robert Emond: I believe that we need to continue to provide language training for specific positions. Given the current situation, this must continue. I do believe, however, that investment should not be tied to specific positions, but rather to overall professional development.

It should be noted that in some departments language training is provided for unilinguals who do not plan on obtaining a bilingual position. That does occur. This is an investment. However, investment as it is commonly understood today focuses on helping the individual obtain a particular position, and in the case of senior management, on keeping the position. This is not an investment in the future. Rather, it is an investment in the present. For our part, we are in favour of investment in the future.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Boivin has the floor.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Thank you.

Hello. It is interesting. I can see that there are four French-speakers here, at least people who have very French-sounding names. Just out of curiosity, I would like to know what proportion of your time you spend working in French.

Mr. Robert Emond: Perhaps between 5 and 10%.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: That is what I thought. Thank you for your honesty.

I represent the riding of Gatineau where there are a lot of public servants. It is here in the national capital region. I have been following what goes on in this region for quite a long time, having grown up here, and I can tell you that this is not exactly a new debate.

I heard Mr. André say that he believed we were going nowhere quickly on this matter. I tend to agree with him. Despite being a strong advocate for the official languages program, despite being a believer, I must confess that I am at a loss. I just don't know what can be done to make a difference.

Wouldn't addressing the working language problem be the key to a solution? You brought the matter up. What public servants are saying, and what I heard during the last election campaign, is that indeed there are more bilingual positions, including senior positions where French-speakers are required, but that these very French-speakers, once on the job, speak in English. In my opinion, it's a waste of time and effort. The fact that it leads to promotion opportunities is all well and good; and perhaps we have made some progress, but have we really achieved much by way of working language? I don't think so.

I look at what is going on within our own ranks. As you said earlier, as francophones we are a little bit to blame too. Indeed, when we meet with our English-speaking colleagues, we speak English. Of course, the vast majority of our colleagues are English-speakers. It's also true that it is sometimes quicker to speak English when we want to make sure we get our message across. I am just as guilty as anybody. I go and see some of my colleagues who are ministers or members of Parliament and I don't have time to wait until they have understood what I'm saying to them in French, so I switch to English. So we are a little guilty in this respect.

You spoke about youth. It is sad, but I get the feeling we need to stop kidding ourselves about the older generation, those who are 50 years and over, who are putting up a fight. We will not change them overnight. But are new, young, public servants bilingual? In fact, I would hazard to say that if we persist in telling ourselves that we will make them bilingual once they're on the job, we will be faced with the same resistance. Shouldn't we literally make bilingualism a hiring criterion, as simple as that?

That is a lot to consider, but for now I feel like we are going around in circles.

• (1025)

Mr. Robert Emond: Mr. Chair, allow me to make a comment on the matter of hiring. I think that it would be a disaster if we insisted on hiring only bilingual people. In his report, Mr. Mitchell talked of Canada's changing demography. Excluding the vast majority of Canadians from federal public service positions is not the solution, in my opinion.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: I was talking about managers. As for the rest, I agree. I wasn't, after all, born yesterday. I'm really talking about managers here. You are the ones creating this culture. The attitude trickles down from the upper echelons. If executives are capable of expressing themselves in both languages, and if there is a culture of both languages, this will be reflected in their staff. I really believe this. The onus is on us to be leaders.

Mr. Robert Emond: I apologize for having misunderstood, but it has to do with the discussion we had previously.

What is the percentage with regard to managers?

Mrs. Colette Nault: It's the current policy.

As the gentleman was saying, it is the progressive implementation of the requirement for imperative bilingualism for all management level positions between now and 2007.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: However, that does not happen in French.

Mr. Robert Emond: I will say something with regard to the language of work. I think a lot of progress has been made in the area

of serving the public. But as far as the language of work is concerned, there were very few departments in which I felt at ease as a francophone to speak French on the management committee, even when I was working for a francophone deputy minister. If there were four of us in a room and there was one anglophone, we all tended to speak English. It was a bit our fault. How can we change that? It's very complicated.

Mr. Mitchell's report contained good suggestions, such as forming units where people have to work in their second language, but not as it was 25 years ago, when there were francophone units. We have to find a way to promote French and perhaps to be a little more tolerant. An anglophone who has just finished a language course won't be as fluent as you. So I think that we have to moderate our expectations somewhat.

The Chair: Quickly, please.

Mr. Robert Emond: There was a question on young people.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: I am not only talking about managers, but shouldn't we look after the young generation right away and should bilingualism not be a hiring condition? Young people are more adaptable and it's easier for them to learn a language.

Mr. Pierre de Blois: What we are basically saying is that we agree with the idea of imperative staffing: EX-2 employees and those at a higher level must be bilingual before they can become managers in the public service in bilingual areas; we don't have a problem with that. But we don't want to suddenly find out that we have to send EX-1 level people who are 48 or 50 years old on a language course.

In our opinion, if we set aside the bilingualism bonus and invested more in training young people in their 20s or 30s, when they enter the public service, we would end up having a bilingual pool of public servants who would be at one, two or three levels below that of managers. If that were the case, imperative staffing would not be setting the bar too high; it would simply be a natural transition.

However, we can't ignore the idea of personal responsibility. If people want a career in the public service and work their way to the top, they will have to learn the other official language. If you learn it at 20, but don't use it for 20 years, you will lose it.

Mr. Mitchell made a very interesting recommendation. He said that the public service and government should provide employees with the opportunity of learning the second language, but that each individual has the responsibility to keep up that language; the government should not have to pay you a second or even a third time to relearn that language. This is an interesting recommendation. For years now, it seems we've forgotten the notion of personal responsibility.

Lastly, there is an issue of leadership. It should be incumbent on senior managers to create a working environment where French can be used.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. de Blois.

Let us continue with Mr. Poilievre.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I want to continue along the same lines of what we've heard from some of our colleagues here. I think it started with Mr. Lauzon when he discussed the challenge of the language of work.

I have in my constituency thousands of public servants, and I hear a reoccurring anecdote from many of them. They tell me they work in roughly the same position for five to ten years, and all of a sudden that position becomes bilingual imperative. So they struggle for a year and a half to reach the requirements that are set out for them—sometimes they'll leave their families to go and do immersion—and they come back and they do their job for another five or six years, never having to use French whatsoever. So they've effectively worked in a position for initially five or six years, maybe more, never having been required to use a second language and all of a sudden a bureaucratic edict comes down on them that they have to go and take language training. They do so at great expense to taxpayers, on full salary, with a replacement employee and a professor to pay for, and the cost of transportation, etc. They return and for the following five or six years they never use the skills they acquired. How do you address that frustration, a very real frustration?

Mr. Robert Emond: I would have to believe that would be a very exceptional situation. Again, there are standards for the identification of bilingual positions. But I think part of the problem may be related, Mr. Chairman, to something we were discussing. The job is supposed to be identified based on objective criteria. If those objective criteria are applied properly, the job is bilingual, and the individual you described goes on language training and comes back and does not use the second language for five years, it begs the question: why was it identified bilingual? If it's for supervisory purposes and it's in a bilingual region, does the individual supervise francophones and anglophones? We'll take the classic example, supervising francophones who don't use French because there's this sense that it's not the language of work. There may be all sorts of issues. But again, Mr. Chairman, as I said to one of the members, I find that an abhorrent situation, and I think it should be looked at.

There are some fairly whimsical decisions, in my experience, made in terms of identification of bilingual positions.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Well, it's not an anomaly, but I'll move on to my second point.

You discussed learning disabilities and people who have difficulty learning a second language. Some people are simply incapable of doing so once they reach a certain age. I'd like to branch into another group of people who share the same difficulty, but for different reasons.

My constituency is home to a large number of immigrants who come to this country knowing neither official language and struggle to learn just one. After having done so, they learn that the number one employer in their region requires them to learn a second language that is foreign to them when they are still struggling with the first. How do you believe we can mitigate the obstructions to diversity in our public service and to public service job opportunities for our nation's immigrants, which are posed by stringent language requirements?

● (1035)

Mr. Robert Emond: I'll ask Colette Nault to comment because she has some expertise in that area.

I think, again, coming back to Jim Mitchell's report, this is an enormous challenge for the Public Service of Canada. I'm really not sure, personally, how one finds a solution to that problem, but it is a problem, I can assure you.

Colette.

[Translation]

Mrs. Colette Nault: Thank you.

[English]

I'm not sure there's an easy answer to this question. Obviously there's no easy answer. One of the things we need to think about is that in other countries people do learn four, five, and six languages. So it's obviously possible to do so. But I think it's a very specific issue that will become a bigger issue and a bigger source of discontent unless we find solutions to it.

The Chair: Merci.

That's all the time we have, Mr. Poilievre.

[Translation]

There are two speeches left before the end. We will hear Mr. D'Amours, and then Mr. Côté.

Mr. D'Amours, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I had the opportunity to hear all the questions and all the comments from both sides. I am a Francophone from New Brunswick. When I arrived here in Ottawa, I could speak English somewhat, of course, but it was really not all that good. However, I decided to communicate with my colleagues in the language which is most difficult for me, which is English. At the same time, I have colleagues who take advantage of the opportunity to speak to me in the language that is most difficult for them, which is French.

It is a matter of training, but certainly also of willingness. From the start, we hear that the government could inject more funds, that it could give clear directives to senior managers. Let me tell you what basically disappoints me in all this. You are not concerned. I think that senior management should also take some initiatives, and not merely wait for clear directives before doing something.

We could even inject all the necessary funds. However, if there is no basic initiative or willingness to speak the other language in the work environment, billions of dollars could be injected without anything moving forward for another 10 years. People must have the will to practice the language they are learning. They may not always be in touch with citizens speaking the other language, but sooner or later they will be. However, if they are not, they must at least have the will to learn among colleagues.

Bilingualism can be the government's responsibility up to a certain point, I agree, but it is also the individual's social responsibility. To get a job, you must have a certain amount of education. Similarly, when you know what kind of job you are looking for, you must be sure that you have the necessary tools. These tools comprise education as well as other kinds of training necessary for those jobs, including language training.

You just mentioned that supervisors should be sure to offer the employees an opportunity to speak in their language. Unilingual working groups can exist anywhere in the country. But tomorrow, a francophone, or an anglophone if we are in Quebec, can get a job and become part of the system. Thus it is important to take this into consideration.

You can make comments or give explanations. You can inject all kinds of money, but initiatives must also come from the top. And the top, ultimately, is senior management. This means you. Initiative does exist in this country, in the society. I have trouble understanding why you have to wait for a clear mandate before doing anything.

• (1040)

Mr. Robert Emond: Mr. Chairman, we do not want to leave you with the impression that the solution lies in providing more funds and resources. This morning we are discussing problems. Many initiatives have been taken in all departments in an effort to promote the use of both official languages. In some departments, individuals get grants to take evening courses. I experienced this with certain jobs I had. Many things are being done, but we must also foster a culture that encourages the use of both official languages in the work environment. We believe that it is time we had a look at the way investments were made in the past and perhaps change our approach somewhat.

I entirely agree with the member, Mr. Chairman, when he says that there is also a personal responsibility. Let me say that I know many public servants, not only in the National Capital Region, but also out West and in Quebec, who have followed evening language courses because they realized that it was an advantage to be skilled in the second language.

I do not want to give the impression that little has been done and is being done. I entirely agree that the solution is not found in money alone.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours and Mr. Emond.

You have the floor, Mr. Côté.

Mr. Guy Côté: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

As Ms. Boivin explained so well just now, there must be initiatives from individuals. Let me tell you about my case. I am not sure that I would pass your tests, but I consider myself bilingual. Like many other young adolescents, I had English courses, because I was from the Quebec City area. This might sound funny to you, but very soon, I began to watch *Three's Company*. It shows how motivated I was to learn the language.

There is an element of individual initiative. When they are hired, as was mentioned, people should have what I call a minimum. Nonetheless, we hear many statements that show clearly, at least from some points of view, that the Official Languages Act is not

meeting its objectives. There are some incentives, be they financial, structural or organizational, but it is not enough. I am convinced that I am not the first to say this before this committee. Bilingualism is found in Quebec, New Brunswick, in the National Capital Region and elsewhere. It is a constant struggle to ensure that services be provided in both official languages.

Just now, we were discussing old habits. Let me tell you a little story. In the Standing Committee on Finance, there are about ten MPs, seven of whom speak French very well. A month or two ago, we welcomed four witnesses, all francophones. The chief witness said that she would speak English to be sure that everyone would understand. There are old habits that we must refrain from. Let me tell you that I did not hesitate, just then, to mention that we had an excellent interpretation service that did an extraordinary job and that no one should hesitate to speak in their own language.

You spoke of incentives in the public service in general as well as for officials. Let me ask you a simple question whose answer is not that simple. In your opinion, what would be the best incentive to increase the use of the other language—and I must say that this means mainly French—among officials and in the public service at large?

Mr. Robert Emond: I will ask Mr. de Blois to answer this question. Indeed, I have been working with senior officials for a long time and sometimes I am discouraged when I see situations such as the one you saw in the Standing Committee on Finance.

As Mr. de Blois is smarter than me, he might have some good ideas.

• (1045)

Mr. Pierre de Blois: I think that you are right in saying that we have made a great deal of progress, but with regard to French as language of work, there is much left to do. This is what we must focus on first. One of the only ways to get this done does not depend directly, in my opinion, on official languages, so I will stay away from the subject for half a minute.

Senior officials in the public service undergo a yearly evaluation process, and their bonuses depend on it. As an association, we have been asking for years that these bonuses be conditional not only upon the managers meeting their objectives, but also conditional upon the way the objectives were met. The way in which human resources are managed in the work environment must become a major factor in evaluating senior managers when it comes to giving them their bonus at the end of the year.

We feel that if the way the work environment is managed in terms of the use of official languages becomes a major factor in the evaluation—these senior managers do in fact have people working for them who are bilingual—, we might begin to see some progress, because there will be a financial incentive.

Mr. Guy Côté: In the end, the answer was not that difficult. This is an excellent suggestion and we'll take note of it.

Mr. Robert Emond: I would like to make a closing comment: obviously, the same principle should be applied to deputy ministers and to deputy chiefs of agencies.

The Chair: Thank you. I will end the discussion here. We have completed four full rounds of questions and answers.

Ms. Nault, Mr. Emond, Mr. de Blois and Mr. Choquette, thank you very much for being here and participating. Thank you for taking the time to answer each of our questions. Thank you to all committee members. I think that this was important for our work.

And please always keep in mind, as we discussed with our guests, what kind of recommendations should flow from these discussions.

This is, in fact, the purpose of our work. Once again, thank you very much.

Let me remind you that next Tuesday, we will discuss the possibility of going out in the field and meeting the beneficiaries of the action plan. Following that, we will hear the Public Service Alliance of Canada, followed by Mr. Alcock, as agreed. See you on Tuesday morning.

The meeting is adjourned.

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