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Mr. Guy Lauzon

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I want to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Let me point out that our meeting this morning will be broadcast by Radio-Canada.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Bélisle): It's actually a video recording.

The Chair: Do the committee members wish to allow this?

Mr. Malo, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Chairman, what prevented us from being able to televise this meeting with the Official Languages Commissioner?

The Clerk: There are only two rooms where this is possible and, unfortunately, those rooms were taken. We were able to get an already-booked room on Tuesday because we had priority since we had two ministers appearing. However, a commissioner does not give us priority.

The Chair: We could not do that twice in the same week.

Mr. Luc Malo: If I had known, Mr. Commissioner, I would not have asked.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I would like you to verify this information, because I think that the commissioner is as important as ministers are. He is a representative of Parliament. I'm convinced that, under the rules we adopted, when an officer of Parliament appears before a committee, he should have priority and we should get a room. If the meeting is not televised, we should at least get a bigger room than this one. I think this proves how official languages are treated, not only out there, but also at the House of Commons itself.

The Chair: The clerk has taken note of your comments and, the next time, we will try to get a bigger room.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, given the importance of this meeting, the appearance by the commissioner and the fact that this follows upon a meeting with the ministers, I feel this situation should have been presented to the committee. We could have then decided to hold this meeting another week, in order to be certain of getting a room in which our meeting could have been televised.

The Chair: Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I agree with you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

The Chair: I want to welcome the Commissioner, Mr. Graham Fraser. Mr. Fraser will speak for 15 or 10 minutes and, then, we will ask questions.

Welcome, Mr. Fraser. Would you like to introduce your colleagues?

Mr. Graham Fraser (Commissioner of Official Languages, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

I'd like to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting me to discuss the official languages program in the Department of National Defence.

[Translation]

I would like to introduce the gentlemen accompanying me, Gérard Finn, Renald Dussault and Marcel Charlebois. They are here to answer detailed questions, because they have been working in this area for longer than I. In all likelihood, I will need their assistance to answer your questions.

The mission of National Defence and the Canadian Forces is to defend Canada and the interests and values of all Canadians, and to contribute to international peace and security.

My appearance is part of a lengthy dialogue with the Canadian Forces on the subject of linguistic duality. For almost a century now, the Canadian Forces have tried to come to terms with their responsibilities towards francophone members and their families, and since the Laurendeau-Dunton report almost four decades ago, this dialogue has intensified. All my predecessors have expressed their concern about the slow progress of the Canadian Forces and have reported on the significant problems that have emerged in terms of respecting the Official Languages Act. Now, in response to a report on a complaint by the late MP Benoît Sauvageau, we see the latest version of the Canadian Forces response and the latest admission of failure.

Given their specific mandate, the Canadian Forces have long been seen as different from other government institutions in terms of the application of the Official Languages Act. I agree that there are significant operational differences between the Canadian Forces and the federal public service. For example, while public servants choose where they work, military personnel may be sent on assignments anywhere in the country or in the world, based on their skills. After a few years, they are reassigned based on the Canadian Forces operational requirements. I am told that there are 10,000 transfers per year. A person's language is not a determining factor in the decision.

I should point out that the Official Languages Act does not confer special or preferred status on the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. The act applies equally to all federal institutions.

● (0910)

[English]

Therefore, I feel that the Canadian Forces must reflect Canadian values, including linguistic duality. The forces must promote this duality and fully comply with the Official Languages Act. Beyond the legislative requirements, it's extremely important that the men and women who accept the inherent risks and choose to serve their country in the Canadian Forces are able to do so in an environment that respects their preferred official language.

Over the years, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces have always demonstrated a willingness to comply with the Official Languages Act. However, I note that many of the procedures and policies they've developed have never produced the anticipated results. A new policy, known as the functional approach, is now being proposed, and we should evaluate it in terms of its application and its anticipated results. This new policy does not necessarily run contrary to the act, but the five-year timeline for assessing results is unacceptable.

I'd like to give you some brief background information to explain how I reached this conclusion.

In 1969, nearly 40 years ago, the Laurendeau-Dunton commission issued a series of recommendations to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces concerning the equality of the two linguistic groups. In 1972, an initial 15-year plan was developed to increase bilingualism and biculturalism in the Canadian Forces. At the end of that period, the Canadian Forces recognized that the objectives had not been met.

In 1988, the department adopted a new policy, called the bilingual officer corps, to develop a pool of bilingual officers. The goal of this policy was to ensure that all senior officers, starting with the rank of colonel and navy captain, would be bilingual regardless of their duties or where they were posted. This policy was modified several times over the years and its scope became limited. It was recently renamed the universal approach. Now, 18 years later, there is an acknowledgement that this policy has failed, and the Canadian Forces is proposing yet another new approach.

[Translation]

All commissioners of official languages have expressed concerns regarding the application of the Official Languages Act by the Department of National Defence. My predecessors have issued a

number of observations and recommendations in their studies and investigations, as well as in a report to the governor in council. Many of the previous commissioners have criticized the assignment process, which allows unilingual persons to hold bilingual positions, and have often condemned the fact that language policies fail to produce clear results.

In her 2001 investigation report, the commissioner issued recommendations concerning the Bilingual Officer Corps policy. She recommended a review of the language requirements for all officer positions to ensure that they are objectively necessary in each instance. She also recommended that the department identify the positions that required the immediate use of both official languages, and had to be staffed by officers who met these requirements at the time of their assignment or promotion.

More recently, an investigation was conducted in 2005 concerning the way in which the Canadian Forces as a whole dealt with bilingualism when recruiting, transferring military personnel, and determining appointments and promotions. In 2006, the commissioner conducted an audit of National Defence headquarters to determine whether the department and the Canadian Forces had succeeded in creating a work environment that is conducive to the use of French and English, and that enables employees to use the official language of their choice in their workplace.

The resulting recommendations call on the Canadian Forces to: set higher goals with regard to the proportion of military personnel who meet the language requirements of their bilingual positions or function; ensure that the performance management agreements of senior officers include objectives concerning language skills, and the creation and maintenance of an environment that is conducive to the use of both official languages; provide every opportunity and the necessary tools to military personnel who aspire to supervisory or other leadership positions to learn a second official language in order to maintain or improve their linguistic skills. Raise to the level of CBC the language skills and linguistic profile of bilingual supervisory positions in bilingual units so that the positions are filled only by personnel who meet these requirements at the time of transfer or assignment.

How have the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces acted on these recommendations? How will the new approach affect their implementation? That remains to be seen.

● (0915)

[English]

I would now like to talk about this new functional approach.

In accordance with the National Defence Act, this approach recognizes that, unlike the public service, the Canadian Forces manages its personnel by unit rather than by position. The information received indicates that the Canadian Forces feels this new model brings its training and employment policies more in line with the requirements of the Official Languages Act. This new approach marks a departure from the bilingual corps of officers policy adopted in 1988. Following the failure of the previous policy, we now have a new formula that once again offers no guarantees.

I can't help but wonder about the thinking behind this change in direction and the reasons the approach adopted in 1988 failed. Could one factor be the closure of the Saint-Jean military college? Do we recruit enough francophone officers? Under the system, what are the chances for francophone soldiers to work in their language? Does this mean that language training does not begin until a person is promoted to colonel? What will be the impact on francophone recruitment?

The Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean was established because National Defence wanted to increase its recruitment of francophone officers. It opened its doors in 1952, and over the years it grew from a college to a full university. As it was located in a French-speaking province, it offered the added benefits of enabling anglophone officers to participate in the best immersion program in North America.

In the 1990s, as part of the government's many initiatives to improve public finances, it closed two of the military colleges—Royal Roads and the Saint-Jean royal military college.

The Royal Military College in Kingston, already bilingual in theory, then became a centre for training fully bilingual student officers. Despite the efforts of officials in Kingston, there was a slight decrease in the number of francophone student officers by 1995. It would be interesting to know the current number in attendance.

Throughout the 1990s, National Defence made some progress in providing soldiers with professional training in French. This was much less true for officer training and development. In fact, as they move up through the ranks, officers have fewer opportunities to take their training in French.

[Translation]

The Canadian Forces agree that bilingualism is an integral part of leadership. However, under the new functional approach, only supervisors in a bilingual or unilingual French unit must be proficient in French, aside from certain lieutenant-generals and vice-admirals. The reality is that there are still too few bilingual military supervisors to create a work environment conducive to the effective use of both official languages in bilingual units.

Our investigations, studies and audits have shown that, over the course of some 20 years, the percentage of bilingual military positions filled by bilingual personnel has not increased by much and currently stands at only 47%. This is quite simply unacceptable.

In all of this, we must consider the perspective of francophones enlisting in the Canadian Forces. Even if the basic career training they receive is in French, new francophone recruits must learn English sooner or later. It is practically impossible to establish a

challenging career in the Canadian Forces if you are a unilingual francophone. Francophones fall behind their unilingual anglophone colleagues, who get an immediate start on their career. One of the rare career opportunities for a unilingual francophone soldier, for example, is as an infantryman at Canadian Forces Base Valcartier.

[English]

In conclusion, the 1990s were particularly difficult for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. Budget reductions forced them to reduce their operational resources, and as in most other departments, their official languages program was inevitably affected. The 2003 action plan on official languages recognized that Canada's linguistic duality was affected during those difficult years. Corrective action measures have been identified.

Recently, however, the government substantially increased funding to National Defence and the Canadian Forces. We're starting a new chapter, following years of cutbacks. I'm hopeful that the overall official languages program, including language training for military personnel, will reap the benefits of this new funding.

Budgets are an important component, but we must remember that the situation will not change without leadership at the highest level. Over the years we've often seen procedures and policies revised, but no substantive change. After more than 25 years of various reforms, the Canadian Forces have examined the issue from every angle. It's more than time to establish clear official languages initiatives based on measurable objectives.

We cannot see another failure like the Canadian Forces' universal approach. It's unacceptable for the Department of National Defence to give itself five years to introduce the main elements of its new policy.

I'd like to point out that although this new policy takes into account some of the recommendations made by my predecessor, neither she nor I have endorsed this new functional approach. It will be analyzed when we begin the follow-up to the investigation on language at work in the department this year. It will also be reviewed during the follow-up to our audit at the National Defence Headquarters scheduled for next year.

● (0920)

[Translation]

As I look ahead in my mandate, I anticipate seeing concrete results from National Defence and the Canadian Forces.

Thank you very much. I shall be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser, for that very interesting presentation.

We will now begin our first round of questions. Each member of the committee will have seven minutes. In keeping with what I told previous witnesses, I will be strictly enforcing the time allotted each member.

Ms. Folco, you may ask the first question.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Fraser.

I am very pleased to see you here today, in your role as Official Languages Commissioner. I am not saying that your predecessors did not take this task seriously, on the contrary, but I am personally very pleased to see you here, all the more so because, listening to your speech, I noted that you were drawing a very arresting picture of what I and many of my colleagues think of the new situation within the Canadian Forces.

I have always believed that the Canadian Forces were there to protect Canadians, be it here or elsewhere, in the short or long term. The Canadian Forces also project an image of Canada within Canada but also to others outside of Canada.

What I heard from the Minister responsible for Official Languages and the Minister of National Defence is that this image was increasingly becoming—it already is—one in which Canada is almost solely a unilingual anglophone country.

You said something extremely important. Sometimes, it is important to face reality, and you did so by recognizing that a unilingual francophone, an infantryman, has nowhere to go in the Canadian armed forces, because of the regulations, because of the way in which courses are organized. Mr. Commissioner, I am a former linguist. So you can understand that I have an opinion on this.

I want to make a comment and then ask a question. I make this comment to the Minister of National Defence. When language courses are organized, various criteria are taken into consideration. First, the objectives are considered and, ultimately, those objectives are assessed. However, I consider the objective of this new program of the Canadian Forces to be mediocre, if not worse.

Then, you need to ensure that those taking the course are motivated. Given the situation you've just described to us, I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that there is little or no motivation. I am talking about anglophones who have to learn French.

Then, we must consider the tools provided to both students and teachers. Once again, the situation you described with regard to the St. John Royal Military College, which was an excellent environment and provided immersion courses not only to the college itself but also to the town, demonstrates that the tools that the Canadian Forces has made available and continues to make available are steadily deteriorating. Of course, we know little about the evaluation.

As a former linguist, I fail to understand why they decided to do an evaluation five years later. Why not 15 years later while they're at it?

Finally, you used one word repeatedly in your speech, the word "unacceptable".

Those are the comments I wanted to make to you to tell you just how happy I am to hear your comments. Could you comment on what I've just said, but I'd also like you to comment on the following. If I've understood correctly, we have been told that from now on, Canadian Forces units would more or less be divided into linguistic

units: anglophones on the one side; francophones on the other. This reminds me somewhat of what happened during the Second World War, when many countries, including the United States, had Black units and White units. And never the two shall meet. If we want the Canadian Forces to reflect our society, it is essential that people work together. Therefore, I am opposed to the idea of having separate linguistic units right from the start. I would like to hear your comments on this, please.

● (0925)

Mr. Graham Fraser: First, we must recognize that the Canadian Forces have shown good will by going beyond the requirements of the act. This universal approach, the goal of which was to ensure that everyone would speak both official languages, was admirable, but to some extent it was done without specific targets. This meant that, often, officers took the mandatory training and then spent their careers in a unit where there were very few francophones, in an anglophone region.

Let's take the example of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, based in Alberta. This is not really an area where officers can maintain what they've previously learned. Also, under section 91 of the act, a language requirement cannot be applied unless required. To some extent, the fact that the Canadian Forces have developed a more targeted plan, which is trying to suit capacities to needs, is not contrary to the legislation. My fear is that this is almost a parallel system to the one that already exists in the public service, where there are unilingual francophone regions, bilingual regions and unilingual anglophone regions.

Imagine there is a tank repairman working at Valcartier and suddenly we need one in Edmonton. It's not like in the public service, where a competition is held and the applicant agrees to live in an anglophone environment. In reality, the repairman must go to the Edmonton base within a week at most. That is how the Canadian Forces operate. In principle, on paper, it could work, but I fear in the long run for individuals and their families.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, I have to stop you. Thank you for your answer.

We will ask Ms. Mourani to ask the next question.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to thank you for your testimony. Could you clarify one small point. On February 27, the Minister for The Francophonie and the Official Languages, the Hon. Josée Verner, said, and I quote:

I am following these efforts closely, and I am pleased to be able to work with the commissioner to promote this invaluable treasure... I had the opportunity to discuss this topic with Commissioner Fraser a few weeks ago, and I know that he is giving his full attention to this issue.

Yesterday, in the House, my colleague Richard Nadeau questioned whether the minister had consulted you about the implementation of this policy. Were you consulted?

• (0930)

Mr. Graham Fraser: As commissioner, I was not consulted. Recommendations were made, and we were assured that they were followed during the development of this approach. If, by consultation, they mean that we approved it step-by-step, I must say that this is not how the process went. Given the follow-up on our investigations and audits, there is an information process, but we did not approve each step. To that extent, we were not consulted.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: When you say—

Mr. Graham Fraser: The first time I had a detailed presentation on this was this week, when Colonel Milot came prior to his appearance and presented the approach.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: When you say that you were assured that your recommendations were followed, is this true? When you looked at this new policy, did you see that your recommendations had been followed or not?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It's difficult to say to the extent that one very clear recommendation was that it was essential for bilingual positions to be filled by bilingual individuals. We cannot assess the success of a plan in advance and we cannot ensure that everything has already been accomplished, but neither can we wait five years to ensure that this is being done.

Renald, do you have any additional comments?

Mr. Renald Dussault (Assistant Commissioner, Compliance Assurance Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): I would like to add that we have procedures in place to follow up on our recommendations, be they investigation reports or audit reports, and more recently, with our audit or the latest investigation reports submitted, the follow-ups remain to be done.

This fall, we will begin one of our follow-ups and, next year, we plan to follow up on our recommendations regarding the audit report. There is a rigorous follow-up. When we do this kind of follow-up, we go over each recommendation made with the institution involved, and we see with the institution the follow-up given to each of our recommendations. So this remains to be done.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: So, if I understand correctly, at this time, what the government is saying, in other words that it followed your recommendations, has not yet been corroborated. We will need to assess whether these recommendations have really been followed. In fact, you may be able to tell us in a year.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I hope so, in the sense that the minister is saying that things were working better and that they were very aware of the problems with the current system. In passing, the figures are very telling here. But we are not yet able to say whether the new system will fix these problems. We will verify what is happening on the ground. If we continue to have a system where unilingual officers fill bilingual positions, this new approach will be yet another failure. We cannot assess the success of a plan by looking at the plan. We have to see whether it works in reality.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I want to make a comment. Do you feel that this new policy is a kind of attempt to assimilate francophones in the armed forces?

Mr. Graham Fraser: For decades, we had proof that there was pressure to assimilate with the transfer of francophone families to

bases where the support services for those families were almost non-existent. I don't know whether this new approach will change existing trends.

• (0935)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Mourani.

We will now ask Mr. Godin to be the third questioner.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank the commissioner for coming.

The first time you appeared, I was not here, but I am pleased to meet you today, you and the members of your team. You are servants of Parliament and the guardians of the Official Languages Act.

I liked the way you talked about the official languages. I think that you take this seriously. In your book *Sorry, I Don't Speak French*, you wrote about this. It is very telling. The words "I don't speak French" make me think of the Canadian Forces.

You said that you found the universal approach to be interesting. It is somewhat like a vision. Based on that vision, we are losing ground. At least, that is how I see it. The functional approach is about respecting the act. If people aren't satisfied, they change the act. It is as simple as that.

I am not an expert, but I think I know that the highest-ranking officers at National Defence have to be bilingual whereas the lower ranks don't have to be. It's almost like telling young people that they don't need to worry, that they can go to school, that they won't have to learn both official languages. The implication is that bilingualism is not important, that now that they have enrolled in the Canadian Forces, that no one has the time to do anything for them anymore so they'll find them a little spot here or there.

Mr. Commissioner, it's unfortunate that the former Liberal government closed the Saint-Jean military base. We must not forget this. Sometimes, people don't speak bluntly. We use words like "formerly" for example. The fact remains that the Liberals didn't help us.

Now that I have stated where things stand, how they stood in the past and the fact that we haven't made any progress, I want to talk about the 12 recommendations made by the Office of the Commissioner, which I have here. This week, the minister testified before the committee and she said, if I understand correctly, that 10 recommendations had been followed. So which two were not? Were they the most important ones?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am not able to answer that. Renald or Gérard might be able to.

Mr. Renald Dussault: As we said at the end of the speech, what is important to us is to evaluate the results. We will conduct a detailed follow-up to our audit report. Based on that report, we will be able to...

Mr. Yvon Godin: You talk about results, but does the plan for these people include the 10 recommendations made by the office? That's what they are saying, right? Moreover, they claim that they consulted, as if the two parties sat down together and came to an agreement. That remains to be determined. Indeed, it did not happen like that. They read the recommendations and drafted their plan. When we asked the minister the question, she said that the exchanges had not taken place with Mr. Fraser but with Ms. Adam. If we need to have Ms. Adam appear on the matter, we will do so.

Mr. Renald Dussault: It's important to understand the process subsequent to an audit report. I will give you a general overview.

First of all, we do a preliminary report that is then submitted to the institution concerned. The institution prepares comments which are usually integrated as such into our audit report. The commissioner then issues a final audit report. Generally speaking, 18 months to 2 years later—and we are currently in this phase—we meet once again with the people from the institution and we look at the list of our recommendations and assess what type of follow-up has been done. As I said earlier, we have not yet completed this phase. It is very difficult to say—

Mr. Yvon Godin: But we have been told that 10 out of the 12 recommendations in this plan have been implemented.

Mr. Renald Dussault: As I said, we have not yet completed this part of our process.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like the commissioner to look into this issue and come back and tell us whether or not 10 out of the 12 recommendations have really been implemented. I would also like to know what two recommendations are not part of the plan.

• (0940)

Mr. Renald Dussault: As I said, this is exactly what the follow-up process to the audit report is all about: we examine one recommendation at a time.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Fraser, you said that five years was too long a time period. Personally, I find that 5 out of 400 years is not all that long. Let us say that our problem has been resolved within five years. I have been here for 10 years, and we have never stopped talking about it. I believe that the Department of National Defence has contravened the Official Languages Act more than any other department.

It has a mandate to defend our rights and to fight for rights and democracy in countries where it has got involved. And yet, it does not respect the Official Languages Act. These people are the defenders of our country, but they say that they are unable to respect the law.

I would like you to explain why a five-year period seems too long to you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am saying that it is too long and that I do not want to have to wait for five years until the program has been implemented before I can do an audit, a follow-up.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right.

So it is not too long a time period with respect to the attainment of results; in your opinion, it's even too long with respect to the implementation of the program.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let's talk about the recommendations. The commissioner recommended to the department that it communicate its vision, create an organizational culture based on the respect of language rights of all headquarters staff members, and require intermediate managers and supervisors at headquarters to take mandatory awareness sessions with respect to linguistic duality and language rights for staff members.

I don't want to have to wait five years before this is done. That is quite easy to determine.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand.

Mr. Graham Fraser: They either do it or they don't.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand that this is too long a time.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I'm sorry, but your five minutes are up.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Okay. I will get back to this issue later on, Mr. Fraser.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Lemieux, it is your turn to ask the next question, the fourth question in this initial round.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I would like to thank Mr. Fraser and the other witnesses for appearing here today.

We heard from the Minister of National Defence here last Tuesday. I would like to explain what I said to him. First of all, I would like to say that I served with the Canadian armed forces for 20 years. I enrolled at the age of 17 as an officer cadet and I retired 20 years later, when I was a lieutenant-colonel. I went to the Saint-Jean Royal Military College and I obtained my diploma in Kingston: two colleges that you mentioned in your presentation.

[English]

So it's necessary to explain this, because I've actually lived in the system at all levels, from being a subaltern, an officer cadet, right up to having senior officer rank of lieutenant-colonel. At all those steps, I lived through the bilingual policy, and from first-hand experience, I can tell you it doesn't work. I think you know that, and your predecessor knew that as well. It was very clear that it didn't work.

So again, I'm listening to my colleagues, and I'm listening to some of the questions they're posing. They're well intentioned, but there's a lack of understanding of how the military works and why it is that bilingual policy failed and why it wasn't working.

The first question I'd like to ask is this.

[Translation]

I think that it is enriching to learn a second language. However, I would like to know if it is stipulated anywhere in the Official Languages Act that it was mandatory for everyone in the Canadian Forces to become bilingual.

Mr. Graham Fraser: No. That isn't the case for the public service either.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Indeed.

Mr. Graham Fraser: There are established criteria for the employees of federal institutions, including the Canadian Forces. Indeed, the protection of unilingual individuals is part of the very basis of the official languages policy. We do not force everyone to learn both languages, but we do aim to protect unilingual populations, and we aim for the protection and development of minority communities. Those are the two fundamental objectives of the language policy.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You've just cleared up one major misperception. There is the perception that everybody must be bilingual because everybody must be bilingual, but you've stated that that's not the case. So this actually leans towards the new functional approach that DND is promoting, which is to determine which people need to be bilingual for which jobs.

As I was listening to your speech, I found a few sentences in there to be fairly negative. One of the ones that concerned me was your very strong statement that it is practically impossible to establish a challenging career in the Canadian Forces if you are a unilingual francophone. That's not what I've seen.

For example, if you are a private, and you are with the Royal 22e Régiment, you have every opportunity to become a master corporal, to become a sergeant, a warrant, and the highest non-commissioned officer rank possible, chief warrant officer. You have every capability, every possibility of achieving that rank, just as an anglophone does in an anglophone unit and just as a bilingual soldier does in a bilingual unit. You're not disadvantaged at all.

It's the same for a junior officer. If you're an officer cadet, or a second lieutenant—that's a better rank, because that's a commissioned rank—in a French artillery unit, you have every capability and every possibility of becoming the commanding officer of that regiment, just like in an anglophone regiment and in a bilingual regiment.

So I wonder if you could explain where that sentence is coming from, where that idea is coming from, and why you think it's practically impossible? That's very strong language, so I'm wondering if you could explain that to us.

● (0945)

Mr. Graham Fraser: My concern is in the skilled trades. I have both seen testimony and have talked to individuals who have been in the situation where the training was not available for them to advance their skill, where the training that was available was only available in English. This put them at a substantial disadvantage in learning the skills to acquire the trade or to advance—to acquire the skill levels necessary to practise that trade. This could be anyone from a specialized fireman to medical personnel, where repair manuals or instruction manuals, the operation manuals for the equipment, are in English only.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Just to follow up, perhaps one of the failings of the previous system was that if you had a unilingual francophone in a very anglophone environment—you mentioned the Princess Patricia's out in Calgary—he would have access to bilingual manuals. What I saw when I was a senior deputy project manager on a fairly significant project and on some other projects as well was that we were obligated to translate all manuals, to provide all

manuals in both official languages. There was no question of not doing that. Those basic tools were always available to soldiers, no matter where they were.

But I think this goes back to the functional approach. It is better to have a unilingual francophone in a francophone environment where his training will be in French, and if you have a unilingual anglophone, it's better that he's in an anglophone environment where his training—and I don't mean here trades training, but I mean his general unit training—will be in his mother tongue. To me that says there are, again, advantages to the new approach being proposed by DND, which is to recognize that a unilingual francophone should be in a unilingual-type unit, and he can progress within that unit and receive his training in that unit.

There is another point I want to bring up as well. It's about this unit versus functional approach, because this is very important for metrics, when you're measuring the success of how this is working. Again, at National Defence Headquarters where the study was done, you might have a unit there that has 100 military positions. Let's just say that 45% or 50% of them are bilingual, and that I'm a bilingual officer and I get posted into that unit, but I don't necessarily get posted against the specific position. It's not as important as it is in the public service. In the public service, I, Pierre Lemieux, am tagged to this specific position and I'm paid in accordance with that position, but in the military I'm paid as a captain or as a major, and it's not really tied to a position. When I arrive at a unit, they just want to know, since they're supposed to have 15 captains there, whether they have 15 captains.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, I'm afraid you're going to have to wait until the next round. I realize you were just getting really revved up, but you'll have to wait until the next round to finish.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay, *merci beaucoup*.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, if things continue along that line, Mr. Milot is going to be afraid to lose his job.

The Chair: We will now begin the second round. Everyone will have five minutes.

Mr. Rodriguez, would you please ask the first question.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Fraser.

Earlier on, when Ms. Mourani talked about potential assimilation, you hesitated to respond, as if that could lead to the assimilation of francophones in the armed forces. Did I interpret your hesitation correctly?

● (0950)

Mr. Graham Fraser: In my opinion, there was a problem of assimilation in the past because of the tremendous mobility required in the armed forces. Members of the Canadian Forces and their families were transferred from one base to the next, and there was very little social support for families and individuals. As a result, often francophones and their families wound up feeling more at ease in English than French.

Nevertheless, I do not know whether or not this new approach will change this trend. I hesitate to give my opinion. I am not claiming that the assimilation of francophones in the armed forces has never existed, that is obvious. Will the new approach strengthen or counter this trend? I'm not able to tell you at this time.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Do we not run the risk of creating ghettos?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I would not dare say that a member of the 22nd Regiment is part of a ghetto, nor would I say that someone in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry is.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: No, but elsewhere?

Ms. Boucher—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Pardon me.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm just trying to understand. Let's look at the units: francophones, anglophones, each on its own side, each dealing with its business. Is that it?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let's not be deceived. In part, this is simply recognition of what exists at present. In his book on the Canadian army, Jack Granatstein, the historian, said that there are three armies in Canada: an army in the west, an army in Ontario and an army in Quebec. I am not confirming them, I am stating what he said and quoting from him. He did not talk about an operational approach, a universal approach. He was making an observation as a historian regarding the way that the Canadian army has evolved.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You talked about bilingual positions which should be reserved for bilingual individuals and which are increasingly staffed with non-bilingual personnel, unilingual individuals. If a position is designated bilingual, there must be a specific reason for that.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed, this is very clear in section 91 of the act.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: And if it's not staffed with a bilingual person, does that not result in a certain security risk, or something like that? There are no consequences?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think that represents a risk in every respect. Before becoming commissioner, I talked to a general who told me that one of the changes that has occurred in the country's culture, is that soldiers were no longer prepared to die in the language of the officers. I think that there is an explanation on the part of soldiers: they want to be understood by their commanding officers.

If a bilingual position is filled by someone who is not bilingual, if the system is transformed so it is the units and not the incumbents of certain positions that provide services in both languages, the soldier would still have this need to be understood and to obtain information in order to do the job.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: So the language issue could jeopardize our soldiers, because there's a problem in conveying—

Mr. Graham Fraser: I must confess that this is a type of very specific question requiring knowledge about the way this policy will be applied in practice. I do not have this knowledge. I do not know whether my colleagues would like to intervene on this topic, but as far as I'm concerned, I do not want to venture into an area when I don't know exactly how things work on such and such a base, in

such and such a conflict, or in such and such a situation, and then make a mistake because I don't know exactly how it works.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser. Mr. Lemieux and Ms. Boucher will be sharing their time for the next question.

Mr. Lemieux would like to finish his speech.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Me again? Great.

[English]

To continue with what I was saying before, if you have a unit that has a requirement for 15 majors and some of them must be bilingual, the military doesn't take the time and the effort to make sure that Pierre Lemieux, bilingual officer, is tagged against that specific bilingual position, because it doesn't really matter in that sense. What matters is that the unit has a bilingual officer and offers its services bilingually. That's what matters.

It's very important, because one of the essential parts of this new plan is the metrics. It's how you measure success. Under the old system, success was measured position by position. It was possible to actually have 10 bilingual positions, but to have the officers not perfectly aligned against those 10. You might say that was a failure, but actually it wasn't a failure. The 10 officers are there, they're just not slotted position against position. I wanted to point that out.

You made a comment about the postings as well, about tradesmen.

[Translation]

When I worked in the electronic and mechanical engineering sector, I was responsible for the technicians, tanks, firearms, etc.

[English]

You'd mentioned that it's possible for a soldier to be posted immediately into a position, and you said that's the way the forces work, but there's much more stability than that.

By exception, when there's an exceptional circumstance that presents itself, yes, it's necessary to move someone immediately, but there's career planning that goes on every year. There's a cycle; there's a rhythm to where soldiers are posted.

[Translation]

If someone wants to go to Quebec, a request must be made, the requirements of the Canadian Forces must be taken into account. This could happen if it is suitable for the individual and the Canadian Forces.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Ask your question.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, it's coming. I just want to leave the point as well, that lack of stability is not there.

So I will get to my question. My question is this. In the military we're taught that if plan A is not working, if you're pouring resources, time, effort, and energy into plan A and it's not working, it's failing, don't persist in plan A. Come up with plan B. Develop a plan B. Implement a plan B. Evaluate a plan B.

The opposition says no, throw everything into plan A. Even if it's failing, put in more resources, more money. It's failing, but they won't come up with a plan B.

Here we have a plan B. So I would like to know your opinion on this concept of, if it has been such a failure for so long, why the hesitation to say, you know, I'm glad to see a plan B; I'm glad to see a different approach here that will actually provide better service, or potentially provide better service, to soldiers?

Could you comment on that? That would be my question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I've actually taken some pains not to say that I am condemning or approving the approach that is being taken. It's not my job to say this plan is a good plan or that plan is a good plan. We've set a series of recommendations in which we feel that there are certain criteria that have to be met in order for the Canadian Forces to meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

The forces have responded with this plan, and my reaction is to say, well, let's wait and see. If it continues to mean that only 47% of the officers who were supposed to be bilingual and provide bilingual services actually are, then it will continue to be a failure. If, on the other hand, we see that there is a better alignment between bilingual officers and the jobs they have to do, then I am not starting from a vantage point where....

For one thing, I'm not presuming bad faith on the part of the military.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Can I agree with you? You're right. You actually have not rendered a judgment, an official judgment. You haven't said this is doomed to failure as well. But when I listened to your speech—and I'll just speak for myself—I found there were a lot of things that were said in there that gave a negative connotation to something that is just being launched.

So I agree with you that you haven't given a final opinion on this, but I do feel that your comments were more negative than positive. I didn't see much light in terms of, "Here are my concerns with regard to the new approach"—and that's fair; we can have concerns about the new approach—"but here are some of the positive things that I see with the new approach. Here's where the real differences could be made." I know you can't say, definitively, "will be made", but "could be made".

I guess my concern was that I found that the approach to the new plan put forward by DND was leaning to the negative side, with a lot of question marks, a lot of doubts about whether or not it will work, and really not much in terms of balancing that with the positive.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemieux. I'm sure that Mrs. Boucher appreciates your sharing her time with her.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: We get along really well.

The Chair: I think you owe her two and a half minutes somewhere along the line.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let me just respond by saying I will take those concerns into account.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you. I appreciate that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Malo, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Commissioner, earlier, you clearly indicated that the reason why unilingual francophones find it difficult to have an interesting career in the Canadian Forces is not because the opportunities are not there, but rather because they have no way of getting adequate training in French.

For example, in order to command a ship, you need a certain amount of training and practical experience on the deck. To my knowledge, there is only one place in Canada that provides such training: in western Canada, on the HMCS Regina, a unilingual anglophone ship. Consequently, it is difficult for a unilingual francophone to become a navy commander or deputy commander.

A lot of money is being invested in the Canadian Forces right now. In this regard, you said earlier that it would be important to focus more on French training and to invest more money in this.

In your opinion, should we consider reopening the Saint-Jean Royal Military College and the use of other ships and other facilities in eastern Canada and in francophone units?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I would like them to explore ways of reinforcing training, so as to take into consideration all the factors that make up a francophone environment and the best way of learning to work in either official language.

After having said that I wouldn't comment on the details of a plan to reach this target within the Canadian Forces, I will also avoid imposing another way to improve training, certainly not at this point in my mandate.

Has the closure of the Saint-Jean Royal Military College resulted in serious problems with regard to the recruitment of francophone officers? I am waiting for answers.

Mr. Luc Malo: You also asked another very interesting question as to the chances a francophone soldier has of working in his own language, within this new system.

Last Monday, I asked the Minister of National Defence a question and he said that francophones, proportionally, represent a significant share of the Canadian Forces. I told him that these are not the statistics we need to look at, but rather, how many francophones are able to work in French within the Canadian Forces? However, he was unable to tell me how many.

Do you not think it would be important to obtain these statistics, in order to have a more accurate picture of French in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Mr. Graham Fraser: In fact, of the many things I want to do, this is one: get a grassroots understanding, within the regiments, of the exact situation.

Renald, do you have any comments?

Mr. Renald Dussault: Every year, we do an evaluation of sorts, a performance assessment of the various institutions. Obviously, language of work is one of the factors we look at.

According to a study by Statistics Canada, 39% of all francophone respondents within bilingual units, wherever they may be in Canada, are very favourable or somewhat favourable to the language of work system within the Canadian Forces. This is one of many indicators.

Mr. Luc Malo: So, is 39% disappointing?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Quite.

Mr. Luc Malo: In fact, I had asked the Minister of National Defence and the Minister Responsible for The Francophonie and Official Languages if they had consulted any of the communities before implementing this. Apparently, they relied solely on complaints.

Do you think that various groups should have been consulted, before this new policy was created?

• (1005)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I consulted with our lawyers on the scope of part VII, that part of the act that requires consultation with minority communities, and I was told that, in fact, sections 41 and 42 of the act do not apply in this case.

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Fraser, I have to stop you.

Mr. Luc Malo: Already? I think my five minutes were shorter than...

The Chair: Here, five minutes is long.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with Mr. Malo: I think that his five minutes were shorter than Mr. Lemieux's.

I listened closely to Mr. Lemieux, and if I am not mistaken, his father was also a military man.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, that's true. He was a member of the air force.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That explains why Mr. Lemieux is more comfortable in English than in French. With all due respect to him, I attribute that to the fact that his father was transferred to various bases across Canada; that is why his son speaks better English than French. I respect that, but that is the result.

Mr. Lemieux was talking about units and he says that 7 out of 15 people should be bilingual, and that we don't understand this.

So, 7 out of 15 people are supposed to be bilingual, including the janitor or the mechanic. They would be considered part of the unit and 2 of the 7 people needed to comply with the act. Is this really the principle that underlines the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Fraser, it's clear that we don't want all anglophones to have to speak French, nor do we want all francophones to have to learn English. We want services to be provided in both languages and for people to be able to work and take training in their mother tongue.

I met with soldiers who contradicted what Mr. Lemieux said. I met with soldiers in Montreal who told me that if they wanted to get promoted they had to learn English because the manuals were in English. Eighty per cent of all National Defence training manuals are in English. Can a francophone really make it all the way up the ladder?

So, you said a little earlier that the commissioner did not have the mandate to say whether the closing of the Saint-Jean Royal Military College was a good thing. On the contrary, I think that the commissioner has the mandate to tell us whether this has hurt the francophone community.

Was it easier to learn in Saint-Jean than in Kingston? We know that Kingston is not a francophone city.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let's be clear. I talked about the contribution of the Saint-Jean Royal Military College to the Canadian Forces and the role that the institution played in reinforcing the presence of the corps of francophone officers. In my statement, I talked about it as one of the best immersion experiences in North America.

The college was created in 1952, in response, to some extent, to problems experienced by the Canadian Forces during the Second World War. At that time, there had been major discipline problems because there were no officers who could understand the francophone soldiers. On some ships, there were near-mutinies because of the language tensions within the naval forces and the systemic problem of the lack of officers able to give orders or understand the soldiers.

The Saint-Jean Royal Military College was created in response to this need. It operated for 42 years and made a significant contribution to the Canadian Forces. Then, that chapter in the forces' history came to an end.

At present, I am asking questions about the effects of this closure. Can we assess the effects 13 years later? This represents almost an entire generation, in terms of the training of the new officers. What is the impact on recruiting? What is the impact on the linguistic ability of officers who studied at Kingston?

I have been commissioner for four months. I am not ready to announce a plan on the future of officer training within the Canadian Forces. That is not how I see my role at present.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. D'amours, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Fraser, for being here this morning.

I don't know whether you had the opportunity to listen to or read my comments or my questions, particularly the ones I put to the Minister of National Defence on Tuesday last.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes. I read the transcript.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: If you had seen the video, you would have seen how difficult it was for the minister to answer me in French. In reality, that would have been the case if he had to give me an order if I were a unilingual francophone. Nonetheless, I respect the fact that some people speak only English and others speak only French.

However, when you are a senior officer and you have to give orders, instructions, you cannot run the risk, as a Canadian, of not understanding what is happening. So, there cannot be francophone units, anglophone units and bilingual units.

You described the situation well earlier. In fact, you said that someone can be sent to another region because that's where the need is. Furthermore, this doesn't necessarily mean that that suits the particular needs of that individual.

In my opinion, it's not about saying that all student soldiers or soldiers should be bilingual. I am talking specifically about those giving instructions and orders to subordinates. The comments I made to the minister on Tuesday referred to health and safety.

Mr. Commissioner, in answer to a question by my colleague Pablo Rodriguez, you said earlier that there was a risk.

Do you recognize as I do that if we get the feeling... I understand that you said we will see what happens, but I think that there really is a risk. However, if there is one, this means that there's a problem from the start. In fact, if we determine that a risk exists, then there is a problem.

If we recognize this fact, why not take action? Why are we letting things go and saying that this is not necessary? Why are we running this risk at this time, when people may not be properly understood?

I come back to what I told the minister on Tuesday. I understand English, which is lucky. Although there is simultaneous interpretation, I don't need it. However, I know that soldiers don't have simultaneous interpreters following them around and whispering translations in their ear when someone says something.

Think of the close relationships that these people must maintain on a daily basis, and yet they are not being fully respected, as regards their mother tongue.

Mr. Graham Fraser: There are two things. I think that, faced with the current failure to respect linguistic requirements, the Canadian Forces decided to take a different approach.

I'm not prepared to say whether the risk has increased because of this change. They have recognized that there is a problem. I am trusting in the good faith of the Canadian Forces in this regard: they believe that this plan will better fill the gaps that currently exist.

However, it is entirely possible that these existing gaps, these current gaps, represent a risk. I don't know. I have not gone in the field to assess the possible ties between the health and safety of soldiers and their language of work.

There is a second point. Since becoming commissioner, I have had the opportunity to look more closely at linguistic requirements for level C.

•(1015)

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, unfortunately, your five minutes are now up. Perhaps you could come back to this in answering another question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Like Mr. Lemieux, I will come back to it.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Malo, it is your turn to ask a question.

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Commissioner, I understand that at 10:15 this morning, you don't want to say whether re-opening the Saint-Jean Royal Military College would be a good thing for the Canadian Forces. However, I'd simply like to remind you that, in your presentation, you said that when it was operational, this college allowed anglophone officers to take part in an immersion program that was unequalled in North America.

Military personnel are not federal public servants with a particular job in a specific location. Being a soldier means moving around. It's clear that francophone military personnel with expertise, skills and specific knowledge are called on to be mobile and to move around to different units. It is somewhat utopic to believe that... we can segregate francophone, bilingual and anglophone corps, when mobility is pretty much the norm.

In this context, I truly believe that a unilingual francophone soldier may find it difficult to feel included and to work in his own language, if his superior officer cannot speak French, no matter what label that unit wears.

Don't you think that wanting to label bilingual francophones and anglophones is a bit strange, as is imposing this on the Canadian Forces?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Not necessarily. In actual fact, this is how things are done in the public service. There are unilingual francophone regions; in other regions, anglophones and francophones have the right to work in their own language. Then, there are regions where anglophones are not required to speak and understand French.

To some extent, this is a parallel approach to the one adopted by the public service. However, I share your concerns as to what this might mean for a mechanic or another francophone tradesman, who has to transfer to another unit.

If I understand correctly, the intent is to avoid the situation you've described, of a francophone soldier with a senior officer who doesn't understand French.

•(1020)

Mr. Luc Malo: So, you believe that from now on, francophone military personnel will not be sent to armed forces units that have been labelled anglophone or bilingual.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't know about that, because we would have to know the details of the assignment. This is something that we will look at during our follow-up, meaning exactly how the plan translates into day-to-day reality. I am not in a position to tell you whether this is the case or not.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Dussault, could you give us the figures on mobility. Mr. Commissioner, you mentioned earlier that soldiers are not typical public servants, and it's difficult to apply the same language classification to positions.

Mr. Renald Dussault: Currently, we don't have such figures. As the commissioner said, it is quite clearly... Especially since this new approach is moving in that direction. Obviously, this is something we will look very closely at when we do our two follow-ups this fall. However, I do not have these figures at present.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Malo, thank you Mr. Dussault. I'm sorry to have to interrupt you again.

The floor is yours, Ms. Boucher.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I just need 30 seconds. This isn't addressed to Mr. Fraser, it's about Mr. Godin.

I would like to point out that we're not here to make personal attacks, whether it be against me or against my father; we're here to discuss a policy. So be professional, please.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You're making a point of order. It wasn't a personal attack. I'm sorry if you interpreted it as such.

We were talking about assimilation, and you were saying how well things were going in the forces and that everyone had opportunities. I used that as an example. If that offended you, please accept my most sincere apologies.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll continue with Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, Mr. Fraser. I'm pleased to see you and your team here this morning. I've been listening closely to what you have had to say. I have several questions that have come to mind.

As you know, on Tuesday we met with Minister O'Connor and the Minister responsible for La Francophonie and Official languages. Minister O'Connor basically explained that he had done his best to foster bilingualism by implementing 10 of your 13 recommendations, which were very important in his opinion, and which came as a result of an investigation conducted by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The commissioner criticized the fact that under the previous government the universal program had not worked.

In an article which appeared in the newspaper *Le Droit* on February 13, you said: "Clearly, the universal approach wasn't as successful as we would have hoped". In the latest edition of *L'actualité*, you even said: "It's an admission that the previous approach has failed".

Based on your assessment, the universal approach can clearly be categorized as a failure. All the same, I'd like you to explain what brought you to the conclusion that the universal approach was a failure.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Well, the figures more or less speak for themselves in relation to the proportion of non-bilingual people holding positions that are designated bilingual. Only 47% of people holding positions designated bilingual are in fact bilingual. That's a failure in my book.

I don't know any assessment system where 47% could be considered a success. At least at my school, when you got 47%, you didn't pass.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Godin referred earlier to unilingual English documents. Is there a specific policy on documentation being in both official languages in the Canadian armed forces?

• (1025)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Members of the Canadian Forces, just like all public servants and members of any federal institution, are entitled to get documentation in their own official language. There is a requirement that bilingual documentation be provided...

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: How can you...?

Mr. Yvon Godin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: How come? I'm asking a question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: ...and also training.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Oh, I see.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I just want things to be clear, we weren't talking about all documentation within the Canadian armed forces. We were talking about the training textbooks. I just wanted that to be clear.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I see.

I have another question. How do you designate which units will be francophone, anglophone or bilingual in the Canadian armed forces?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It's the Canadian armed forces' responsibility; it's not part of my mandate as commissioner. You should ask the Canadian armed forces that question. That's one of the questions I intend to ask, but I don't have an answer right now.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I was wondering the same thing about the Official Languages Act. How are regions designated bilingual?

Mr. Graham Fraser: According to the regulations, the bilingual regions as far as language of work in the public service is concerned are the National Capital Region, part of Quebec, northern and eastern Ontario and New Brunswick.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The biggest francophone city is considered bilingual, isn't it?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Is that a requirement under the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, it is.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Have you finished, Ms. Boucher? Thank you.

I'd like to ask Mr. Godin to wait for his turn, again.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Excuse me?

The Chair: I said: "again".

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, it's my turn! Just like everyone else had a turn.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I accept your apology, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: My most sincere apologies.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I accept your apology, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to quote a passage of your report:

The Royal Military College in Kingston, already bilingual in theory, then became a centre for training fully bilingual student officers. Despite the efforts of officials in Kingston, there was a slight decrease in the number of francophone student officers by 1995. It would be interesting to know the current number in attendance.

Can we ask the commissioner's office to do a study on this?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There are some...

Mr. Yvon Godin: I can make an official request if you'd like.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We'll certainly think about it and see what our priorities are, and what studies are currently under way. Training is indeed one of our priorities, as is monitoring.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'll make an official request tomorrow.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Great.

Mr. Yvon Godin: A little earlier, Mr. Lemieux said 7 out of 15 people had to be bilingual. This is not a personal remark directed at you, Mr. Lemieux.

Now as far as bilingual units are concerned, that means that of the 15 people that make up the unit, only one person has to be bilingual, is that right? If everyone in a 15-person bilingual unit speaks French and 7 of these people are bilingual, does that mean the bilingual individuals would be anglophone? Could we have a study on this? What about bilingual units where the 15 members speak English and 7 of them are bilingual? When it comes to our country's two official languages, what are the proportions? Do you have an answer to these questions? If you don't have any answers, I'd ask you to get some.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't have any answers. I don't know if my colleagues have an opinion about the table you're referring to, with the 15 and the 7.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are you telling me you don't know if they understand what I'm saying?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You understand what I'm saying, that's good.

• (1030)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I don't know, perhaps my colleagues...

Mr. Yvon Godin: What's a bilingual unit? Where are these units? Are we talking about Ontario, Quebec? I know that the individual who wrote that particular book referred to Canada's three national defences: Quebec's, Ontario's and the west's. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be one for the Atlantic region.

Mr. Graham Fraser: They're land forces.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Could the commissioner's office, the office of the advocate for official languages, get us these figures?

Mr. Graham Fraser: This will be a part of our follow-up. We will take a close look at how this policy is applied, to get a better idea of how it works in practice.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Earlier, you spoke of waiting for five years. Did you mean the implementation or the achievement of results?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I spoke of the implementation, but I did not speak of 35 years.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, I said five years.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Oh, I thought I heard "35 years".

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are there any violations of this law?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No, there is no violation of this law. The act is stable. The review was a part of this process. Mr. Sauvageau complained that the law had not been respected. We investigated the matter and we made recommendations based on the obligations laid out in the act.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Earlier, Ms. Boucher misunderstood what I said. She thought that I was speaking about internal documents, whereas I was speaking about training manuals.

Will your study show whether we can also obtain the training manuals? What percentage of the manuals is meant for anglophones and what percentage is meant for francophones? Mr. Lemieux said that a francophone can receive his entire training in French. I would like to know whether this is true.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Myself as well.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. You have 30 seconds left, you are very efficient.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I would like to take these 30 seconds to thank Mr. Fraser for what he's doing for bilingualism in Canada. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We have the time for a fourth round's table of five minutes each, if all the committee members agree.

Let me ask Mr. Rodriguez to put the first question.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Ms. Boucher referred to the last issue of *L'actualité*. On the cover page there is the title "Le retour des séducteurs" or "The seducers are back", and your photo is inside. Thus, Commissioner, it is a good choice for the title.

I would like to make a footnote because you said that during the three months that you have been in your position, you have received more than 100 complaints regarding the Court Challenges Program. I would like to know how many complaints you have received up to now.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think that it is 110, but we can say that it is over 100, and the investigation is still going on. We hope that it will be over...

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: This has nothing to do with...

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Of course not, the direct connection...

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: ... we are talking about the armed forces.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You referred to *L'actualité*. Therefore, I was looking at *L'actualité* and...

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, but now, we are talking about the armed forces.

The Chair: Mr. Rodriguez, perhaps we should not put questions about...

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I think that there is a connection.

Mr. Yvon Godin: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

I think that as parliamentarians, we can put the questions that we want to put. There is no need for the opposition to take over your responsibility as chairman.

The Chair: Perhaps we should stay with the subject of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, in my opinion, court challenges are relevant to the subject. If a soldier or a municipality or some other group wants to bring a challenge to court, it is relevant to the subject, and I do not see how it would go against the Standing Orders.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Rodriguez, please continue.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Of course.

Mr. Godin referred to a percentage. Earlier, you spoke of 80% of the manuals. I think that you wanted to verify the accuracy of this number. Because if it really is 80%, a unilingual francophone has practically no way of going ahead. Only a few crumbs are left.

Mr. Graham Fraser: My own —entirely subjective—impression is that it depends on the trade. Training in French is available for certain trades and not so easy to obtain for other trades. However, I do not have any specific data to share with you regarding this.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: This brings to my mind... For instance, when purchasing a helicopter or some other item, do the instruction manuals have to be translated?

• (1035)

Mr. Graham Fraser: It is a legal obligation.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Do all operational manuals for equipment have to be translated?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It is certainly compulsory for training. Regarding the manuals that come with the purchased equipment, I know that there is some controversy regarding certain kinds of equipment.

Mr. Renald Dussault: Of course, with the exception of cases where the said equipment and the manuals that come with it is really meant for a unilingual English speaking unit. In such cases, of course, there is no problem.

Obviously, the important thing is to have the French manuals available especially in bilingual regions. In addition, if the manual is published in one language, obviously, it must be translated for the unilingual regions of the other language.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: For instance, when a apparently bilingual soldier is transferred from Quebec to a bilingual position somewhere else, let us say Alberta, is there a reception structure ready to receive his family? For instance, if he moves with his wife and two children, are there any structures that allow this person to send his children to a French school?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It all depends on the region. There have been cases in the past where soldiers were transferred to certain bases, in the belief that resources were locally available. In fact, they were non-existent. Some time ago, someone testified regarding a soldier who had been transferred from Quebec to Moose Jaw. In fact, there were no resources ready for him. The only available school was an immersion school for Anglophones. This created rather serious problems for his family.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: If a francophone soldier in a bilingual position is transferred from some other place, and if his children have no services in French, they have to go to English schools.

Mr. Graham Fraser: That was the case in the past. I do not know if things have improved since then.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, I am sorry, but your five minutes are already up.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Are you sure that I only have five minutes?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Chong.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have three points to make that I'll ask for your comments on.

I note that on page 2 of your report you indicate that in 1972 an initial 15-year plan was developed to increase bilingualism and biculturalism in the Canadian Forces. Out of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the two resulting effects were to adopt official bilingualism and to adopt a policy of multiculturalism. I would be interested to understand where the biculturalism aspect came in with respect to that 15-year plan. I wasn't aware of that before.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I would have to take a closer look as to precisely what the bicultural elements were of that, but my assumption would be that part of the biculturalism that exists in the Canadian Forces is the existence of French-speaking units like the Royal 22e Régiment, like the HMCS/NCSM Ville de Québec, and the navy. There are a number of French-speaking units that have a long and proud history.

The Royal 22e Régiment was created in 1914, and has produced a series of not only generals but chiefs of the defence staff, and governors general for that matter. In terms of the culture of the Royal 22e Régiment, anybody who visits The Citadel in Quebec City would come to a greater appreciation of the deep cultural elements the Royal 22e Régiment has. And every regiment has these, but for the Royal 22e Régiment it is very much a reflection not only of bilingualism but of biculturalism in this country.

• (1040)

Hon. Michael Chong: I was aware of the historical heritage of the forces through its regiments and the like, but I wasn't aware that we had an official policy or plan, even back then, on a bicultural Canadian Forces. If you would provide us with that information, it would be much appreciated. I have been aware of the official bilingualism aspect, but never the official biculturalism aspect.

The second point I want to get your comments on has to do with respect to the critique of the five-year timeline, and your implication that there aren't any deadlines or targets in this five-year plan. You state that "...we have a new formula that, once again, offers no guarantees", and "It is more than time to establish clear official language initiatives based on measurable objectives."

Yet, when I look at the actual plan from the Department of National Defence in annex D, I see lots of targets and lots of measurable objectives. I see things like the deadline for completion of the first phase of awareness training being June 2007. I see another part here: that key stakeholders are to have effectively addressed this issue prior to March 31, 2008; that the target date for completion of this program is June 2007; an implementation plan to be put in place by December 31, 2007; and on and on it goes.

With respect to the five-year timeframe, that's long-standing government planning for various programs that have been put in place and have used the five-year plan. The action plan on official languages that the previous government initiated, and that we are in the process of implementing, is a five-year plan. Throughout government departments there are often five-year time cycles to roll out programs, implement them, and measure them.

So I'm not sure why the criticism of the five years, and I'm not sure why the implication that we don't have specific targets and deadlines set out when they are set out in annex D of this report.

The Chair: I'm going to have to ask you for a 30-second response, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Graham Fraser: What I intended to say was that I was not going to wait five years, waiting to see whether this plan was working. I intend to ensure we are watching the process every step of the way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Malo, you may put a question.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Chairman, earlier this morning, you said that the fact that there had been no consultation before producing this new policy did not go against part VII. Nevertheless, before asking whether this was legal or not, we must ask whether it was the right thing to do.

Yourself said that respect for official languages in the Canadian armed forces was a dismal failure. We were not warned in any way about this new policy.

Given this dismal failure, would it not have been preferable to carry out a broad study, to meet military personnel, and family members who are directly affected as well communities that are in some way partners with the Canadian armed forces in every region of Canada? Would it not have been better to consult these people?

Since you have made a priority of drafting this new policy, would it not have been preferable to carry out more consultations, before formulating this policy?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I can't confirm that there was no consultation with troops or their families. The people responsible for official languages in the Canadian armed forces are very much aware of the needs and problems in this area.

Now, as far as consultations are concerned, let me be very clear about my role as commissioner: I am neither a program nor a plan administrator. The commissioner's office has to be somewhat independent in some ways and not get too involved in developing plans. On the other hand, we do make recommendations and assess

departments' and military institutions' efforts and their effects in relation to their response to our consultations.

There would be a number of questions I would want to ask if we were supposed to get involved in the implementation of a department's or the Canadian Forces' programs. We want to have a good communications relationship and be able to share information, but at the same time we need to maintain our distance.

•(1045)

Mr. Luc Malo: Well, that's fine on that piece.

But don't you think that the Standing Committee on Official Languages which regularly advises the government on the future steps and the development of new regulations, policies and statutes, should at least have been consulted and called upon to seek testimony and hold a frank and open discussion on the issue?

If things had been done that way instead, the committee could have submitted an opinion to the government which, in turn, may have made a more enlightened and less rushed decision.

Mr. Graham Fraser: It is not up to me to tell you what the committee should do. This committee is master of its own destiny.

Mr. Luc Malo: But wouldn't that have been a good idea? That's my question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I wouldn't presume to say what any committee should have done or should do in the future. I am an officer of Parliament; and it is up to parliamentarians to determine committee agendas. I wouldn't want to make an assumption or criticize what you have done or have not done.

In my opinion, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has done an excellent work in the past. And as an officer of Parliament, I hope to be able to enjoy a collaborative relationship with all parliamentarians.

The onus is on the committee to decide earlier whether or not to intervene in the decision-making process. It's not my place to tell you what this committee should do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Unfortunately, Mr. Malo, your time has run out.

Mr. Luc Malo: I'd simply like to thank Mr. Fraser.

I'd simply like to thank you, Mr. Fraser for those fine remarks and for being so neutral in your appearance before us this morning.

Thank you again.

The Chair: Now, that was all very politically correct, as they say.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I've already expressed my gratitude; so I'll move straight on to my question.

Was Part VII really reviewed? But actually, before asking that question, I'd like to know if, in your opinion, National Defence is part of Canadian society.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, I think it is.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I see, thank you.

Subsection 43(1) states:

43. (1) The Minister of Canadian Heritage should take such measures as that Minister considers appropriate to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society and may take measures to:

Then there's paragraphs *a*) to *h*), then subsection (2), which states:

43. (2) The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take such measures as that Minister considers appropriate to ensure public consultation in the development of policies and review of programs relating to the advancement and the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society.

It is the law.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, it is. And as you can see, the scope of the legislation is very broad in relation to Canada's linguistic duality.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but under Part VII consultations could of taken place. It says that in the act.

Mr. Graham Fraser: My interpretation is that Part VII, and the amendment made to it, thanks in large part to this committee's work, deals in particular with minority communities. Some sections give much broader meaning to this. As far as consulting with the military is concerned, the challenge is to determine exactly what type of consultation should occur, and with whom. Are we talking about the community surrounding the base?

• (1050)

Mr. Yvon Godin: You can consult former service men and women. Now that they can speak, of course. It's funny how hard it is to get any information out of military personnel who haven't yet retired. They are extremely polite, kind, and do what they are asked.

On the other hand, those who are no longer with the service have no qualms about coming to our offices and telling us stories about how bad things are. For example, we were told that on National Defence's big Airbus the film was only screened in English. Now, that's not the end of the world, but it's the kind of thing that gets me a little riled.

It clearly indicates that steps need to be taken to ensure the public is consulted. These people are part of Canadian society. Why should National Defence be excluded? When bill S-3 was enacted, it made these provisions binding instead of declaratory. Don't we have a new tool to help us enforce the act?

I think that we need to add what I am about to say to the record. No one asked the commissioner anything about the anglophone issue at National Defence. We need to try and make sure these two languages are on an equal footing in the workplace. Francophones can't be turned into anglophones and vice versa, but these people should be able to get service in their own language. Right now, this is not the case.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'll bear in mind your comments on Part VII. I'll go back to the office and see if in fact—

Mr. Yvon Godin: You'll consult an army of lawyers to tell us whether National Defence is part of Canadian society and whether officials at that department should have held consultations rather than claiming they consulted the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. They didn't do this. They had a good look at the 12 recommendations and tried to get us to believe that they consulted the commissioner. I was insulted to learn that.

And on that note, I'd like to thank you once again.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the members and our guest, particularly Mr. Fraser. I think that the official languages are better off for having you at the helm.

Our next meeting will take place on March 20.

This meeting is adjourned.

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