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Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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• (0910)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): Hello, everyone. Welcome.

As part of our deliberations on bilingualism in the public service, this morning it is our pleasure to welcome representatives from the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada,

[English]

represented here by Michèle Demers and Mr. Robert McIntosh.

[Translation]

Welcome. I believe you wish to make some opening remarks. Then we will have a question period.

I would like to remind committee members that the witnesses need to leave around 10 a.m. At that time we will pause for a minute and then continue in camera to discuss the work of the committee, in particular, our plans for travel in the field.

With no further delay, I give you the floor.

Ms. Michèle Demers (President, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Good day, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee.

I'd like to introduce my policy advisor, Mr. Robert McIntosh, who is here with me. I'd also like to thank the committee for inviting the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada to make a presentation on official languages in the Public Service.

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada is a certified bargaining agent for some 50,000 professionals and scientists employed in the federal Public Service, federal Crown corporations, and in the provincial jurisdictions of New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba. The overwhelming majority of these employees fall within the jurisdiction of the Official Languages Act and are subject to the language policies and practices of the Treasury Board of Canada.

This submission is divided into three parts. Part I is the Institute's position on Official Languages as posted on the Institute's Web site. This statement covers most of the questions raised by your committee. Part II highlights the recent experience of the Institute with the application of the language policies and Part III consists of a concluding observation.

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada subscribes to the principle that Canada is a bilingual country, that Canadians have a right to be served in their official language of

choice, and that public service employees in the four designated bilingual regions of the country are entitled to work in the official language of their choice.

The Institute believes in and promotes a strong language training program that is to be made available to all employees with career aspirations that could require them to be bilingual, regardless of the fact that they live and work, or not, in one of the country's designated bilingual regions. Language must be a barrier to advancement. Until such time as the educational infrastructure of Canada supports proficiency in both languages by all students, the federal public service must continue to provide linguistic training. This training must be available as new hires enter the public service and be maintained and monitored throughout their careers. This will eventually help us reach the ideal, that "speaking two official languages has become a way of life within the public service".

The public service must set the example, by becoming a facilitating environment with the necessary tools and resources. The recent study on attitudes towards the use of both official languages in the public service revealed that 86 per cent of respondents were willing to make a personal effort to encourage bilingualism in the workplace.

In our estimation, there is a shared responsibility to acquire and maintain proficiency in the other official language.

The employer must monitor the level and quality of bilingual services to the public, provide rejuvenated training and create a culture that supports the upkeep of bilingual services on an ongoing basis, and make language training part of the culture. The public service should provide a facilitating learning environment for career development, enrichment and progression.

The employee, on the other hand, must be proactive in acquiring and maintaining a level of language skill proficiency to ensure quality of services to the public, actively seek opportunities to employ or practise newly acquired skills both on the job and during off time, and make it a point of promoting official languages by exercising the right to work in his/her own official language when working in a designated bilingual region.

As a bargaining agent, PIPSC has a responsibility to monitor the use of the bilingualism policy by the employer, seek co-development with the employer on a renewed bilingualism policy, and on the establishment of criteria for measuring and evaluating both training and skills upkeep. The Institute wants to carry forward the dialogue on official languages at the National Joint Council, through union-management consultations nationally, regionally and locally.

On the issue of bilingual imperative and bilingual non-imperative staffing, we believe the employer must not question the need to continue to staff on a bilingual non-imperative basis. We continue to maintain that bilingual non-imperative staffing is necessary to ensure fair access to positions.

For decades, the federal government has not enforced its own rules on official languages. Parameters and time frames must now be set and rules implemented allowing current public service employees time to acquire a second official language, should they aspire to a bilingual position.

A long-term plan is needed to review the mix of unilingual/bilingual imperative/non-imperative positions.

PIPSC faces a number of major challenges in the area of official languages. The Institute must convince the employer to provide a model training program replete with tools and resources to attain, increase and maintain bilingual capabilities from career commencement and onwards. The Institute must ensure the employer commits and encourages our members to commit to shared responsibility in attaining, maintaining and practising new linguistic skills.

[English]

To summarize our policies, first, at this point there is no universal access to training for the second language within either our public education system or the federal public service. Bilingual non-imperative staffing is therefore necessary to ensure fair access to positions based upon merit.

● (0915)

With respect to the bilingual bonus, the status quo, though politically expedient, is not reasonable. The bilingual bonus should be more than a symbolic payment. It must genuinely reflect the value of the additional skill and the actual service rendered. This requires revisiting the antiquated bilingual bonus of \$800 per year, which does not reflect today's market reality.

The employer and the bargaining agent should co-develop appropriate follow-up criteria to ensure that the opportunity to maintain the necessary language skills exists, and that the skill is maintained.

The institute is strongly opposed to any unilateral action by the government, either directly or through its various employers, to change the bilingualism bonus. The institute is strongly opposed to any attempt to factor in the costs of official bilingualism at the bargaining table.

The PIPSC policy statement on official languages is made in the belief that the concept of bilingualism is important to Canada as a nation. The professional institute continues to support both the objective of creating and maintaining a public service that is capable of providing effective service in both official languages and the principle that within each bilingual region, subject to the need to provide service to Canadians, every public service employee has the right to work in the official language of his choice.

The professional institute believes the linguistic requirements of any position in the federal public service should reflect the objectively identified language requirements and proficiency levels of the actual duties of the position. In order to balance the rights of

employees in bilingual regions to work in the language of their choice with the need for both working levels and management to reflect the makeup of Canadian society, meaningful language training needs to be available to all employees who wish it, from the beginning of their careers.

On September 14, 2004, the institute wrote to 24 departments and agencies requesting information on language training. We asked each department and agency to disclose the amount of money earmarked for language training for fiscal years 2003-04 and 2004-05. We also asked for the number of employees who had or will have access to language training for these two fiscal years, and the circumstances of their training, full time or part time, with the number of hours per week. We also asked how many of these employees were classified in bargaining units represented by the professional institute. Their experience with the School of Public Service on the provision of language training was probed. Our survey concluded with questions about departmental plans to meet their goals within the next three to five years, and how employee career aspirations and personal learning plans are factored into the determination of need for language training within the department.

Of the 24 departments and agencies listed in the appendix to this submission, 20 responded to our inquiry. Key results are as follows.

First, there is no consistent approach from one department to another on the development of action plans, particularly for language training for non-imperative staffing. Some departments are better than others, which suggests a need for a coherent, systematic, service-wide approach to set language training goals. The School of Public Service is not meeting the demand for language training. Some departments indicated they had more than 100 people on waiting lists for training at the school.

“One can only monitor what one can count”: that's one of the answers we got from one of the departments. Some departments stated that they did not have the capability to count the number of employees taking language training, or the capability to determine how many employees were part time or only taking language training after hours.

The same holds true for tracking the budget allocation for language training. Some departments have line items in their budgets dedicated to language training, whereas others simply lump language training costs under the general heading of “professional development”. Professional development encompasses other learning and training experiences intended to maintain and enhance professional competence.

Other departments noted that individual managers were delegated flexibility to reallocate funds from their budgets to cover the costs of language training. From the departments that were able to provide figures on the allocation of funding to language training, several stated that there were less funds for 2004-05 than for the previous year. In some of these departments, the amount was significantly lower. However, it was noted in a couple of cases that the decrease in funding was due to the fact that at the end of the time of writing the response to the institute's letter, they had not yet allocated all their funds to various line items for the current fiscal year.

It was reported that there is a lack of opportunity for employees to access part-time language training, particularly outside the national capital region and Quebec. In Newfoundland and Labrador and other provinces, especially in rural areas, there are no facilities for language training.

Many replies highlighted innovative ways in which language training is being provided in their departments. These have been collected by Treasury Board and published in *Official Language's Compendium of Good Practices*. Just to highlight a few, many of the departments provide access to online training modules, CDs, lunch-hour chats, etc. It appears that these innovative practices are being developed in-house within each department. No department reported that the School of Public Service is offering innovation in language learning.

In addition to our attempts to obtain data directly from departments and agencies, the institute has encouraged members to report online any problems or observations about their experiences with language training. The collection of online opinions pointed to the following conclusions.

The bilingual imperative designation of all EX positions has precluded career advancements into the EX community for many professionals who do not meet language requirements. While many unilingual professionals are interested, and indeed keen to learn the second language, there is insufficient access to language training, either full time or part time. Lack of training opportunity is often due to a lack of funds, but it is sometimes due to a lack of facilities.

● (0920)

[Translation]

In conclusion, the application of official language policies in the workplace should contribute to a positive environment where employees are able to do their best work.

There are many factors that contribute to high morale and performance. One factor is the application of official language policies and at this point, official language policy changes are negatively impacting on opportunities for professionals to advance their careers within the public service. The prospect of career advancement and mobility is a contributing factor when individuals decide on whether or not to pursue a career in the public service.

Consequently, a greater investment in language training is required now to ensure Canadians have a professional, bilingual public service in the future. Equally important, there needs to be recognition that engaging employees and their representatives on the ways and means to promote bilingualism in the workplace is highly desirable.

Clearly, no matter how well intended, unilateral action by the government or indirectly, through public service employers, to impose new official languages policy and procedures will fall short of its objectives without partnership with employees.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Demers. I understand that you have to leave about 10?

Could we agree to limit ourselves to five minutes rather than seven for the first round? That might make it possible to have two quick rounds. Is the committee agreed?

Thank you.

Mr. Lauzon.

● (0925)

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

Hello and welcome.

The Official Languages Action Plan has been in force for two years. Can you tell me if your members have made progress in terms of official languages during the past two years?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Actually, the revised official languages policies were announced by Ms. Robillard in November 2003, I believe, to come into effect on April 1, 2004. Thus the new policies have been in force for barely one year.

I cannot say that my members have made progress in terms of second-language skills, since most of them who have pointed out problems with official languages were people who did not have access to language training. We have been told, both by our members and by departmental representatives, that most funding went to training employees in the EX category, since they had to acquire the second-language skills within some very specific deadlines.

Since our members are not, of course, in the EX category, they did not have access to language training, in most cases.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Your members do not have access to training?

Ms. Michèle Demers: In most cases, they do not, and that is because of the situation in which the departments find themselves. You are aware, of course, that the departments are caught in a financial stranglehold. Training is always the first area where cuts are made and they are probably made faster in the case of language training than in professional training. They do not have the funds required to set up language training programs, liberate people for language training, or replace those who are on training. It is a vicious circle.

When Ms. Robillard introduced the revised policies, she made a commitment to inject more money for this purpose, and she also made a commitment that every new employee in the public service would, systematically, as part of his or her career development plan, have an opportunity to take language training. But as long as there is no firm will to inject money to make this training accessible, it will not happen. This measure has not been implemented since the new policies were adopted.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: A small number of your members have been lucky enough to take training. I would like to know what they think of the courses offered in that training.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Some kinds of courses are more appropriate than others, being more oriented to the day-to-day work than more general kinds of training where you learn to say “Paul is walking Fido”. I know some people who have taken language training and did well. When it is available, it works well.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: When a person gets back to work, is there an opportunity to use that second language?

Ms. Michèle Demers: That is something which should be looked at in detail, I think.

• (0930)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: There is a problem there.

Ms. Michèle Demers: There is a problem, indeed, especially in environments that are overwhelmingly unilingual, whether English or French.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Do you have some suggestions for us?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Suggestions? I think there should be awareness campaigns. The employer must be encouraged to work in partnership with the bargaining agents to develop promotion methods to enable employees to maintain their second-language skills.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: That is a big challenge.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Yes, it is a big challenge.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. André, please.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning, Ms. Demers and Mr. McIntosh. I am pleased you could be with us today. I heard about your public appearance this morning.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Let me just correct a detail. We do not represent 50 professionals, but some 50,000.

Mr. Guy André: I saw that the number had gone up: a minor difference of 49,000.

In your Declaration of Principles, you say: The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada subscribes to the principle... that Canadians have a right to be served in their official language of choice, and that public service employees in the four designated bilingual regions of the country, are entitled to work in the official language of their choice.

How do you reconcile these two principles? Is it the client who chooses the language in which to address the public service, or is it the public service employee who chooses the language for communicating with the client?

Ms. Michèle Demers: There has to be a fair balance between the two, but service to clients—

Mr. Guy André: These are two rights that—

Ms. Michèle Demers: I think they are very compatible with each other. An employee who works where both official languages are in common use must serve the public. The purpose of the public service is to provide services to the public. On the other hand, an anglophone employee in Montreal would have the right to be supervised and evaluated in his or her mother tongue, and could use that language in day-to-day work. However, in my opinion, service to the public should take priority.

Mr. Guy André: Here is another item from your Declaration of Principles: Language must not be a barrier to advancement.

You know that the Official Languages Act stipulates that some positions must necessarily be bilingual. We also know there are exclusion approval orders. Some people can occupy bilingual positions without being bilingual. They are not able to provide service in the other official language. As I interpret this declaration, it is not very important to be bilingual. In reality, you are saying that a unilingual person should not be penalized in career advancement. That is paradoxical.

Ms. Michèle Demers: No, it's not paradoxical. Our Declaration of Principles fundamentally supports the principle of equality of the official languages in the public service. We are saying that, for nearly 30 years, the employer has not respected its own official languages rules. The employer has let things slide. People came to depend on the fact that they could go on language training and come back after two years, whether or not they met the requirements. It was not a problem, because in any case they could keep on doing what they had been doing.

Suddenly, it has changed course and now says the Official Languages Act must be enforced, that it is the law and it must be put into practice. That is fine. We are not opposed. But give us a chance to catch up. Some people have been there for 25 years and the fact that they did not meet the requirements has always been tolerated. Give them a chance to learn the language.

When I say that, I am very much aware of our shared responsibility for acquiring and maintaining skills in a second language. Employees have their responsibilities but the employer has some, too, since it has had such a lax attitude for all these years. The employer cannot say—overnight—that the public service must be bilingual and that no matter what becomes of the incumbent employees, this is going ahead.

We say there must be a plan for gradual implementation, whether it is a three-year or five-year plan, that it must give people an opportunity to learn the second language, and that it must bring about a positive culture change. People must not be forced, making them bitter and resistant to bilingualism.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you Mr. André.

Mr. Julian, please.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ms. Demers and Mr. McIntosh, for being with us today.

I will begin by asking you to give the government a grade. Mr. Alcock made a presentation to the committee Tuesday evening, and we learned that the number of designated bilingual positions in the federal public service occupied by bilingual employees has decreased in the past 10 years. Ten years ago, it was over 90%. Now it is about 85%.

You said this morning that in terms of language training the government was not making all the effort it needed to. What grade would you give the government on honouring its commitments with respect to bilingualism, bilingual service and the opportunity for public servants to work in the language of their choice: A, B, C, D, E or F?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Do you mean in terms of concrete results?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes. I do not mean promises, but results.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Frankly, it is a tough question, because I have not seen the statistics you mentioned. There are many statistics on official languages and there have been many studies on the topic. The study I referred to in my brief was a study on attitudes toward bilingualism. The study on positions actually filled appropriately—

Mr. Peter Julian: More simply, then, give it a grade based on your experience and that of your members.

Ms. Michèle Demers: In terms of intentions, I would give it 100%. In terms of methods of getting there, getting where it wants to go, I could not give it a passing grade. I would say 40%, since it has tried to meet its objectives, but in a very clumsy way, I think.

Mr. Peter Julian: So far, it has been a failure.

Ms. Michèle Demers: That is correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. In my opinion, it is important for the committee to know where we are at present, if we want to work with a minority government facing the challenges you have identified.

As for the bilingualism bonus, you said in your presentation that the amount of \$800 was not enough. Indeed, it has not changed in years. You say that it should be the subject of negotiations, as I understand it.

If this issue of the bilingual bonus were a subject for bargaining between your union and other organizations representing public servants on the one hand, and the government on the other, do you not think the government might exert pressure to have this bonus abolished or reduced? We know that for many years the government has had a tendency to try to reduce anything going to public servants, while they provide incredible services to our country.

Ms. Michèle Demers: That is a very good question. Yes, it could imperil the bonus. The bilingualism bonus has existed for 30 years. When it was instituted, it was worth about 10% of the average federal public service wage. Now it is worth around 1%, 2% or 3%. The government had to introduce incentives to encourage people to learn a second language and that was one means. It was a means that existed at the time, and it has operated fairly well over the years; at present, it is outdated and the amount is insignificant. It is no longer an incentive. The government ought to consider that. The bilingual bonus is a policy from the National Joint Council. That is the forum where the bargaining takes place. It is not group by group at the bargaining table, for each union and group in the public service. It is

negotiated centrally. Let us be clear: it was negotiated I do not know how many years ago.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Julian. We will continue with Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Thank you. Good morning and congratulations. I always find it interesting to see women at the head of institutions like yours. It is very stimulating for other women.

I do agree with you: we will not be having any great debates here. Even on the government side, you will hear that the committee members are not necessarily satisfied—I can speak for myself—about what money we can put into this, what meat we can put on the bones.

You have put your finger on something that has been bothering me since we began these hearings on bilingualism in the public service: you talked about a culture change, and that intrigues me. I represent Gatineau, a riding not far from here, where many of your members and Public Service Alliance of Canada members live. When I talk to people in my riding, I constantly hear that these are fine principles but they make life on the inside difficult. As a francophone living in a province where francophones are in the majority, I was not always entirely aware of what minorities are going through. It became more obvious when I came here to Parliament, and I must say that my eyes have been opened about many things.

How can this culture be changed? I have a hard time accepting your second statement. It comes back to what Mr. André was saying. Saying that language must not be a barrier to advancement in the federal public service is a strong statement. I understand and I accept all the criticism you make of the government, but I have some criticism for you as well. Is saying something like that not a way of denying the importance of bilingualism? In the case of a scientist, no one would tell him that the fact he was an expert in his field did not count toward his advancement. If bilingualism is important in the federal public service, I do not understand your institute saying that language must not be a barrier, even though certain things were tolerated in the past.

There is an action plan. A new course has been set. Either we accept it or we do not. When I see francophones, even in senior management, who work only in English, I find that disturbing. There is a problem. How can all this be reconciled? How can the culture be changed when it is not even recognized that bilingualism is fundamental?

Ms. Michèle Demers: I agree with you completely: bilingualism is fundamental. On the other hand, a culture does not change overnight. There is no magic knife that can create a bilingual culture overnight. It does not work like that. If we want people to believe in bilingualism, if we want to convince them, they have to be led to it in a positive way.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: It has been 35 years, Ms. Demers. We have celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Official Languages Act. I think that we have been very nice and everyone has been tiptoeing around. We are so afraid that people— We ought to be proud. I am proud to be bilingual and able to go everywhere in Canada. Why see that as a knife? If it were announced today that tomorrow certain positions— You, you are almost preaching non-imperative staffing of bilingual positions. I have a hard time accepting that. I repeat that I will accept all the criticism anyone can make of the government. It is up to us to see that you get the tools you need. But what message are we sending our employees if we say that imperative staffing of bilingual positions is not important and we are just going to putter along? You may think I am impatient, but 35 years is almost my whole life. I think it is a long time.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I am just as impatient as you. In my opinion, however, when we look at the situation completely objectively, we see that it has not been 35 years, but only a year and a half. For a year and a half, this new course has been taken seriously. All I want to say is, let us do things the right way; let us put the necessary resources into it; let us move forward and promote these measures, but not unilaterally and not without giving people some opportunities.

There may be a great deal of bilingual imperative staffing in the public service, but it must be done in moderation and with balance. Let us suppose, for example, that in an office providing service to the public, 10 employees out of 20 are bilingual and able to provide service in both official languages. It might be possible to be flexible in such a case, and allow the 10 employees to reach their bilingualism goals. If we took the principle seriously that employees entering the federal public service must have access to a development plan including official languages, the objectives could be met.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boivin. That is all the time we have.

We will now begin the second and final round, which should take until 10:05 or 10:10. Then we will pause for a minute before considering the committee's future deliberations.

Mr. Vellacott.

[*English*]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Thank you for being here, Michèle and Robert.

In your brief, you mentioned the four designated bilingual regions in the country. Maybe you could describe for me what they are. I've got a map before me, and it looks like there are actually six. Maybe some of these are lumped together.

It includes the bilingual region of northern Ontario, the bilingual region of eastern Ontario, the national capital region, the bilingual region of Montreal, bilingual regions of other parts of Quebec, and the province of New Brunswick.

Are some of these grouped together when you talk of the four designated regions?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Yes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Perhaps you can name them specifically, then.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I would say the Montreal region, New Brunswick, the bilingual regions of Ontario, and the other bilingual regions of Quebec.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The national capital region would be—

Ms. Michèle Demers: And the national capital region, yes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: That would be five, unless you include that as part of Ontario.

Ms. Michèle Demers: In the official documents, they're always qualified as four official designated bilingual regions in the country.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay.

Picking up on what Mr. André said, and I guess what Françoise was talking about as well, there does seem to be a bit of a contradiction here, and I have a little difficulty getting my head around it. If you've got individuals who are entitled to work in the official language of their choice, are you talking just in terms of the supervision aspect of it? You seemed to touch on that, so maybe you could explore this for me, or expand on it.

We're talking about service to people in terms of the language of their choice, but then these people are working in the language of *their* choice. So is this in terms of the customer and the public service or just in terms of the supervisory aspect?

• (0950)

Ms. Michèle Demers: No, as I said to, I think, Mr. Julian, I believe the first and foremost responsibility is to serve the public in the official language of their choice in those regions designated bilingual. But that does not prevent an employee from working in the official language of his choice, or his first language, in a meeting or through supervision, with his or her supervisor. There needs to be a proper mix, a proper balance, but in terms of service to the public, obviously the public has a right to be served in the official language of their choice in those officially designated bilingual regions.

I mean, that happens a lot in this town. When you go to a meeting, the conversation switches from French to English. People express themselves in the language of their choice.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Does this mean that in all circumstances, in providing that service in the language of their choice to the public, it has to be one and the same person providing that language service?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Not necessarily.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Or could it be that if there is a query or something to be responded to in English, then one person is the point person or designate for it, and the same goes for French? Is that sometimes how it's done?

Ms. Michèle Demers: There should be an appropriate balance of qualified positions with respect to languages. If there is a pool of people who can provide service to the public in both languages, there should be allowances made, with flexibility to allow those other people who are unilingual to reach the language requirements through training and mechanisms that the employer could put in place.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: So you're saying that you can make that provision of language in the request of the public, but not necessarily in one and the same person, in all cases.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Absolutely.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: But you're still moving to the goal of having that person bilingual, then?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Sure.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Insisting upon it? Or are you just—

Ms. Michèle Demers: In the bilingual regions, that's something we should be striving for.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Right. But at the end of the day, with the reality of how it's been over several decades, there certainly is a view that we can accommodate those other unilinguals, be they only French or only English, and continue to provide them employment, and then just designate them as required, by way of the public demand.

Ms. Michèle Demers: There is a requirement that the positions in the federal public service be objectively designated as per the requirements of the job. That means that you cannot just arbitrarily say in a particular office that every position is going to be bilingual imperative. There needs to be a needs assessment done, and an appropriate designation of the position, based on the needs and the requirements of the job.

So you could have a situation where not all positions need to be bilingual, but I think it's something we should strive for, to reach that goal of having, in the regions designated bilingual, people fully fluent in both official languages.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Vellacott.

Continuing with Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): I also want to congratulate you on your new position. I am sure it is quite a challenge.

I would like to know approximately what percentage of your employees are bilingual at the present time.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I have no idea. We do not have that kind of data. On the other hand, I can tell you that here in the national capital region, a large number of our employees are probably bilingual. In addition, I often meet francophones in unilingual anglophone regions.

Mr. Marc Godbout: You cannot give us those figures? It could be interesting.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I do not know how it could be done. You would have to request it from our employers. It would probably be easier for them than for us to do that kind of analysis. In our case, we would have to do a voluntary survey or something like that. And we know what proportion of people reply to surveys. In short, I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Marc Godbout: It would be interesting to look at such data, if that could be done.

Ms. Michèle Demers: Yes.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I want to be certain I understand the distinction between what is imperative and what is not.

You appear to be encouraging—and correct me if I am wrong—a fairly easy recourse to non-imperative staffing of designated bilingual positions. Some people consider this a problem. It could be that this practice occurs too frequently. In fact, we find ourselves with a situation where the public service gives an impression of being bilingual but really is not.

Can you go into more detail on this issue? I would like to know if we have understood your position correctly.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I said earlier that, for many years, there was really no attention paid to the official languages issue, or else things were done rather haphazardly. It is only recently that people have begun to say, seriously and with political will, that goals will be set and reached.

The way these goals will be reached must be considered intelligently. We all want the same thing. We all want the culture and attitude to bilingualism to change and become a way of life. In Europe people speak three, four, five languages. It is an incredible treasure to speak more than one language. We know that. But there is still resistance and there are problems to overcome. To ensure that people want to achieve this, because there is a deadline and some incentive, we must go at it gradually and intelligently.

So, we recommend developing a training program that responds to need and enables people to learn the other official language. They must be given a share of the responsibility for learning the other official language and maintaining that knowledge, and they must be given some time. An action plan must be created.

When Ms. Robillard announced her new policies, she said the EX-5s had to be bilingual by April 2005 and the EX-3s by April 2007. That is a plan.

How can this opportunity be offered to the EXs and not to those who will become EXs in the future? They are the new generation, “la relève”. These are people who have acquired experience and will aspire to those positions. We are telling you to invest some money. At present, there are many initiatives in the federal government, many fine projects and huge reorganizations, but people must accomplish them while taking budgetary constraints into consideration. The departments must economize by \$11 billion over the next five years. Moreover, they must provide language training and the government is no longer providing the funds. It will not happen unless there is some money. It is a question of cost.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godbout.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I think I am talking too much.

The Chair: They can interrupt you.

Mr. Bergeron, it is your turn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have been listening to you talk and it reminds me of a song that was very popular in Quebec during my childhood. The chorus said that everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die. For 35 years the federal government appears not to have made the effort required to reach its objectives. You have emphasized the issue of training. I would just mention that you are asking for more training but you do not appear to have the statistics or data that would enable you to identify how many of your employees would need training.

I will go further. The federal government has probably been lax and let things slide with respect to the Official Languages Act in the past 35 years. Nevertheless, I think you are demonstrating some naivety and magical thinking if you imagine that, if we declare bilingualism not to be a barrier to employee advancement, that will be true.

We find ourselves in this situation 35 years later, which is why the francophone and Acadian communities of Canada are lobbying the government to make Part VII of the Official Languages Act enforceable. In fact, 35 years later, we get the impression that it has been mostly a failure. We are in a situation where 60% to 70% of designated bilingual positions in the Department of National Defence are filled by unilingual anglophones.

When a position is designated bilingual, as I understand it, the staffing must be imperative. If there is a position as an accountant open, you do not hire a mechanic who promises to become an accountant one day. If it is an engineering position, you do not hire a hairdresser who promises to become an engineer one day. It does not work like that. If the position is bilingual, you cannot hire people and make them promise to become bilingual. At some point, the government will have to provide training and will have to make a lot more effort, but what is really needed is employees with enough openness of mind to say that a designated bilingual position is really a designated bilingual position.

Ms. Michèle Demers: I hear what you are saying. I defend the interests of the members of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. As the representative for those professionals, I will tell you one thing: if you want a position to be designated bilingual imperative, call it that, but give some warning. Say that this position will be bilingual in three years and that candidates for the position must meet the language requirements. Give people the tools they need to meet the language requirements and also leave part of the responsibility up to individuals. When the position is designated bilingual, then it will be bilingual forever. But do not do it in such a way that all the employees in the public service have it in for you or that you end up declaring war on unilinguals. They will tell you it is discriminatory; they no longer have the right to work in their own country in the language they choose; barriers are being set up so they no longer can be promoted; and certain positions are blocked to them. Put some winning conditions in place—you must know that expression—and make sure it is done, but done with a plan. That is all I say.

• (1000)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I think that bilingualism as you see it may be a barrier to promotion in the public service, but it is certainly not a barrier to being able to work in the language of one's choice. If someone is francophone or anglophone and has the good luck to be bilingual, obviously that person can work in his or her chosen

language. It is simply that this person is also able to work in the other official language if necessary. So I do not understand the idea that someone who is bilingual cannot work in the language of his or her choice. It is not an argument. I do not think it is a sound argument.

Ms. Michèle Demers: That is your opinion.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Which you clearly do not share.

Ms. Michèle Demers: That's it.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: According to you, if someone is bilingual, they cannot work in their language of choice.

Ms. Michèle Demers: No, that is not what I said. I am saying that if you are establishing positions where bilingualism is imperative, you have to do it in an intelligent way. That is all I am saying. We are not opposed to the official languages. We are not opposed to having to provide services in both official languages. We are opposed to the way some departments—not all of them—are doing it, unilaterally. Others do it in a much more intelligent way, with a plan over two, three or four years. They say that in a certain sector they will have so many positions designated bilingual imperative within a year or two, and that in three years another category of positions will be bilingual, and so on.

However, despite these fine plans, the training tools and the funding for language training are still lacking.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The last speaker will be Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Usually, when we talk about a certain number of francophones, we think of a population that is stable or perhaps declining. Nevertheless, in my province, British Columbia, there is growth in the francophone population. We now have the fourth largest provincial francophone population in the country, following Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick. We have 65,000 francophones. Some regions, including Whistler, now have such a high percentage of francophones that it will soon be important to have bilingual services.

I note that you say in your submission, “the linguistic requirements of any position in the federal public service should reflect the objectively identified language requirements...” In regions where the francophone population is growing, or certain regions where the anglophone population is growing, what criteria should be used to give these new regions the ability to provide services in both languages?

Ms. Michèle Demers: I must say frankly that I am not sure how I am going to answer that question, but I think that a region is designated bilingual based on the percentage of the population, studied statistically. I do not know that percentage. I imagine that if there are a sufficient number of people, they may be a desire to provide bilingual services, but I do not want to venture into an area I am not familiar with.

• (1005)

Mr. Peter Julian: You said earlier you would give a grade of 40%. I think that is appropriate.

What would be the top two or three priorities to absolutely get started on, so that this 40% mark could get closer to 100%?

Ms. Michèle Demers: I think an extensive program should be established for training.

Mr. Peter Julian: That would be the first priority?

Ms. Michèle Demers: Yes. Here we are talking about training that focuses on the work and on needs in the work environment. The second priority would be funding, in the departments and agencies, that would make it possible to meet requirements. The third priority would be to develop a partnership with the unions in order to begin work on a joint plan.

The new Public Service Modernization Act talks about co-development and co-determination. In that context, it could be

fascinating to work with the employer to establish an action plan and implement the new official languages policies in the federal public service.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

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

Thank you, Ms. Demers.

Thank you, Mr. McIntosh

We will break for two minutes and then we will discuss committee business in camera.

[The Committee resumed sitting in camera]

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