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## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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**Thursday, March 13, 2008**

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**Chair**

Mr. Steven Blaney

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## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, March 13, 2008

•(0915)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)):** We will now begin our meeting. Up next is Mr. Rodriguez.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** No, it's my turn.

**The Chair:** You asked that this be a public meeting.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** No, I only presented a motion, but my name was on the list of speakers. The reason I asked that this meeting be held in public was not so I wouldn't be heard.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** It would be my pleasure to let Mr. Godin speak before me.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, you may finish your intervention.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, first, I support the motion calling on Mr. Lord to appear before the committee.

I have a question for the clerk who represents the entire committee. I would like to know what Mr. Lord's response was to the clerk. What reasons did he give for not appearing before the committee?

**The Chair:** We will distribute Mr. Lord's response.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** In the meantime, can we move to the other points?

Mr. Rodriguez, you have the floor.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly raise three points. Regarding Mr. Lord, he will come when he can. We will clear our schedule and Mr. Lord will then decide which issues he feels he can address. We will see when that happens. It is not up to the committee to determine in advance which questions we will put to him. He will decide which issues he will address.

Further, I don't really like the fact that Ms. Verner wants to wait for the report to be tabled before appearing before the committee. In that case, the committee would be held hostage by the timing of the report's release by the government. If Ms. Verner decides to table her report in one, three or six months, it would mean that the committee could not invite her before then. That doesn't make any sense.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, we must never forget that the *raison d'être* of this committee is to look after the interests of minority language communities. That's why we are here. But too often we seem to forget this. There is too much petty politics on this committee, which means that we just can't do our work. Ultimately, it's the communities who pay.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Let me remind you that we are debating the motion to invite Mr. Lord. I have three names on my list: Mr. Gravel, Mr. Petit and Mr. Lemieux. Afterwards, if it is the wish of the committee, we can put the motion to a vote.

Mr. Godin, would you like to speak? Fine.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ):** I won't be long. I simply want to say that if Mr. Lord does come here, we will surely ask him questions about official languages. Surely he has read the report which he himself wrote and tabled. It's not rocket science: we are not inviting him to talk about the weather.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gravel.

Mr. Petit, it's your turn.

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** No, I'm fine.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemieux, you have the floor now.

[*English*]

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Now that we're in public, I'd like to make very clear, first of all, what I said earlier in this meeting and what I said in the last meeting; that is, we support—I support, certainly—Mr. Lord appearing in front of this committee. What I don't support is the manner in which this committee operates, which is outside of its own processes. This is what happened with respect to the invitation of Mr. Lord.

[*Translation*]

The steering committee met and decided to invite the witnesses. But it doesn't work that way. The steering committee must present its recommendations to the committee, and each member here has the right to go over the list of recommendations and to engage in a discussion. That did not happen last time. I find it passing strange, because every time we would like to discuss any subject, the opposition—

•(0920)

[*English*]

Their arms go up in the air, they overreact, and they make outlandish statements because they don't happen to like it when Conservative MPs want to discuss an issue. They just want to have their way. This is my concern.

So it's not that we shouldn't have particular witnesses; it's that there is a process in place and we should follow that process.

Unfortunately, last time, we lost a meeting because the opposition would not move ahead with a witness who we had called or who had been called in front of the committee. We lost two hours on that.

No one on this committee wants to repeat that. So I, for one, am very glad that we are following a process here now, that 48 hours' notice was given on this motion, that we're free to discuss this motion, and that we will vote on this motion.

That's the way it should happen. We should have a lot less strong-arming going on here. It's not in the best interests of official language communities when the committee breaks down.

[*Translation*]

We are all here to work in the interest of our official language communities. I would like the work on these important matters to go ahead.

It is essential that we follow the existing process and that we respect the rules we ourselves adopted at our first meeting here at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

I have two names still on my list: Mr. Godin and Mr. Rodriguez.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As you know, I am the one who presented the motion asking that Ms. Verner appear before the committee. But until now, I have not yet shared my opinion on the fact that the minister refuses to appear before the committee. Whether we are talking about Ms. Verner or Mr. Lord—

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, I would simply like to remind you that the motion we are discussing deals with Mr. Lord. Perhaps we can settle that issue first. We can then move on to committee business. We have to do things in order, Mr. Godin. So I would suggest you speak to the motion. Then, you can—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, I do not object to that, but when Mr. Lemieux talked about Ms. Verner's refusal to appear, which has nothing to do with the report, you did not interrupt him. So I would like to come back to the parliamentary secretary.

**The Chair:** This applies to all committee members.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** If that applies—

**The Chair:** Let's concentrate on the motion. I still have two names on my list.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** It applies to all committee members, but you nevertheless allowed Mr. Lemieux to go on. I would like to respond. In fact, it is not up to the government representatives on this committee to decide what our issue will be. We invited Ms. Verner not to talk about the contents of her action plan, but because we are preparing a report on the action plan. We wanted to ask her questions on the machinery of government which would be required for the coming action plan.

The opposition parties are not obliged to give their questions to the Conservative government. I know that the Conservative members are stuck with their prime minister, but that is not our case.

In her letter, Ms. Verner said that she had to respectfully decline the committee's invitation. However, she said yesterday that she had

never done so. I want to make sure that this committee actually wants to work and study, and that it can hear from the witnesses it wants to invite. Mr. Lemieux mentioned that we wasted two hours this week, and that's true. However, committee members argued for two hours why she should not come, and they ultimately voted against the motion.

I believe that the minister is an adult and that she is able to answer questions. If there are questions she does not wish to answer, she is free to do so. But I don't think it is right for committee members to block the minister's appearance before the committee.

The same applies to Mr. Lord. We want to ask questions of Mr. Lord. I'll come back to the motion. When we will ask Mr. Lord questions, if he says he cannot answer because the matter is not addressed in his report, he will have to decide which questions he wants to respond to. However, people cannot block his appearance before the committee. He should therefore appear before the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

At this point I will just intervene to remind committee members that, first, we must respect the fact that some votes or decisions were taken in camera.

Second, I believe that everyone around the table is in favour of the motion. I would therefore like to invite committee members to work in a productive manner. So in that spirit, if everyone has spoken to the motion, as chair I am ready to hold the vote.

● (0925)

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I am next on the list. I am willing to stop here if members are ready to vote—

**The Chair:** We are discussing committee business. You can speak as long as you like, but if it is the will of the committee, I am ready to put the motion, which reads as follows:

That the committee again invite Mr. Bernard Lord to appear before it to discuss his recommendations for the Action Plan on Official Languages.

(Motion agreed to unanimously)

**The Chair:** We can now come back to the speaker's list or move on to the second motion.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I would like to ask Mr. Lemieux a question because there is something I am trying to understand.

**The Chair:** We will follow the order of the speaker's list.

Mr. Rodriguez, go ahead.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I'm trying to understand. I was listening to Mr. Lemieux. You were upset that we did not hear the witness who was here last week. Is that right?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Chairman, I said that one witness, Mr. Corbeil from Statistics Canada, appeared before us. We invited him. He is no doubt a busy man, but he took the time to prepare his presentation and he provided us with a lot of information. He also told us he would be here for 9:00 a.m., and he was.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I asked my question; this is my time.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Let me explain.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I asked my question through you. Now I have my answer. He wanted us to hear the witness.

**The Chair:** If you don't mind, Mr. Rodriguez, we will give Mr. Lemieux the opportunity to complete his answer.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** This is my time.

**The Chair:** I gave him the floor and you agreed to this.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** No, I asked him a question, and I am getting an answer—

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Let me continue. What I said—

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I wanted to understand what Mr. Lemieux

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** A witness came before the committee and we wasted two hours.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Chairman, it's my turn to speak. I'm asking for a clarification before I can make up my mind. Do you understand what I mean?

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** He has no time, this is not a debate.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Turn off his mike.

**The Chair:** Just a minute.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Before continuing with what I have to say, I wanted a clarification from Mr. Lemieux, and I got it. This does not mean that Mr. Lemieux can speak forever and always. I asked for a clarification, I got it, and now I want to continue.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rodriguez, perhaps we should give Mr. Lemieux the opportunity to finish what he was saying.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** How much time will that take, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order on rules.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

[English]

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Parliamentary committees are supposed to follow parliamentary convention. Convention states that remarks, comments, and questions are to be directed to the chair of the committee in the interests of ensuring detached discourse. So if we're going to have discussions here, questions are supposed to be directed to you, not to other members of the committee—

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Through him.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** —or to the witnesses themselves.

So I would suggest that all the members on this committee follow convention and direct their remarks and questions to the chair. If they have questions for other members of the committee, they should direct them through the chair to the other members of the committee.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** That's what I did.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chong, for reminding us of the basic rules of procedure for a committee.

I think it would be best for everyone if we allowed Mr. Rodriguez to finish his intervention. If other committee members wish to speak, just let me know. If people want to raise certain issues, we will put their names down on the speaker's list.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I would like to thank Mr. Chong for reminding us of the Standing Orders. I would also like to say that I had put my question to Mr. Lemieux through the chair. I even gave a signal and I said that my question was for Mr. Lemieux, through the chair. I got my clarification.

This leads me to point out a flagrant contradiction, Mr. Chairman, in what Mr. Lemieux said. Indeed, on the one hand, he told us that the subcommittee should not have invited Mr. Lord, because it made a decision without first consulting the main committee. On the other hand, he told us that we should have heard from a witness who had been invited by that same subcommittee. So according to Mr. Lemieux, we did not have the right to invite Mr. Lord, but we did have the right to invite someone from Statistics Canada, whom we should have heard from. And then Mr. Lemieux blames us for not having listened. This is a double standard: either the committee can go ahead, or it cannot. Mr. Lemieux should be more consistent and honest in what he says.

● (0930)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

I have on my list Mr. Bélanger, Mr. Harvey, Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Nadeau. I would also remind committee members that we have to discuss another motion.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman. I would like to know whether one of us must move discussion of the next motion or whether this will happen automatically, since it is on the agenda.

**The Chair:** Mr. Nadeau, we normally follow the agenda. Since we have just adopted the motion, normally someone would have to move the second motion for discussion, and then we would be productive by voting on that motion.

It is Mr. Bélanger's turn. Mr. Bélanger, do you wish to debate the motion?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, I have a suggestion. In order to make up for the time we lost on Tuesday, I would invite you to organize an extra meeting, if that is the will of the committee. You can check with your colleagues. As for us, we certainly want to make up for that lost meeting.

Regarding the motion to ensure that all invitations are sent out in both official languages, it is before you. I would be pleased to move the motion for a vote and then we can immediately proceed with hearing this morning's witness.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bélanger. I have taken note of your suggestion.

As for the motion, it reads as follows:

That all written correspondence from the Standing Committee on Official Languages, including requests to appear, be written in the language of the recipient and, in case of doubt, in both languages.

Are there any questions or comments with regard to the motion?

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Yes, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Mr. Harvey, we are listening.

**Mr. Luc Harvey:** I was on the list of speakers before we held the first vote. I had things to say about that. But you went ahead with the vote and now we have moved on to another issue which has nothing to do with what we were discussing before. What's going on?

**The Chair:** I received unanimous consent to put the first motion to a vote. On my list I have the names of Mr. Harvey, Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Nadeau. If committee members wish, I can follow the list of speakers.

Go ahead, Mr. Harvey, you're up next on the list. Your timing is good.

**Mr. Luc Harvey:** Our colleagues said something about matters which happened in camera, and then people started speaking freely about what had been said in camera. Are we saying things about some people? They seem to have a selective memory with regard to what was said behind closed doors: when what they said behind closed doors is repeated, they don't quite see things the same way. So it seems there is a double standard. I will respect what was said in camera and will not repeat the dumb things the opposition parties said.

Further, you may remember that at our last meeting, we discussed procedure at length and the fact that we could not change or upset a schedule which had been published and agreed to by all parties—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** One moment, Mr. Harvey.

**Mr. Luc Harvey:** This won't be a point of order, it will just be another thing to discuss.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin would like to make a point of order.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I would respectfully like to make a point of order. We have just agreed to debate a motion requiring that correspondence be sent in both languages. If we are to have a discussion, it must be on the motion. We cannot be seized of a motion and then talk about other vague issues. I believe we should debate the motion. If anyone would like to speak on anything else, they can do so after.

**Mr. Luc Harvey:** But I had raised my hand long before that.

**The Chair:** I accept your point of order. Indeed, we are discussing the motion. The three points on the agenda are the following: the motion on Mr. Lord, the motion on the language of correspondence, which we are discussing now, and then we will move on to committee business and the suggested agenda.

Mr. Harvey, would you like to conclude by speaking to the motion?

• (0935)

**Mr. Luc Harvey:** I had raised my hand earlier, long before we had begun to speak to this motion, but that's fine.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemieux, it's your turn.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Are we debating the motion? All right. I have a question, Mr. Chairman. How do these invitations normally go out? Are they sent in both official languages?

**The Chair:** They are normally sent in the language of the person we are trying to reach. That's how it works on all committees, Mr. Lemieux. But if we don't know which language is—

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** All right. A mistake was made and apologies have been presented. We are debating a motion which simply reaffirms the way the committee works. We can vote on the motion right away, but it's a bit superfluous because the committee already operates that way. Of course, mistakes happen from time to time, but we don't have to adopt a motion every time someone makes a mistake. As you said, the way our committee and every committee operates is that invitations are sent in both official languages.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Nadeau.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** Mr. Chairman, I just want to come back to the issue of inviting someone to appear before the committee, but not doing so in that person's mother tongue. I simply want to point out that we did not know what that person's mother tongue was. It was an honest mistake. We don't know everyone. So if we are to avoid this type of thing from happening in the future, I would simply ask that we make sure—and if this is done anyhow, so much the better, we will only reaffirm the way things are done in this motion—that we not offend the person whom we are contacting, and that to do so we contact the person in their official language, that is, in English or French. This applies to any correspondence by mail, any invitations or any type of correspondence coming from the Standing Committee on Official Languages of the Canadian Parliament.

It is therefore in this spirit and in order to be practical that the Standing Committee on Official Languages will show all citizens that it is aware of this matter. In future, when we are not sure what the mother tongue is of the persons we are trying to contact, we will send the information in both official languages, simply to avoid any unpleasant situations. So in that spirit I am asking that we put the motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** No, I'm fine.

**The Chair:** Mr. Petit?

If no one else wishes to speak, we will put the motion to a vote. It reads as follows:

[*English*]

That all written correspondence from the Standing Committee on Official Languages including requests to appear be written in the language of the recipient and, in case of doubt, in both languages.

[*Translation*]

(Motion agreed to unanimously)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman. I promise, I'm not saying this to impede our proceedings. At least I am consistent in what I do.

When will we adopt the proposed schedule? We have to do this because we did not do so at the last meeting. So I was wondering, out of respect for the rules, when we will go back to the agenda.

**The Chair:** Mr. Nadeau, you've hit the nail on the head. As I mentioned last Tuesday, at the last meeting of the steering committee a proposed schedule regarding the appearance of witnesses was distributed. It will be changed depending on what the committee wants to do. For example, this morning we adopted the motion to invite Mr. Lord at the earliest opportunity, if I can put it that way. So the steering committee is presenting you with its recommendations, which were distributed last Tuesday. You will have had the opportunity to look at them.

I would briefly like to remind committee members that we are basically planning on undertaking two major reviews, the first being on agreements signed between the federal government and communities, and the second dealing with post-secondary education. Other issues will be studied on an ad hoc basis, as we are doing this morning with regard to the ombudsman and CFB Borden. As for how we shall proceed, someone will have to move the motion. We will then debate the issue.

Mr. Godin?

• (0940)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to move the motion. However, I think we should remember that this schedule covers a fairly long period of time ending on May 15 next. As long as we are flexible, we should be able to adapt to any potential changes. This schedule will give the clerk time to call witnesses and to organize our meetings, but in the event that—and I am speaking from experience—Mr. Lord does agree to come, for instance, we should be flexible enough to reschedule other witnesses. So I will move the motion, but with a small amendment allowing for flexibility when necessary.

**The Chair:** So this is the proposed schedule.

Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I would like to support Mr. Godin's motion, which is that we approve the schedule but allow for a certain degree of flexibility. Indeed, nobody knows what will happen. I would also like to address some of the things that Mr. Rodriguez said. It's very important. He is right in saying that a witness showed up last week although his appearance had not been approved by the committee. So in principle, he is right.

[*English*]

We do not want to hear the witness because it hasn't been decided yet whether he should have been invited.

[*Translation*]

However, the witness was already here. He had prepared his notes and had a lot of information to convey to us. He was before the committee. We had to respect the fact that he had taken the time to show up, so we had to hear from him. That was the best thing to do.

It's like today. The National Defence and Canadian Forces ombudsman and other witnesses are here, even though we had not agreed to the schedule. They are ready to testify before the committee. They prepared their notes, they made sure that they were available. So out of respect for them, we must continue with the meeting.

In future, I would like the committee to adopt a schedule before any final decisions are taken with regard to witnesses and issues, as a true committee would do. We must respect the committee and all members who sit on it.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Now I have Mr. Rodriguez.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier, I used the term "honesty". I said that Mr. Lemieux should show some honesty. I apologize, it was not the word I wanted to use. At no time did I presume Mr. Lemieux to be dishonest. I meant to say that he should be consistent since we cannot invite witnesses from a given list and then refrain from inviting the witnesses from that list based on the pretext that the list has not been adopted. It is in keeping with the principle mentioned earlier.

The subcommittee is comprised of members from different parties. We have all, including the chair, debated, discussed, and made decisions based on good will and the presumption that members of the committee of the whole would be in agreement. The subcommittee has carried out the task it was asked to do, and has done a good job.

That being said, can we move on to the next point, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Petit, you have the floor.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Since I am not a member of the steering committee, I would like to make a suggestion similar to Mr. Bélanger's suggestion to include Mr. Lord. This is an urgent issue. I would like to hear from representatives of the CBC concerning the offence made at the Panthéon gala. All Quebec artists were gagged. I would like the CBC to come here. It is a matter of respecting my language. I would like to know why the CBC put us under a gag order throughout the show. I'd like a representative of the CBC to appear as soon as possible.

I've already heard from National Defence officials in November. The CBC's offence has just occurred. This is a hot topic. I do not want to meet with them in six months. Since we are on the topic, I am entitled to table a motion immediately calling upon CBC representatives to answer our questions as soon as possible.

• (0945)

**The Chair:** Mr. Petit, if I understand correctly, you are tabling a motion.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** I would like it to be added, as the issue concerning Mr. Lord was added.

**The Chair:** Since there is already a motion, we shall consider it as an amendment.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** One moment, Mr. Chairman, please.

**The Chair:** That is a point of order.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** On Tuesday, I had asked you to consider the motion to invite Mr. Lord as an amendment to the motion before you then, which you had refused because it failed to meet the 48-hour notice. I hope you will now take the same position.

On Tuesday, you clearly stated that Mr. Nadeau's motion required a 48-hour notice. I have no objection to this, but one must be consistent in the interpretation and application of the rules.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélanger, I'm extremely pleased that you have raised that point. I will remind you that there was no ongoing business on Tuesday's agenda aside from the appearance of the witness from Statistics Canada. However, unlike Tuesday morning, this morning we are dealing with committee business, which is on the agenda in proper form. We are here to discuss the committee's business. I was going to ask Mr. Petit that very question. I thank you for your point of order, which has allowed me to clarify the situation.

I was going to ask Mr. Petit a question. You are therefore proposing an amendment which is entirely in order this morning. If this is the case, we will hear questions and comments on the motion which is to add to the list of witnesses for future meetings representatives from the CBC to discuss the issue raised.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** It would have to be a one-hour meeting, since two hours just for that...

**The Chair:** I will hear from each person in order.

Mr. Chong, go ahead, please.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I agree with my colleague, Mr. Petit.  
[English]

I too was disturbed to read these reports regarding the CBC.

I note that the 1991 Broadcasting Act under which the CBC operates states in subparagraph 3(1)(m)(iii) that the programming provided by the corporation should "actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression". In subparagraph 3(1)(m)(iv) it reads that it should "be in English and in French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities", and in subparagraph 3(1)(m)(vi) that it should "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity".

I think these three sections make it clear that the CBC has an obligation not only to carry services in both official languages but also to bridge the linguistic divide, the linguistic duality that our country has, and I think that cutting French language programming out of a broadcast when it was an integral component of that broadcast is something that we, as a committee, should study for just one meeting.

I would support completely the idea that we put the motion to study this for one meeting in front of the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Chong.

What I would suggest to the members at this very moment is that if there are any members who are willing to express themselves, and if there's unanimous consent, we will move on with the subamendment and with the motion. Then we could proceed with our witness and catch up on our schedule.

If it is the members' will, this is the way we can proceed.

• (0950)

[Translation]

Is there agreement?

All those in favour of Mr. Petit's subamendment?

(Amendment agreed to unanimously)

**The Chair:** All those in favour of the motion?

(Motion agreed to unanimously)

**The Chair:** We will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes and then welcome our witnesses.

Thank you.

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\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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• (0955)

**The Chair:** We will now resume the meeting. I would invite committee members to take their places at the table.

We are pleased to have with us this morning, from the Department of National Defence, the Interim Ombudsman for National Defence and the Canadian Forces.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, Ms. McFadyen. You are going to be addressing the issue of particular interest to us. I would invite you to begin by introducing yourself and your colleagues.

Once again, I want to wish you a warm welcome.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen (Interim Ombudsman, National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, Department of National Defence):** Thank you.

I am pleased to appear before the committee today to give an update concerning the treatment of new soldiers at Canadian Forces Base Borden. I am accompanied today by Margaret Brandon, Director General, Operations, and Denis Egglefield, Director of Investigations for this file.

[English]

Given that we have only recently been notified of this meeting and our desire to ensure that we provide the committee with as much information as possible today, I will call on my colleagues who have been involved in the investigation at every step to make sure we can respond to any detailed questions you have.

[Translation]

I would like to start by saying that I am honoured to have been appointed Interim Ombudsman of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, as well as to have been invested with the authority necessary to fulfil the mandate of the office fully and completely.

As general counsel at the Office of the Ombudsman for more than five years, I had the opportunity to work with the past two ombudsmen and to actively participate in all investigations and important matters. I am proud to have taken part in the real, positive and lasting changes that the office has helped establish within the Canadian defence community in the past.

I am fully committed to ensuring that our military members, our employees at the department and our military families who make so many sacrifices for Canada are treated fairly and equitably.

Over the next few minutes, I will describe the work done by our office since the final appearances by the Ombudsman at the end of last year.

[English]

During his testimony before the committee last November, Mr. Côté indicated that our office would be returning to Borden to assess what, if any, progress had been made to address the serious concerns related to the treatment of unilingual francophone recruits and students. I am pleased to inform you that our investigators did return to Borden at the end of January, and we are currently analyzing the information they collected.

[Translation]

I would also point out that, as a result of the committee's recommendations, we sent two teams of investigators to Canadian Forces Base Gaagetown, where the majority language is English, and Saint-Jean Garrison, which is mainly French. Our investigators completed over 500 confidential questionnaires with students at the Saint-Jean Canadian Forces Language School and five schools at the Gaagetown Base. They also met with students, families and service providers on each base.

What we found, unfortunately, was that the problems at Gaagetown and Saint-Jean are essentially the same as those encountered at Borden over the past year. Unilingual soldiers in the Canadian Forces have real difficulty obtaining services and instruction in the official language of their choice.

Generally speaking, students at Gaagetown and Saint-Jean were not aware of their language rights. Most of them did not know who to go to, how to raise their issues or how to get effective help.

[English]

These services, including medical care, were singled out by many Canadian Forces members as areas where significant improvement was needed. As an example, some students reported difficulty communicating symptoms and understanding diagnoses and treatment options when dealing with medical professionals on the base. One student said all his medical files are written in French; therefore, he couldn't read or understand his own file. Another student said it was hard going somewhere when people do not speak English; he went in for a broken foot and came out with a cold pack. Others raised privacy concerns resulting from situations where a breakdown in communications required the intervention of a third party to serve as interpreter.

● (1000)

[Translation]

We also found that translation was a problem at Gaagetown and at Saint-Jean. Students on both bases said that translated documents were not always available and that much of the translation was very poorly done.

One student at Gaagetown said that he was tired of always having to decode the message in badly translated material. I would add that the instructors and administrators also raised similar problems with our investigators.

[English]

As these examples show, there were very serious issues related to fundamental fairness, respect, and the welfare of members stationed on both of these bases.

[Translation]

One student at the Gaagetown Base summarized his experience working and living in the other official language by saying that bilingualism was a skill and he felt incompetent because he was not bilingual.

[English]

These concerns, along with others raised throughout the course of our work, create unacceptable linguistic barriers that not only hinder the professional development of these students but also create an environment where they feel alienated and isolated.

Following our work at Saint-Jean and Gaagetown, I wrote to the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, to inform him of the problems identified by our investigators and to request his commitment to address these concerns on a priority basis.

[Translation]

General Hillier recently replied to our letter and we are studying his response. As for next steps, as I mentioned earlier, our investigators returned to Borden at the beginning of this year to see what progress had been made to deal with the problems that had been raised.

[English]

However, our findings were not outlined in the letter to General Hillier, the reason being that while a great deal of work has been done to date, our investigators have not yet had the opportunity to complete the analysis of the data from their second trip to Borden. I would expect that this work will be completed in the coming weeks.

[Translation]

We are continuing to keep the Commissioner of Official Languages informed of our work on this file, and we have offered him our assistance if required, given that his office is beginning work on the issue of official languages at military schools and instructional facilities.

In closing, I want to say that I believe, like my predecessor did, that this is an issue of fundamental justice for members of the Canadian Forces. As an independent and impartial organization, our office is committed to ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all members of the Defence community, whether they are francophones or anglophones.

[English]

At this time, Mr. Chairman, we stand ready to provide any assistance that we can to the committee.

*Merci.*

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. McFadyen.

Without further ado, we will begin with a first round of seven minutes. If we have time after that, we will add a shortened additional round.

So I would invite committee members to concentrate on the first round as much as possible.

We will start with the Liberal Party and Mr. Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** If I understand correctly, you went to see the Chief of Defence Staff, General Hillier, for a second time to urge him to deal with the situation.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Are you talking about the situation at Borden? We have received a response concerning those problems. In order to check to see that everything was going well at Borden, we sent another team of investigators in late January. We did that just to make sure that all the problems had really been resolved.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** The second request sent to the Chief of Defence Staff was about Gagetown and Saint-Jean.

• (1005)

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Have you had a response from the Chief of Defence Staff?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes, we have received a response.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Can you share it with us?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes, we can provide you with a copy of that letter now.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** When did you receive it?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** On Friday.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Did you know that you were going to come here?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** No, I received a phone call.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** That is quite a coincidence. Is the response by the Chief of Defence Staff concerning the Gagetown and Saint-Jean bases similar to the one the ombudsman received about CFB Borden?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** It is somewhat similar. We indicated what the problems were, and the Chief of Defence Staff responded. He has tried to resolve them. We will be checking to see whether that has really happened.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** In the case of CFB Borden, a strategic plan was developed but there were no resources to implement it. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I know that the Department of National Defence has a long-term action plan, but we have found things that need to be fixed in the short term. Our role is to try to resolve these problems now.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** If I remember correctly the testimony given by your predecessor and General Semianiw, the Chief of Defence Staff acknowledged that there was a problem at Borden. They came up with a plan to address the situation, but they did not provide the necessary resources to implement the plan.

Am I correct in my interpretation of what happened?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I do not know if it was necessarily a problem of resources, but I think that the issues were not resolved on the ground at Borden. After the first visit to Borden, the chain of command told us that everything was fine.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** According to the notes I have here that are dated August 2, 2007, Major-General Gosselin said the following to the senior staff at CFB Borden:

I am working with the Chief of Military Personnel to find resources to implement this plan.

That tells me that staff had come up with a plan, but that they had forgotten to provide the necessary resources to implement it.

Are you concerned that the same thing might happen at Gagetown and Saint-Jean? Did the Chief of Defence Staff indicate in his letter that he intended to free up the necessary resources to correct the situations that you had identified?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** It is not necessarily a problem of resources. For example, an official languages coordinator would need to assign a place to new soldiers. Resources are not a very important factor.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** You were supposed to receive a report from the Chief of Military Personnel in December about the situation at CFB Borden. Did you receive that report? Can you share it with us?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I believe so, but not today. We will send it to you.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Can you give us a general idea of what it says?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** It is a response from the Chief of Military Personnel. His letter addresses all the questions raised by Mr. Côté. We are now in the process of checking whether the measures have actually been implemented on the ground at Borden.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** When did you receive the report?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** In December.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** So you have been checking since December whether steps have been taken? Have people from the ombudsman's office gone back to Borden?

• (1010)

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes, we sent a team of investigators in January.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** What was the result?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** We are in the process of analyzing the questionnaires and interviews done at Borden.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** You went there in late January, which is already over a month ago now. Do you have a first impression? Has there been progress? Are things stalled? Are they getting worse?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I think it can be said that there has been progress. As I said in my remarks, I believe that we should be able to give you more information within the next two weeks. Our investigation will be complete by then.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bélanger and Ms. McFadyen.

We will now go to Mr. Nadeau.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

To begin with, when we met with the officers on December 6, we were told about the political issue connected with obtaining the resources needed to start to deal with the problems at CFB Borden.

So I am surprised to hear you say today that, according to your report, all the difficulties at Borden are resolved. I am very eager to see that report, since these were serious problems.

Let us talk about the instruction that our soldiers received on how to carry out their various tasks. I contacted the Library of Parliament in order to obtain what was, in my humble opinion, basic information. In particular, I asked for the list of courses offered at CFB Borden, the courses offered only in French or only in English, bilingual courses, how often they were offered, how many francophone, anglophone and bilingual CF members there are there, and if a minimum number of students are required in order for a course to be given. What is the situation for each course?

I forgot to ask you whether the books used on the base for courses in French are in French, or whether the young participants have to translate continually. The Library of Parliament told me to contact the Department of National Defence, which replied that it would take a long time to get that information.

Ms. McFadyen, I would like you to undertake an investigation of those issues at CFB Borden as well. I come from a teaching background, and if the school board wanted to know what was going on in my school—what books, programs or material was being taught and what tools were being used—and I answered that it would take a very long time to get that information, I do not think that I would have kept my job for very long.

I think that the situation at Borden goes beyond what is obvious, and it also involves administrative issues; I would point the finger at National Defence.

I sent a letter and I phoned the Office of the Minister of National Defence, to which I was told to address my questions, and that is the kind of answer I was given. If that is the answer that a member of Parliament gets, imagine what happens with a soldier who does not know his rights. Things have gotten to the point in our country that you need to know that you have the right to speak in your own language and obtain services in that language. That is hurtful and it is an extremely flawed system.

Would you be prepared to do an in-depth investigation? You have received a copy of what I have just described. The necessary research needs to be done. This is where the rubber hits the road. Could I please do my course in French? If I speak French, am I given second-class treatment?

Do you intend to get to the bottom of this?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** That was one of the problems we identified at Borden. It is difficult for soldiers to receive instruction in the official language of their choice, and the translation is inadequate. It is one of the things that we looked at when we went back to Borden a second time. The Commissioner of Official Languages also undertook an investigation to make sure that military personnel could receive instruction in both official languages. We are working in cooperation with—

•(1015)

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** I would like to know whether you received the same answer as I did, Ms. McFadyen. I was told to submit an access to information request to find out what is being taught at CFB Borden. That comes from the Office of the National Defence Minister, Mr. MacKay, in fact. I was told to go through access to information, which would be faster. I hope that you will track down this extremely important information, since access to instruction in the participant's own language, with the necessary teaching materials, is a key factor, and it is a daily problem for the soldiers there.

I want to come back to what Mr. Bélanger said a little earlier. It says here that the necessary resources must be found. I assume that we are talking about the money required for proper materials. Have we come to the point where soldiers have to sell chocolate bars or hold bingos in the church basement in order to buy their instructional materials, like people have to do in French schools in Ontario and Saskatchewan? That is what it takes to get service in French in our country, in Canada, where there are two official languages. In order for francophones to obtain services in our own language, we have to scrape together all our pennies, whereas all the books and documents in English are provided automatically. I would like to hear your response about the money issue. I would like to know how you are going to shake up the department in order to free up the resources to buy instructional material for these students.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** My office believes that new members of the military should be treated in a fair and equitable manner. It is not necessarily an issue of resources, that is the department's problem.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** I understand what you are saying, Ms. McFadyen, but fairness is based on concrete action. It is not enough to philosophize and to table a report saying that the system is not fair. I would like to hear you say that the department is not spending enough to ensure that there is fairness in the system. This has to be highlighted and proven. National Defence is a quagmire for anyone wishing to have a career in French. Everyone knows there is no fairness, this has been proven. We absolutely have to pick up on more of these details. I do my job, we are doing our job, but National Defence is not doing its job, I think we can all agree on that. There is a reason we are here. Mr. Petit said earlier that often people from National Defence appeared before the committee, and there is a reason for that, and he agrees me with on that point.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

It is now Mr. Godin's turn.

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

If I understand correctly, the ombudsman did some travelling and visited CFB Borden. What he learned was that francophones, especially at CFB Borden, were not receiving services in the language of their choice and that there was a problem. This was in 2007.

Do you remember which month this was in 2007?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** The first time Mr. Côté went to CBF Borden was in November 2006.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** All right then, in 2006.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** In January 2007, he pointed out the problems to the Chief of Defence Staff.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Then Mr. Côté came before the committee. Following our request, he said he would go to Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Gagetown.

Do you agree with me on that?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Apart from its bases in Borden, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Gagetown, National Defence also has a school in Kingston. Did the office of the Ombudsman realize that National Defence also called upon private institutions to give certain courses?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I believe there are also subcontractors involved. Since they give courses within the department, they should give them in both official languages, as is the case in the public service.

• (1020)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** You say these courses should be given in both official languages. Let me show you something. Based on what I will show you, could you ask National Defence how many other courses are given this way?

On March 12, 2008, there was an online announcement in French for a naval technician course. My assistant will give you a copy. The French version reads as follows:

If you are applying to the Naval Technician Training Plan (NTP), you must complete and submit:

-Admission Form to the Marine Institute AFMI (in English only)

Here is a copy. It is posted on the Internet. The Marine Institute is based in Newfoundland. We contacted National Defence or the Marine Institute, and this course is given in English only. Anyone from National Defence or from the outside who wants to take the naval technician course can only do so in English, based on the information provided.

I began by saying that the Ombudsman began his investigation in 2006. It is 2008, and once again, it is clear that National Defence provides courses in one language only. Has the department learned its lesson or is it thumbing its nose at the government? There is something going on. There is no respect for the law, whether it protects francophone or anglophone Canadians. National Defence sends people abroad to spread democracy and uphold the laws of other countries, and yet one of our own laws, the Official Languages Act ...

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** I would like to have the document. Can we get on with this?

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** It has been sitting in the corner there for 10 minutes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, I don't mind distributing it if you stop the clock.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** I simply want to follow you.

**The Chair:** Your time has been cut off, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** What? Oh, you scared me!

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Mr. Petit, the procedure is the same for all documents distributed at the official languages committee: they must be in both official languages.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** In both languages.

**The Chair:** Initially, we received the document in French only. Mr. Godin's assistant now has copies in English. So one copy will be distributed to each political party.

**Mr. Luc Harvey:** It is a page in French from an Internet site. If he translated it, it is losing its meaning.

**The Chair:** Yes, but the site is also available in English. There are differences between the two, clearly, that Mr. Godin wants to raise.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** It is available in French.

**The Chair:** We are distributing the document. We can take a couple of minutes to distribute it.

Mr. Godin, are you ready? I will start the clock again. You have two and a half minutes left.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Okay. Mr. Chairman, I have eight copies in English. I think that will be enough to meet the committee's needs.

**The Chair:** Perfect, Mr. Godin, you have two and a half minutes left.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Okay. In the English version, it says:

[English]

"If you are applying for the naval technician training program you must complete and submit an admission form to the marine institution." They don't say it is only in French because they are speaking to the anglophone community.

[Translation]

I am wondering if your research went beyond just Borden, Kingston, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Gagetown. The Department of National Defence uses private colleges. According to the National Defence website, some courses are only available in one language.

• (1025)

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I agree with you, there are problems everywhere. That is why we are going to assist the Commissioner of Official Languages during his audit, so that training in the Canadian Forces, be it provided by an instructor, an entrepreneur or a public servant, is in both languages.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Is it not insulting to see that in 2008? We have been saying for almost 10 years that the Department of National Defence is not respecting the Official Languages Act. Yet we are learning this morning that this department is still providing courses in English only in some provinces and in some institutions. The other official language community does not even have access to that training.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I agree with you. The courses should be provided in both languages, to be fair and equitable for all members of the Canadian Forces.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now give the floor to a member from the government side.

Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McFadyen, thank you for your presentation. Your testimony, like that of your predecessor whom we heard from last November, is key to understanding the situation in Borden.

I think that everyone—certainly all of the members here—agree that the situation in Borden must be improved. The government must find practical workable solutions. The Canadian Forces has a long way to go, after having been neglected for over a decade.

I was in the Canadian Forces for 20 years. I am proud of the initiatives for francophones and bilingualism that our government has taken. Reopening the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean is an example. When I enrolled in the armed forces at 17, I went directly to the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean. I was really disappointed when the former government shut down the college. I am very proud that we have now reopened it.

The Canadian Forces is trying to improve its bilingual training and its bilingual system. The last system was a complete failure. The commissioner said it was a failure. Something must be done. To my mind, the Canadian Forces are trying to react positively.

Your predecessor, Mr. Côté, was deeply concerned about the situation in Borden, but he also mentioned that certain constraints existed, like the fact that it is sometimes difficult to assign francophones to Borden as they prefer to remain in a francophone environment, which is normal. So we need to be pragmatic and take concrete steps that will improve the situation in Borden.

In my view, the challenge appears to be finding qualified bilingual personnel. The Canadian Forces training system is under great pressure because they are attempting to increase enrolment. Therefore, they are accepting a lot of recruits, but there is a shortage of resources to increase the training, because of the operational tempo. For example, the Van Doos are in Afghanistan. So the francophones who could help us in Borden are currently participating in an operation. Those are the major challenges we are facing.

You went over several recommendations, which came both from your predecessor and members of Parliament as well as from elsewhere. In your opinion, would those recommendations help effectively resolve the problem?

• (1030)

[English]

Of all the recommendations you've seen and considered and studied, could you share with us which ones you would find more effective in quickly resolving the situation that exists at Borden—and, now that you've identified it, that also exists in Gagetown, and in Saint-Jean at the recruit school?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I think it's fair to say that what we found won't necessarily be solved by resources. In lots of cases it's a question of attitude, just changing the attitude and making people aware that people have the right to operate in the official language of their choice. That is one thing we've really focused on.

A lot of the stuff that we've suggested needs to take place does not cost that much money. Having a place for someone to go and complain if they don't know where to get their services, if they need help with something, is a right. People need to be able to express themselves and get service in the language of their choice. It will not necessarily cost the department a lot of money to do that.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** No, I agree with you, I don't think money is the solution here. But to my understanding, if, for example, someone is going to teach a course to mechanics, vehicle technicians, or weapons technicians, and they are unilingual, as a qualified instructor—they have the necessary experience, they've taken the necessary training courses, but they're unilingual—it's a challenge for them to actually offer bilingual training. To me, finding someone who is qualified as well as bilingual is where the challenge is.

But from the comments that you just now made, are you stating that actually most instructors are bilingual and they're just choosing to speak one language?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** No, not at all.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Okay, because when you mentioned attitude, it makes it sound like the instructor doesn't have the right attitude and therefore is deciding to teach in only one language and not the other.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** No.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I think it's more of a skill set, and that's why I was saying that I think *le grand défi*, the big challenge, is to find people who are qualified in their own technical trade to teach and who are bilingual, so that they are able to teach in English and in French and offer bilingual service.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Certainly, it is a challenge sometimes to find people who have the specific technical qualifications and are *bilingue*. We're having people take these courses who need to understand, usually for matters of safety and also so that they can get ahead in the Canadian Forces, so that they can understand what they're learning in their mother tongue. There will have to be steps taken so that it's only fair—and again our office looks at fairness—that people are able to get that instruction in both languages.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I guess what I'm asking is this. Of the recommendations you've seen, which recommendations will most effectively ensure that bilingual service is delivered to unilingual anglophones or francophones depending on what base they're on?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I think we just have to make sure the department takes it seriously, and they will have to make some effort to find people and to teach these courses. It's only a matter of fairness that the students are entitled to get these courses in the language they can understand.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We do not have much time left. We can do a final four-minute round.

We will now go to the official opposition and to Mr. Pablo Rodriguez.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Good morning, Madam. I want to welcome you. I will be very direct. I sense that you are very timid and reluctant to criticize or to judge the Canadian Forces. Am I mistaken?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** No, that is not true. I have been working in the Office of the Ombudsman for five years and it is our role to make recommendations to obtain positive changes within the department.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I have the impression we are going around in circles. Perhaps we should invite you back in two weeks, because then, we will have a better understanding. You received information Friday that we do not have access to today. An investigation was conducted in January, and we do not have access to the conclusions today, and they are key to the study on what will happen next in Borden.

I put that out to the committee: we may invite you back to obtain specific answers to certain questions. As you know, time moves on. I am looking at Mr. Côté's report. In his terms, the problem was urgent. It needed to be dealt with urgently, and the allegations or the issues contained in his report are extremely serious. Time is going by and I do not have the impression that any progress is being made. That is why I am so eager to see your report.

In your view, when francophones are recruited and when young people go there, do they have any idea, or do they know that they will undergo training in a place, or in a world that is almost entirely unilingual anglophone?

•(1035)

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I cannot answer that question.

[English]

I don't know what they're told. I know they have to go to basic training somewhere, and there are only certain places they can get it. Certainly with respect to this issue, we received the information. We went back to Borden in January.

I apologize if the committee thinks we've taken a long time to analyze this, but we certainly just want to be sure that the department has done what it said, and if there are more things they need to do, we will ensure that they do it.

That's one of the positive things of our office. We make recommendations, but we do have the right to go public and to put pressure on the government to change things if we see that there is something wrong. That's what we will do once we've looked.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** With all due respect, we are not sensing that pressure. We are reserving our comments for the report. Those are my initial comments. I sensed your reluctance in this area.

We are talking specifically about Borden, but I wonder if the changes made by the Conservative government, in particular the decision to abandon certain obligations linked to bilingualism for senior officers, was not sending a bad message, generally or in specific cases, like Borden. That is a change in attitude in government policy. We have the impression that the Conservative government has taken a step backward regarding the obligations of the Canadian Forces in terms of bilingualism.

[English]

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** The issue of whether they've changed the linguistic profile for senior officers may be something the official languages commissioner will look at when he's looking at his *vérification de l'apprentissage*.

We went out to bases, we saw unfairness in how these recruits were being treated, and that's what we have focused on.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Are you aware of specific cases? Mr. Côté told us about francophones who were being intimidated, probably even roughed up, when they dared to ask for services in French. Are you aware of that? Were you made aware of any concrete examples like that?

**The Chair:** That is your last question, Mr. Rodriguez.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** As regards the second visit to Borden, I think that I can say the situation had improved somewhat.

[English]

As to whether we saw any examples, I'll ask Denis to answer, since he's the director of the *enquête*.

[Translation]

**Mr. Denis Egglefield (Director of Investigations, National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, Department of National Defence):**

In the case of Borden specifically, we have noted an improvement in certain areas and a decrease in the number of problems raised by students, be it in terms of service or training. Having said that, many problematic situations remain in Borden, but I do not have concrete examples at my fingertips. However, I can tell you that according to the students whose comments we collected, problems have considerably decreased and there has been progress. Our intervention has given rise to improvement. We also note some impatience among students. They want the situation to be resolved quickly, which is understandable.

•(1040)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will now go to the government side, to the Conservative Party.

Mr. Petit.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Thank you.

Good morning, Madam. Following a short preamble, I will ask you some questions about Borden or what you know about the base. You have given us an overview of the situation at several bases, be it at Gagetown, Borden or Valcartier, which is in my riding, and of the situation regarding bilingualism.

Over the past two or three years, the Canadian Forces have received new funding for equipment, among other things. But as you know, our soldiers deployed to Kandahar in green uniforms rather than beige ones. There is nothing more ridiculous than that. In addition, we could not even transport our soldiers into a given theatre of operations. We had to use American planes to transport them.

Is this underfunding not also a problem in terms of teaching materials in Borden? My colleagues asked earlier if there were books, among other things. We have been ridiculed for two or three years because of the underfunding of the Canadian Forces. Have you seen this underfunding resulting in a shortage of books, making it impossible to provide training in both French and English?

At present, the recruitment of francophones is higher than it has ever been. How are you going to meet the demand? Are you short of funds, professors, schools? What are you currently short of? You undoubtedly noted that something was missing in Borden, I am sure of that.

[English]

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** At Borden, they certainly have an influx of *nouveaux militaires*, and the department has to deal with this. There is new money, it is my understanding, to go towards Borden. They just have to make sure things are translated, that there are services available.

It's very important. It's at a time when the department is recruiting new people, and they have to be fully trained. It's only fair.

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Members of the military who came to speak to us last November had good intentions. You are following in Mr. Côté's footsteps and that is not necessarily easy. The question is simple: did you find out which books were in Borden? Were there enough? They are the very basis of teaching. If a francophone coming to Borden does not even have a book in French, at least a book telling him where the clinic is, the doctor's office or the dormitory, what should he do? Is there at least that minimum? Is there a lack of money? What is the problem? There must be a problem because otherwise we would not be here today.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** That is a good question. During our second visit to Borden, we surveyed new military members and we interviewed the chain of command. We noticed that services were available in both languages.

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Petit.

We will now continue with Mr. Gravel.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ombudsman, you mentioned in your opening remarks that you had noted the same problems in Saint-Jean, Borden and Gagetown. The problem is the opposite one in Saint-Jean. However that is not the information we have. The teachers in Saint-Jean have told us that everything is bilingual, that there is not a problem and that services are offered in both languages. I don't know why you made that statement.

What are your grounds for stating that Saint-Jean and Borden are experiencing the same problems? What research material were you provided with?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** We received complaints from Saint-Jean telling us that they are experiencing the same problem as in Borden. We then sent a team of investigators to Saint-Jean to look into the situation. We noted that it was difficult to obtain services in both languages, as in Borden. The problem is not as extensive, but it does exist nonetheless.

• (1045)

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** Are you telling us that anglophones are experiencing the same problem as francophones?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** That really is not the information we have. If what you are saying is true, then that means that there is material, there are books in French at Saint-Jean, given that the problem is the opposite. If that is the problem, then why does Saint-Jean not help Borden and Borden do the same? Teachers could be sent there; it is the same department and the same material. It would not cost very much to send material.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I cannot answer that question. That involves military command.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** You could make the suggestion.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I don't know if we could solve the problem by moving teachers.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** That is not what I am saying. We are told that Borden lacks French material. People have to take courses in French but with English material. If that is true, why not use what has already been translated into French from Saint-Jean?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** The courses offered at Saint-Jean are not the same as those offered at Borden.

**Mr. Denis Egglefield:** In most cases, the courses being offered are different. Even though the training problem in Saint-Jean seems less extensive at first blush, we want to make sure after having proceeded with our investigation, that we can provide you with accurate information. Currently the problem appears to be less extensive.

In answer to your question about training material, the courses offered at Saint-Jean are basic training courses directed mainly at recruits. Those differ from the technical courses, for example the vehicle technician course, that are offered at Borden. Therefore, transferring instructors from one place to the other is difficult because we are talking about different courses.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** I understand. Does that mean that soldiers who are trained in Saint-Jean are not as well trained as those being trained in English at Borden?

**Mr. Denis Egglefield:** These are different courses. The basic courses provided to recruits at Saint-Jean, whether those recruits be anglophone or francophone, meet the same standards. It is a question of the availability of training. It appears that the wait time for training recruits at Saint-Jean, whether they be anglophone or francophone, is basically the same. The availability of the courses appears to be the same, which is not the case in Borden nor in Gagetown.

**Mr. Raymond Gravel:** I understand the material is different because the courses are different. However, the individuals teaching at Saint-Jean speak French.

**Mr. Denis Egglefield:** At Saint-Jean, 70% of the recruits are anglophone. There is therefore a greater need for anglophone instructors than there is for francophone instructors. The recruits are for the most part anglophones and they all get their training at Saint-Jean.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Egglefield.

We will now move to the last speaker for today.

Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** You said that the problem was less extensive at Saint-Jean. Do anglophones, who represent 70% of the recruits, have anglophone teachers at Saint-Jean?

**Mr. Denis Egglefield:** There are anglophone, bilingual and francophone instructors there.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** What are the percentages?

**Mr. Denis Egglefield:** I cannot tell you exactly. It appears at first blush that the breakdown of anglophone, francophone and bilingual instructors is appropriate for meeting the training needs.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, I think there is a problem. Let's not fool ourselves. It is impossible for a bilingual instructor to provide a course to two groups of individuals speaking two different languages. I do not think that it is possible. That is why in Canada, we have francophone colleges and universities on the one hand, and anglophone colleges and universities on the other.

I think that is where the problem lies, whether it be in Borden, Gagetown, or the Marine Institute of Memorial University of Newfoundland. How can these individuals provide a course in French when they are all anglophones? If we want francophones to be trained in their own language, then we are going to have to add a francophone institution. That is the problem. We do not need to look elsewhere.

I have trouble accepting what Mr. Lemieux stated, that is that the problem is due to the fact that they are having trouble finding instructors who speak French. There are more than 9 million francophones in Canada, so do not try to make me believe that it is impossible to find a few instructors. I am not even going to say out loud what I am thinking. This makes no sense.

In the same vein, I would say that in this case National Defence does not respect both official languages of this country. I do not think this is a problem of money, but if it is, then these people should tell the government that they cannot cover the cost of two institutions.

It is all very well to say that the instructor speaks French and English, but how can he use a book and provide explanations to everyone at the same time in both languages? That is not done anywhere else. You stated clearly that at Saint-Jean, the courses that are offered are not the same as those in Borden. It is not surprising that the problem exists: in order to respect both official languages, this training has to be provided in two different institutions.

Would you agree with me?

• (1050)

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** As Mr. Côté and myself have already stated, new military recruits should be able to obtain their training in the language of their choice.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Your role as Ombudsman is to make suggestions. So what do you suggest in order to make sure that this training is offered to military members in the language of their choice? My suggestion was that there be two institutions. What is yours?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** It is really up to the Department of National Defence to decide how...

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I agree that it is up to the department to decide, but your role consists in making recommendations.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes, and we are recommending that recruits be able to receive their training in the language of their choice.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** What do you suggest in order to make sure that marine technicians be provided with their training in French in Newfoundland?

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** That course should be available for francophones as well.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Then National Defence is violating the Official Languages Act, given that in that area, no training is provided in French.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** I do not know. That is the first time I have heard about this.

[English]

I don't know if they teach it in French also, but they should. Everybody should have the right to receive instruction in—

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** But if the material were drafted in French, then why would they sign up for training in English?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** That just is not done.

**The Chair:** That will be your last question, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I think that is the proof. In any case, we will leave it up to you to investigate.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Yes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you.

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

That ends today's meeting.

Mrs. McFadyen, I would like to thank you on behalf of the committee members for having spoken to us today.

**Mrs. Mary McFadyen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** You have provided us with details on this issue and have given us very recent information, which will be contained in

the upcoming report. The members of the committee are looking forward to reading it.

Thank you, everyone, and good day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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