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Mr. Steven Blaney

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)):
Good morning everyone and welcome to this 18th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[English]

This morning, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we continue our study of the Department of Canadian Heritage road map for Canada's linguistic duality, 2008-2013. We have the privilege and the pleasure to have with us Minister James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

[Translation]

Minister, I was able to finish my jogging upon arriving this morning. Without any further ado, I invite you to make your opening statement.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear before you again today. I am accompanied by Ms. Judith LaRocque, Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage, and Pablo Sobrino, Assistant Deputy Minister of Strategic Policy, Planning and Corporate Affairs.

Today, I would like to describe for you how our government is demonstrating leadership on official languages. In particular, I will tell you about the actions we have taken under the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality.

[English]

As you know, 40 years ago Canada put in place the Official Languages Act. Since then it has become part of our life and has made bilingualism a fundamental Canadian value. More than ever before, all government departments and agencies take into account the place of official languages and the needs of official language minority communities in their activities and programs.

In addition, in June 2008 our government made an unprecedented commitment to official languages by introducing our road map for Canada's linguistic duality. The government-wide commitment of \$1.1 billion is now being acted on by 15 federal departments and agencies.

[Translation]

What this means for Canadians living in minority-language communities is investments in priority areas, including health, economic development, culture and education. As we move forward,

we are consulting with community groups on the ground, so we get a better understanding of what works, and what we can do to get better results.

I am particularly pleased to hear of the success of the Dialogue Days held here in Ottawa last week. Close to 90 organizations, representing official language minority communities and our linguistic duality, came together over three days for discussions. I understand that these discussions captured the attention of several members of your Committee. I hope we get just as much interest when it comes to supporting our work on the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality.

What happens in our Francophone and Anglophone minority communities across the country is a reflection of who we are. Today, more than 71% of the commitments made in the June 2008 Roadmap have been the subject of formal, detailed announcements by my Department or other departments concerned, amounting to more than \$792 million. Canadians have access to this information through the Official Languages Secretariat section of the Canadian Heritage website.

[English]

Here are a few examples of those investments. In the area of health, our government has set aside more than \$174 million to train staff and improve access to health services. Everybody wins: francophones outside of Quebec and anglophones in Quebec have greater access to health services in their own language, and health professionals can develop their skills while contributing to the future of their communities.

Let me give you a specific example. Last March a health and social services resource centre opened its doors in Gatineau, Quebec. Monsieur Nadeau should be familiar with this centre, as it's in his district. The ConneXions Centre was established to help the approximately 54,000 anglophones in the Outaouais find health services in their own language in their own region.

[Translation]

In education, I announced the signature of a Protocol for Agreements between our government and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, which represents the ministers of all provinces and territories. The protocol sets aside more than \$1 billion for education, second-language education, and scholarship and bursary programs. Because of this support, close to 107,000 young Anglophones in Quebec and 142,000 young Francophones in other parts of Canada are studying in their own language, in a school of their choice. And 2.4 million young Canadians are learning French or English as a second language at school, including 300,000 immersion students.

• (0910)

[English]

These are programs we are proud to support, new services that make a difference every day in the lives of all Canadians.

I've already stated that our official language minority communities are a fundamental part of who we are as a country. That goes without saying to members of this committee. What needs to be said is how these communities are becoming economic assets for Canada. For example, more and more business in western Canada can be conducted in French. Thanks to the government's investment over five years, 1,600 French-language jobs were created or strengthened in 2008, and 716 francophone businesses were created or were able to improve their competitiveness over the same time period. This achievement can be attributed to our overall commitment to official languages.

Francophone economic development also includes the north. Our government will invest more than \$500,000 in various projects for Nunavut in the north, while over four years \$400,000 will go to socio-economic development in northern francophone communities.

[Translation]

As you know, Canada enjoys a competitive economic advantage over other countries by having two official languages of international stature.

One of the Roadmap projects was specifically to offer all Canadians free access to the Government of Canada's Language Portal, which features high-quality language tools such as TERMIUM. Since last October, this powerful work tool—developed in Canada—has put all our language expertise within the reach of all Canadians.

We have also launched a second-language pilot project at the Canada School of Public Service to give more people access to language-learning products at Canadian universities. This means that students at 11 universities will benefit from the School's training tools and products in learning their second official language. This project allows us to raise awareness among our youth about the advantages of bilingualism.

Mr. Chair, your Committee is currently studying immigration as it relates to official language communities. This study is well-timed.

At the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie held in Vancouver last September, my counterparts and I clearly stated

that this issue is vital for the growth of the Canadian Francophonie. We continued our discussions this past March at the 12th Metropolis Conference in Montreal, and we supported the publication of the *Best Practices Manual on Francophone Immigration in Canada*, which was presented during the conference.

This clearly shows the potential for action by all levels of government.

In Saskatchewan, we worked with our provincial counterparts to make it possible to implement a project that will make it easier for Fransaskois to access government services in their own language, in fields such as immigration and health. In total, we are investing \$200,000 over two years in this project, which draws on the single-window concept, providing the public with access to integrated services on a one-stop shop basis.

[English]

We recognize the importance of working together. In partnership with the Government of Manitoba, we recently provided \$50,000 for a project enabling TFO, the Franco-Ontarian channel, to broadcast in Manitoba. This partnership with another government increased the availability of francophone culture in the province of Manitoba while also helping Franco-Ontarian creators reach a broader and expanded audience.

While I am on the issue of working together, I want to note that the *Guide for Federal Institutions* has been widely distributed for three years now. A new summary of best practices is available to the public and the Government of Canada's organizations. This highly useful document gives concrete examples for supporting minority communities and promoting our two official languages.

• (0915)

[Translation]

As the Minister responsible for arts and culture, I would be remiss if I did not mention the cultural support programs put in place by our government under the Roadmap: the Cultural Development Fund, the Music Showcase Program, and the National Translation Program for Book Publishing.

Let me give you some details about these three programs. Last year, I announced the implementation of the Cultural Development Fund. With a budget of \$14 million over four years, the Fund is strengthening the arts, culture, and heritage within minority communities. Several organizations across the country have received funding for their projects under the Fund. To mention just a few, in British Columbia, we have helped Vision Ouest Productions launch a new summer event called ÉTÉÂTRE. It will feature a host of activities, films and shows celebrating the Francophonie in my home province.

The Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network also has a great project. Under its Spoken Heritage Online Multimedia Initiative, it plans to preserve and promote the oral history and cultural heritage of English-speaking Quebec.

Mr. Godin, I am sure you are familiar with this project in your home province of New Brunswick. There, Film Zone is raising the profile of Francophone film in Acadian regions, especially among young people, and is also encouraging film production in the region. Mr. D'Amours, I am sure you are also a supporter of this project.

[English]

Last year we also announced that we were establishing the music showcases program. The program was created with the aim of giving official language communities better access to music performances in their own language. At the same time, our artists, including those from official language communities, can reach an even wider audience—in Canada and abroad.

To act on this commitment, our government provided \$4.5 million over five years to Musicaction and FACTOR through the Canada music fund. These two organizations are managing this sum to meet the particular needs of Quebec anglophone communities and francophone communities outside of Quebec.

[Translation]

The National Translation Program for Book Publishing was established in April of 2009. The purpose of this program is to give Canadians better access to our country's rich culture and literature, in both official languages. This program helps Canadian publishers translate Canadian-authored literary works into either English or French. Quebec books such as *Vers le sud* by Dany Laferrière and *Le facteur C* by Simon Brault were translated into English by publishers in British Columbia and Ontario.

[English]

As I said a moment ago, our government supports the cultural vitality of these communities, not only through the road map but also through my department's cultural support programs.

Arts and culture employ more than 650,000 Canadians. They contribute \$46 billion to the Canadian economy and account for nearly 4% of Canada's GDP.

Since April 1 of 2009, our government has invested more than \$53 million in projects, under the economic action plan, to be implemented in Canadian communities of all sizes. You would be right if you said that this support is going to all of Canada's communities and that its scope is far broader than our official languages concerns. My reply is that a culturally and economically diverse society yields advantages from all of our communities, including official language minority communities.

[Translation]

I would like to give you an example that speaks volume. The amount of French-language audiovisual productions originating outside Quebec rose sharply from 2003 to 2009, from less than 50 hours to 110 hours. What that actually means at the community level is jobs—jobs for writers, actors, technicians, and other workers in the arts and culture sector. It also means services and business opportunities for a sector three times the size of the insurance industry and twice the size of the forestry industry.

In 2008 and 2009, 14 National Film Board films were produced or co-produced by artists from Francophone communities outside Quebec, and 12 films were produced or co-produced by artists from

Quebec's Anglophone communities. These films enjoyed critical and popular success; an example is the Franco-Ontarian film *Entre les lignes*. Mr. Bélanger, you may be familiar with this superb Franco-Ontarian film. Each of these works is a reflection of its community.

● (0920)

[English]

Finally, you will recall that the language rights support program was announced in June of 2008. During the 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, I reaffirmed our government's commitment to delivering a fully operational program before the end of 2009. I announced that the University of Ottawa would be the managing institution of the program. We have met this commitment. The program began operating last December. Mr. Allan Rock, former minister and current president of the University of Ottawa, has praised the government's actions. He said—and I quote—“Thank you for continuing to lead in the area of language rights in Canada.”

[Translation]

As you can see, promotion of our two official languages and support for official language minority communities, have been and will remain priorities of our government. This is very evident from the activities and programs that I have mentioned today.

I would like to thank you for once more giving me the opportunity to describe what our government is doing to show the way forward in this area. Thank you for your attention. I am ready to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will start the first round with Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would just like to make the Committee aware that my colleague, Mr. Coderre, is here today and will be replacing me later, as the Commissioner of Official Languages is tabling his fourth report this morning at 10 a.m., if memory serves me. So, I will have to leave, and I would like to thank my colleague for being here.

Minister, your presentation this morning is basically a list. You mentioned a series of programs. It seems to me that what is missing... Indeed, our Committee will be looking at this, because it is our intention—I hope—to table an interim report on the Roadmap, since we are now at the halfway point. There are gaps. Last year, the Commissioner spoke of them. According to the media, he mentions them again in his report this year. So, we'll see.

I would like to mention two things. I am not asking for an answer. We will get the answers in greater detail in the government's response to our report. In the final year of the Action Plan, the amount was some \$230 million. If I take that last year of the report and transpose it over five years of the Roadmap, I note that there is no increase. So, that effectively means that there has been an erosion in funding for the communities, if we only consider inflation and the addition of some programs that you have praised.

I will let you comment, but I want to mention, Minister, that there seems to be a problem with governance. You are the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. Since you became minister, have you struck an ad hoc Cabinet committee on official languages?

Hon. James Moore: There is no Cabinet committee on official languages, but there are other committees. Respect for Canada's two official languages is always a concern in every piece of legislation we bring forward and in each of our commitments.

I would also like to respond to what you said regarding the money still available to be spent. Many of our commitments—in education, for instance—are multi-year. So, to say that some \$700 million has already been spent... These are amounts that are part of multi-year commitments. So, there is no erosion occurring with respect to our investments. We are spending more money on official languages than has ever been done before in the history of Canada.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Not in constant dollars. In terms of constant dollars, that is not the case, Minister.

Hon. James Moore: Yes it is.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In constant dollars, if you factor in inflation, support for the communities over the five-year period is less than what it was. We will come back to that.

So, there is no ministerial committee on official languages. The Action Plan provided for two annual consultations: one in the fall, with ministers, and one with officials, in the spring. We are now in the third year of the Action Plan. This week, you had your first consultation with officials. Did I get that right? Was it with officials?

Hon. James Moore: Yes, but it was not the first.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Were there others?

Hon. James Moore: I have held several consultations in the regions of Canada with organizations on the ground, in their communities.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I am talking about the Roadmap.

Hon. James Moore: Officially, yes; last week, there was a meeting.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It was the first.

Have there been consultations with the 11 or 13 ministers responsible for various aspects of the Roadmap and the communities? Have there been systematic annual consultations?

● (0925)

Hon. James Moore: Each minister can tell you about his personal commitments and the commitments made by his department. That is each individual minister's responsibility.

As a minister, my responsibility is to ensure that we have the necessary funding in place to keep our word and meet expectations.

[English]

To say there's been an erosion of funding for official languages and that in constant dollars... The five-year road map that was Stéphane Dion's road map when he was minister has been increased by 20%. Inflation over the past five years has not been 20%. There's been a dramatic increase in funding for official languages in this country.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Minister, just to address your final point—

[English]

If you take the funding in the last year of the action plan, which was at that point over \$230 million, and you transpose that over the next five years, then in effect, in constant dollars, you will see an erosion.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

[English]

Hon. James Moore: That's not how the program works.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's fine. I'll come back.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

We move now to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Minister.

Minister, I have a lot of things to say, but very little time available to me, unfortunately. The Official Languages Act is now 40 years old. It is intended to ensure that all citizens can receive services from their federal government in the language of their choice all across the country. That is the whole rationale for the Official Languages Act.

Having said that, looking at what is going on inside the public administration and comparing the Dion plan to the Roadmap for Canada's linguistic duality, it seems that we have gone from \$72 million to \$17 million. That is money invested in the public service so that people are able to... We know that there are gaps as far as French is concerned, it being the minority language. There has been a huge drop—from \$72 million to \$17 million—in the monies invested in the public service to ensure that public servants are able to speak the language of choice of the people they are dealing with.

I have read the report and the documents you forwarded to us. We are told that the reason for this is that the money has been given to the Canada School of Public Service to provide better training. We have gone from \$13 million to \$3 million. I am talking about the money from the first plan and the second plan. How can you say that the spirit and Part IV of the Act are respected—particularly in terms of communications with the public and service delivery—when there has been such a glaring decrease in the money provided to the public service to ensure that services are delivered in the language of the minority?

Hon. James Moore: We have made a number of changes. It is not just a matter of funding. Ms. LaRocque can explain the changes that have occurred.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque (Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage): It is difficult for me to speak for my colleague at Treasury Board, because this is her responsibility. However, I can tell you that the School has made major changes to the way it delivers training. Computers are now used to a much greater extent. People can test themselves and determine their own level of bilingualism, and from there, establish—

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Test themselves? Listen, there is not much point in continuing this; I do not accept that. What we need is training. Testing yourself when you are a unilingual Anglophone! That is really something, don't you think?

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: But at least it—

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Ms. LaRocque, I only have five minutes so I would like to keep going. Only five minutes, Mr. Moore. I am sorry, but the rules set by the Liberals and Conservatives when this Committee began holding meetings are that we only get five minutes—to punish the mean old New Democrats and Bloc members. What can I say?

As regards civilian positions at National Defence—National Defence is part of the Canadian government machine—I see that there are unilingual positions in Quebec. There are 1,035 unilingual English positions in Quebec. I wanted you to be aware of that, because I am sure you will be speaking to your friend, Mr. MacKay, and all the other ministers. At National Defence, 43% of the public service positions are unilingual English, compared to 5% of positions that are unilingual French. It is disproportionate. When a soldier wants to receive services in French from his own public service... There is a huge amount of work still to be done.

I would like to end on the interdepartmental issue. What is the status of your work in that area? In April, representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada told us they had no idea where the government is going in that regard. Canadian Heritage should not be the only one providing services in French to the community as a whole.

● (0930)

Hon. James Moore: Regarding your comment on National Defence, I am certain that Mr. MacKay takes his duty to respect the official languages of Canada very seriously. As you know, there are a great many reports that deal with National Defence services. Mr. Fraser talked about them and I am sure that Mr. MacKay and his officials are working hard in that area.

As for our engagement with our partners and the other departments, I know that Ms. LaRocque and Mr. Sobrino engage with their counterparts on an ongoing basis to ensure that all commitments are met and that taxpayers' money is being properly spent. She may want to comment on that.

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

We move now to Mr. Godin, for five minutes.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning. I would like to hear more about the “self-testing” method.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: There is a self-assessment that is available. You can use a computer to ascertain your level of bilingualism.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, that is the way it works at Air Canada, from what I can see! At Air Canada, a flight attendant was supposedly bilingual, according to Jazz—which is not subject to the Official Languages Act as Air Canada is. She was telling us that she had passed the exams and that was why she was now assigned to flights between Montreal and Bathurst. So, I guess she must have “self-tested”?

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: I am not aware of that case.

Mr. Yvon Godin: A complaint was filed with the Commissioner of Official Languages and with Air Canada in that regard. Now I understand. I wanted to know what the term “self-test” meant. If people are assessing themselves, that does not mean the results will be the same if they are assessed by someone else.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: No, that is only an initial step, and from there the training that is needed is planned.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When that is over, when these individuals are already in a position, you realize that they self-tested and do not speak both languages. Now I understand.

There will be a debate Wednesday afternoon regarding the Official Languages Act and Air Canada. This will be the fourth time a bill has been tabled in the House of Commons. Mr. Moore, why is it that the government does not introduce legislation to protect the Official Languages Act at Air Canada? Because Jazz is not subject to that legislation; Air Canada is. If we complain to Air Canada, we cannot go and talk to officials at Jazz. And that is what is happening now. If one of your officials could follow up on that, that is the fundamental issue there.

Do you support a private member's bill that has been tabled in the House of Commons two or three times by your government but which never comes to fruition?

Hon. James Moore: I was the transport critic when I was in opposition. I understand what you are talking about. I am well aware of this issue. We will just have to see when the bill... At some point, there will be a debate in the House of Commons, and I hope to consider your position very seriously.

Mr. Yvon Godin: “Seriously” is not enough. Do you support the bill or not?

Hon. James Moore: As a government, we will see and be attentive to the debate in the House.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Minister, “being attentive” does not answer my question.

Hon. James Moore: I am certainly in favour of a bill that my colleague, Mr. Baird, would table.

Mr. Yvon Godin: All right.

In Ottawa, in Montreal and in other cities in Canada, public servants can speak the language of their choice.

In Ottawa, would you say that Supreme Court justices are, in a way, public servants? Are they subject to the Act? They are, aren't they?

Hon. James Moore: Supreme Court justices can speak the official language of their choice, yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Fine, but how can they speak the official language of their choice when the nine judges deliberating on a case in French are all forced to deliberate in English because one person does not speak French?

Hon. James Moore: The opposite can also be said, if someone is unilingual French. Right?

• (0935)

Mr. Yvon Godin: But no such case exists. In 143 years, it has never existed.

Hon. James Moore: You do not have confidence—

Mr. Yvon Godin: In 143 years, it has never existed.

Hon. James Moore: I have complete confidence in the community—

Mr. Yvon Godin: In 143 years, Mr. Moore, there have been none.

Hon. James Moore: It is my hope that one day, young unilingual Francophones in Canada will have an opportunity to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That was not my question.

At the Supreme Court of Canada, is it possible for the eight justices who speak French and who are discussing a French case to speak the language of their choice if there is one justice among them who does not speak French, and if no interpretation services are available?

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Godin, I am against your bill.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, I know that.

Hon. James Moore: I am against your bill for many reasons, because your—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I guess you are also telling the Senate to vote against it, are you not?

Hon. James Moore: Pardon?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Your government is telling the Senate to vote against this bill, right?

Hon. James Moore: We will see. I am sure there will be a lengthy debate in the Senate. Our government is against your bill because the purpose of the Official Languages Act is to unify Canada, not to divide people on the basis of language.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So you think the Official Languages Act divides the country?

Hon. James Moore: No, your bill would divide the country.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The only thing my bill says is that the people of this country have to be able to make themselves understood in both official languages. And you say that is divisive?

Hon. James Moore: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, that is what you just said, Minister.

Hon. James Moore: No, your bill and the way it would be applied would not be in the best interests of Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. James Moore: As you said, for more than 140 years, the Supreme Court of Canada has served all Canadians very well. Your

little game with Mr. Mulcair and this bill that you have introduced to try and win seats in Montreal is dividing Canadians, and is not in the best interests of Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is dividing the country.

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

We will move now to Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Once again, welcome to the Committee.

I would also like to thank our other witnesses for being here today.

Personally, I like to hear the answers. Mr. LaRocque, you were talking about what our government is doing with respect to the public service. I would like you to complete your answer.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: I want to say right off the bat that I am no expert on the Canada School of Public Service. That responsibility falls to my colleague, the Secretary of the Treasury Board.

However, based on my understanding of the situation, people are invited to do a self-assessment using a computer. It is a way of obtaining an overall assessment of their mastery of the second language. Based on that, training plans are developed for them. Within that framework, much greater use is made of computers, as opposed to individual training.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much.

I really liked the tests, exams and evaluations, because they meant that I did not have to wait. In that respect, I certainly understand the rationale for that process.

[English]

Hon. James Moore: Because this question came up within the context of public service—Mr. Godin's bill—let me just take a minute, without the shouting back and forth and in the constraints of time, to say, in the language in which I'm obviously a little more comfortable, yes, Mr. Godin, we are against your bill, because I think the Supreme Court of Canada is one of Canada's great institutions and it has served this country incredibly well for over 140 years without your bill.

I think what you're doing with Thomas Mulcair and, unfortunately, some members of the Liberal Party—although from private conversations, I know there's a great deal of doubt within the Liberal Party about the position they've taken on this private member's bill—is that you're taking Canada's responsibility to bring Canadians together and to respect our official languages and using that as a political wedge. This is, I think, a very cynical game, using the Supreme Court for political purposes that are entirely unhealthy.

As you know, when Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin was appointed to the Supreme Court, she would not have qualified to become a member of the Supreme Court under your bill. As you know, John Major has spoken out against your bill. As you know, the *Globe and Mail*, *Macleans*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Montreal Gazette* have all written that your bill is destructive to the court. And francophone papers—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. James Moore: —have spoken out against your bill, saying that it's not in the best interests of the court, of Canadians, or of national unity to go down the road that you're proposing here.

I think the Supreme Court has served Canadians very well. The Official Languages Act has served Canadians very well. Of course, there are at times challenges when it comes to ensuring that Canada's official languages are seamlessly realized in every aspect of the public service, but to use the Supreme Court, through your bill, as a wedge like this to try to divide Canadians in a cynical attempt to gain a couple of seats in Montreal is really the worst of politics.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much, Minister.

I'd like to return to the road map, if I could, for just a moment, because that is in fact why we're here today. I know that other members had a number of questions that they've said were relevant to the road map, and I'm going to ask one. You've commented that it differs from the action plan in the Dion era. I'd like you to expound on how it differs, please.

• (0940)

Hon. James Moore: Well, it differs, obviously, from how the Liberals imposed things, and in a number of ways, not the least of which is the level of funding that we've put in place, the consultations we've done prior to the implementation of the road map, and the ongoing consultations we're engaged in. We have new standards that we've put in place for those who are receiving money from the federal government, to ensure that the investment of our money has greater velocity. These standards are going to go I think a very long way to ensuring that the results of the broad goals of the road map will be seen well into the future.

I'm not sure if you want to add anything, Judith.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: There is also quite a

[*Translation*]

cultural component

[*English*]

to this road map, with

[*Translation*]

the Music Showcase

[*English*]

and also with the translation program, which is different from the original road map—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: That is new money, is it not?

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: Yes.

[*English*]

Also, I think we've reached a greater number of departments with this particular plan in the sense that we are now 15 departments that are actively funded by the road map and that are continuing to delve into this work and, we hope, establish good working relationships with the communities, really get to know them, and understand their needs.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good.

How many departments were covered under the action plan of the Liberal government?

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: There were eight, and now we're up to 15.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover.

We will now begin our second round, with Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, did you say that the Commissioner of Official Languages did not know what he was talking about when he expressed support for the bill that deals with the language proficiency of judges to be appointed to the Supreme Court?

Hon. James Moore: We had a discussion about that in my office a week and a half ago. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss his report, which will be released to the public in about 45 minutes. We had a good discussion and he understood my viewpoint. He said imposing the legislation would cause a lot of problems in practice. Imagine what would happen if someone was a candidate for a position on the Supreme Court and came before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. A committee member might ask him questions and ask him to say a few words in French, only to decide that his proficiency just was not adequate. Legal excellence must take priority. Here we are talking about changing our Supreme Court by Americanizing it. That is not in Canada's interests.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Minister, I have to stop you there. I had the same conversation with the Commissioner of Official Languages. He talked about the way they would be appointed if Mr. Godin's bill passes. However, he is still in favour of this bill.

What you are doing is a little dishonest, because the Commissioner of Official Languages is in favour of the bill. He thinks this would be a way of introducing positive change within the Canadian federation. And if justices had to be bilingual at the time of their appointment, the way the parliamentary committee operated might have to be reviewed. You are attributing comments to him that he never made.

Hon. James Moore: It is wrong to believe there would be no negative consequences from this bill, because of the way it would be applied on the ground.

Mr. Fraser also stated quite clearly, in my discussions with him, that it is not as simple as that. This is an issue on which we cannot all agree.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You also say that the Quebec National Assembly—

Hon. James Moore: Rest assured that my position in that respect is that I want our country to respect its bilingual heritage and have respected institutions.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So, you are saying that everyone who is in favour of ensuring that Supreme Court justices can all work and express themselves in the country's two official languages is dividing the country.

Hon. James Moore: No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Quite frankly, Minister, I am surprised by your comments this morning.

• (0945)

Hon. James Moore: I said that the Supreme Court has worked very well for more than 140 years without this bill.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But the country has worked—

Hon. James Moore: When you were minister, you did not impose this kind of legislation, because your government had understood that it would not be in the best interests of Canada to divide Canadians on an issue like official languages.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You are making a big mistake, Minister. I believe your colleagues in the Senate are quite uncomfortable with this. Mr. Nolin, among others, seems to want to support the bill.

Hon. James Moore: There are more Liberals who do not support it.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The entire Quebec National Assembly and New Brunswick Legislature, including the Ministers of Justice representing the governments of New Brunswick and Quebec, have said that this bill should be supported. Quite frankly, Minister, you really should do your homework.

I would like to come back to the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality. The FCFA would like your government to again consider the creation of an Official Languages Secretariat at the Privy Council. Are you in favour of such an initiative, Minister?

Hon. James Moore: The choice—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I know that this is a decision to be made by the Prime Minister, but do you support that demand by the FCFA?

Hon. James Moore: I understood your question the first time; you do not need to ask it twice.

Management of the Privy Council is decided by the Prime Minister of Canada. I can tell you that our Department has made a number of commitments to the other departments in order to ensure that the money is spent effectively and that they show leadership in terms of, not only their policies, but their public servants.

I do not know whether you would like to talk about the changes made by our government, and not yours, with respect to Canada's official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

We will continue now with Mr. Carrier, an engineer colleague.

You have the floor, Mr. Carrier.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): This is my first meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Good morning, Mr. Moore and Ms. LaRocque.

I would really like to convince myself of your determination to defend the official languages. Under your Roadmap, I see that you were expected to spend \$1 billion from 2008 to 2013. That is a lot of money—at least, that is the information you have provided. At the same time, I believe the best example of a country that sees itself as bilingual is that it must itself be bilingual.

In my opinion, senior-level positions should be designated bilingual. Do you agree with that?

Hon. James Moore: That is not the only criterion, but it is important.

Mr. Robert Carrier: It is an important criterion for a country which has an official languages policy.

Hon. James Moore: That is why we increased our budget. We have made new commitments.

Mr. Robert Carrier: That is fine, in terms of the budget. However, in actual fact, as a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, I noted that all the officials we meet with and who come before the Committee to present their plans and programs for the year, speak to us only in English. In terms of setting an example, as a government that sees itself as bilingual and has an official languages policy, I would say you are providing very poor service. It means that all the great policies that you officially support are ineffective.

And there is worse: witnesses who sometimes have a French name who are called to appear before the Committee almost feel that they have to speak English. Of course, people have a right to express themselves in the language of their choice. However, there is frustration out there and it is expressed by Francophones. It is clear that Francophones are speaking English because they have the impression that they are coming to appear as representatives of an Anglophone government. That is the comment I wanted to make.

I think you should start with the public service: you should also ensure that candidates applying for positions that are bilingual imperative who want to receive these kinds of promotions are actually bilingual and can speak both English and French. That is my first recommendation.

Let's talk about the judges now. At the Supreme Court of Canada, all Canadian citizens, whether Francophone or Anglophone, must be able to be heard in the language of their choice. And it is perfectly normal that justices be able to understand what people are saying. Relying on interpretation is always difficult. You miss certain parts because the interpreter is always behind the person who is speaking. You must know as well as I do that this is not an effective process. Therefore, it is perfectly normal, if we are demanding that our senior officials be able to express themselves in French and English, that Supreme Court justices, who are the most senior representatives of our justice system in this country, also be able to understand French. It may not be necessary for them to be equally proficient in French and English, if you want them to retain some freedom in that regard, but I think it is essential they be able to understand.

Personally, I use an earphone. I listen to the comments in English in an effort to understand English, because it is important to know both languages. As far as our judges are concerned, they must be selected for their competence, but I do think we could choose individuals who understand both French and English.

It is much simpler for a country to have a single official language—that is really what you are saying. It is much simpler to operate in English alone and for all of us to just use English when communicating with each other.

• (0950)

Hon. James Moore: That is not what I said.

Mr. Robert Carrier: But if you are in a country with an official languages policy, which is spending \$1 billion—you have highly paid translators on your payroll—just to say that we have two official languages, it seems to me that it is perfectly normal for the most senior officials or individuals representing the government and the country to be able to understand both languages equally well. That is my view.

I am very disappointed to see that the Minister, who should be defending the two languages, does not agree with that principle.

Hon. James Moore: I agree with the principle that all our institutions, including the Supreme Court of Canada, must respect Canada's official languages. That includes people who not able to express themselves in English or French. Everyone must be respected—not only people who are perfectly bilingual.

The problem with this bill is that it says that people who are unilingual have no role to play at the Supreme Court, and that is not in Canada's interests. We certainly want to see bilingual justices appointed to the Supreme Court, we want the Supreme Court to be bilingual and we want that to be respected, but—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. James Moore: For more than 140 years, our Supreme Court has served Canadians in both official languages, very effectively and responsibly, and in such a way as to unite this country. We do not need legislation like this.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Well, you are clearly expressing your lack of comprehension of linguistic duality, as Minister and as—

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

Hon. James Moore: Well, since that is coming from a member of the Bloc Québécois, I will take it with a grain of salt.

The Chair: Fine.

We move now to Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, I would like to thank you for being here today.

As a lawyer from British Columbia, who resides in that province and is the father of three children who attend French immersion school, I believe I have a lot in common with Mr. Bélanger and Mr. Godin.

First of all, like you, I am totally in favour of a policy that aims to foster the development of the French and English languages, which are Canada's two official languages. That policy falls within your purview, as Minister. I believe the conclusion is a completely different one when we are talking about the Supreme Court. We all agree that justice must be respected in the country. That is clear. The same applies to the two official languages. However, if, in British Columbia, a policy stating that the Supreme Court has to be the way

they want it to be is allowed to be imposed, I believe that will cause division in Western Canada. In order to defend the two languages, the best policy is always a united country from coast to coast where Canadians can speak both languages.

In your opinion, what will people out West think if some people continue

[*English*]

to promote this policy of complete bilingualism at the level of the Supreme Court?

Second, related to my introduction, the policy of promoting French immersion in the schools in the west, in British Columbia, seems to be succeeding, but there are long lineups. I'm wondering whether the road map is doing anything to help promote French immersion schools in B.C. and other places.

Hon. James Moore: We've dramatically increased funding for education to help people gain access. I can tell you this as someone whose mom was one of the first teachers in British Columbia.

Look, my father turns 69 this fall, and he slept in a car outside a school a couple of months ago so that his granddaughters, my nieces, could be in French immersion schooling in British Columbia. He slept in a car—at 69 years of age—to make sure that they could get in. My sisters pitched a tent on the front lawn of another school so that my other sister's daughters could be in French immersion.

So my family has a long track record, and I take no lectures from anybody when it comes to my family's commitment to Canada's official languages and doing our best to ensure that, especially on the education side, people have access.

You're right that as British Columbians we have a different perspective.

I notice, by the way, that on this committee, in the two years now that I've been Minister of Official Languages, there are no British Columbians on the opposition side. It's the third-largest province of Canada and no British Columbian has ever been a member of this committee....

I can tell you this: British Columbia is Canada's third-largest province, we have 4.1 million people living in it, and 60,000 claim to be bilingual. A tiny fraction of them are lawyers; a tiny fraction of those are lawyers of the calibre to be in the Supreme Court; and a very small proportion of those are fluently bilingual enough to be in the Supreme Court.

This is what I mean by saying that this bill by the NDP, this cynical bill that is unnecessary, will hurt this country's unity going forward. Canada's third-largest province deserves to have people on the Supreme Court, people like Beverley McLachlin, who are of the highest judicial excellence to serve this country. Beverley McLachlin would not be on the Supreme Court if this bill, which was supported by the Liberals, the Bloc, and the NDP, were in force back in 1989. Canada's Supreme Court has served this country for over 140 years without this law, without this bill, that is very divisive.

This is why, for example, Peter MacKinnon, the former dean of law at the University of Saskatchewan, said that the bill was not just unwise but “very unwise”, and that he was “surprised it got this far”. The *Montreal Gazette* said that “imposing a formal rule” to make Supreme Court judges fully bilingual “would be a mistake”. I have a list of quotes that goes on and on.

This is not in the best interest of Canada. Of course we want Supreme Court judges to be bilingual. Of course the court has to be bilingual. Of course all Canadians, regardless of linguistic barriers, have a right to be heard before the Supreme Court. And of course these institutions have to respect Canada's past and our future aspirations to be a bilingual country. But to have a private member's bill like this, with Thomas Mulcair leading the charge, trying to hold on to his seat in Outremont, trying to play a political game in Montreal, and the Liberals falling into this, is a huge mistake for this country. It is not good for this country's unity.

● (0955)

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

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

We will complete our second round with Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Moore, I am a little disappointed with the results for Francophones. In your opening statement, you said that 107,000 young Anglophones in Quebec are studying in their own language and that 142,000 Francophones in other parts of Canada are doing the same. But let us look at Canada's population. Quebec has a population of 5 million and, if we subtract that 5 million, we are left with a population of about 27 million for the rest of Canada. Do you consider it unfair that the ratio is 107,000, for a population of 5 million, to 142,000, for a population of 27 million?

Hon. James Moore: It is not as simple as that. This is a commitment that was made to each of our partners in the 13 provinces and territories, in accordance with the levels that had been set. Under our agreement, Quebec is receiving almost \$65 million a year for official language enrichment, which allows 106,000 young people from the Anglophone community to study in their own language, and 642,000 young Francophones in Quebec to learn English as a second language.

Each of the provinces has its commitments. It is relative to the level of commitment in each of the provinces that we are making these investments.

Pablo may want to comment on funding levels per province.

Mr. Pablo Sobrino (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Planning and Corporate Affairs, Department of Canadian Heritage): I have the details. I would just like to add that the comparison should be limited to members of minority communities who can study in their own language. In Quebec, 106,000 young Anglophones have that opportunity. We are providing the same funding to the other provinces so that Francophones can study in their language as well. I could give you the figures, but it is important to compare the two.

We also cover immersion. In Quebec, 142,000 Francophones are in immersion to learn English, whereas in the rest of Canada, if I am not mistaken, more than 2 million Anglophone students are learning French through immersion programs.

I can give you more precise numbers.

● (1000)

Hon. James Moore: Yes, we can provide those figures, if you like.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: After 40 years of bilingualism, do you think it is fair that so few people outside Quebec are studying or want to study in French?

Hon. James Moore: There are different concerns in each of the territories. There are also different demands depending on the region, as you know.

In my province of British Columbia, the greatest demand comes from new Canadians who want to learn one of Canada's two official languages. In Vancouver, there is more and more demand for English, not French. However, that is not always the case.

There are different commitments for each province. As you know, education is a provincial responsibility. It is up to the provinces to decide how they want to spend taxpayers' money. The decision rests with them. We respect the provinces' jurisdiction.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Yes, education is a provincial responsibility, but the federal government can do a lot to help the provinces.

You mentioned that your 69-year-old father slept in his car so that his granddaughters could attend a bilingual school. Don't you think that, after 40 years of bilingualism in this country, it is disgraceful that a 69-year-old man would have to do that?

Hon. James Moore: Yes, and I can assure you that I vented my frustration to the minister responsible in British Columbia.

Having said that, this falls within their jurisdiction and it is their decision to make. We are making our own investments. We are investing more money than ever before in the history of Canada. To be perfectly frank, I have received no complaints from provincial Ministers of Education. This is within their jurisdiction and the decision rests with them.

Our commitment is to provide added funding for Canada's official languages. We respect the provinces' jurisdiction.

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

We will now begin our third round, with Mr. D'Amours.

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

Minister, I would like to thank you and the people accompanying you today for being with us. I would just like to make one brief comment. The next time, Minister, you should wait in the car instead of your father. There comes a point where you need to show some leadership and compassion in that area.

Hon. James Moore: I went to get the coffee from Starbucks.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, your colleague, Ms. Verner, promised there would be no cuts to the Roadmap on Official Languages. But recently, budget cuts of \$1.7 billion were announced for some federal departments and agencies, and there may well be other such announcements in the coming weeks and months. In spite of that, are you giving us the same guarantee as your colleague—in other words, that the Roadmap will not be cut on the backs of official language minority communities, even if budget cuts are announced at departments and agencies for which you are responsible?

Hon. James Moore: Yes, our commitment to official languages comes under the Act. We are serious about that commitment and the changes we have made to increase funding. That was the commitment we made in the election campaign.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, I am talking about a commitment to make zero cuts. You are there for official languages, which is one thing, but are you prepared to state that there will be no cuts, in spite of all the announcements there have been these days about budget cuts to departments and agencies?

Hon. James Moore: We have no intention of touching the funding. We have already put more than \$1 billion on the table over a five-year period to contribute to Canada's success. We will continue to fund organizations and help public servants learn Canada's official languages. We are not planning a single cut.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, you have referred to \$1 billion for the Roadmap. Can you tell me what the budgeted amounts are for the first and second years of the Roadmap, please?

• (1005)

Hon. James Moore: It is not as simple as that, because several agreements are multi-year agreements. However, Pablo may be able to give you exact figures for 2008-2009.

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: If I am not mistaken, it was \$182 million for the first year. Several programs—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: And for the second year?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: It was \$235 million, but I may be off by \$2 or \$3 million.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: And what was the amount of funding under the Dion plan for official languages in the final year, the fifth year?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: I believe it was also \$235 million.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: So, we agree that in the first year, the funding was reduced. You said \$182 million, correct?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes, program renewal was responsible for that decrease.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: As I understand it, the \$182 million for the first year reflects your budget.

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: It was the amount spent. I can check—

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: So, the \$182 million and \$235 million amounts reflect the actual money that was spent?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I would like to know what amounts were budgeted for those years.

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: We spent what we expected to spend in the first year. There were some delays, because of changes made to the Roadmap programming. We established a cultural program, a program on immigration, and programs like TERMIUM. It took some time for all of that to be approved by Treasury Board, and so on. So, that money was spread over four years, rather than five. In any case, the total amount is \$1.1 billion.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That means that in the first few years, the money that was budgeted may not have been completely spent.

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: No, that is not the case. We knew we would not receive approval in time, so the money was spread over the four following years.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Was it carried over?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: As you mentioned, Mr. Sobrino, it took a certain amount of time to receive the necessary approvals. This question should perhaps be addressed to you, Minister, or to Cabinet. Since it was known that the Dion plan on official languages would be terminated after five years and would need to be renewed, why did it take so long to move ahead with the specific programs and projects needed in official language minority communities? For several years, you boasted about the fact that you were going to bring someone in to carry out needs assessments behind close doors all across the country. And yet when the time came to inject that funding for the year in question, it was impossible to obtain the necessary approvals, which meant that the money had to be carried over into the future. I understand that this money may be available in future, but the money was not actually available when it was needed.

Hon. James Moore: The money was available, but as you know, this is a five-year commitment. We held consultations and added new money. Our commitment to official languages was enhanced by more than 20%. The money was spent.

Therefore, we increased funding for education, compared to what was provided for under your plan. It budgeted \$381 million, whereas we actually invested \$429 million.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, would you like us to list the budgets that were cut or no longer exist?

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

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: It would be interesting to make that comparison.

Hon. James Moore: They were not cut. There was a renewal. We also added more than 20% to Canada's official languages budget. In addition, we began acting on those commitments immediately.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Minister, if the amount was \$235 million—

The Chair: I am going to stop you there.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: —and it then went down to \$182 million, that is a net decrease, Minister. It is not a 20% increase.

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

Ms. Boucher, please.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, Minister. I would like to wish everyone a good morning and welcome you all to this great Committee.

We have talked about a lot of things. In your opening statement, Minister, you said that culture plays a very important role in supporting the vitality of official language minority communities. You also mentioned the economic side of culture.

I would like to hear more from you on that and what culture represents, in economic terms, for the official language minority communities.

Hon. James Moore: Culture is a key component for these communities. As you know, the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games were a great moment for the Francophone communities in my province of British Columbia. For them, it was an opportunity to underscore the fact that there is a truly vibrant and proud Francophone community in British Columbia. We invested in developing the Place de la Francophonie for the duration of the Vancouver Olympic Games. It was something very special. There were Francophone artists there from every region of Canada. There were Franco-Ontarians, artists from Quebec, Acadians, and so on. People from across the country were there to celebrate the Francophone fact in Canada.

I would just like to say that there were a number of demonstrations during the last election campaign and tell you where the money was reinvested. There were ineffective programs that were not helping the artists and were not helping us keep our promises, in terms of meeting the needs of Francophone artists and communities across the country. So, what exactly did we do about that? Well, we did not reduce funding for the arts in Canada by even a single penny. We reinvested that money in programming that would guarantee that the arts and culture are well respected and positioned for the future. One form of support was the creation of the Place de la Francophonie during the Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Games.

I know that Bloc MPs were in attendance during the Olympic Games and were singing and dancing in the streets during Yann Perreau's show. The federal government invested money so that Yann Perreau could be in Vancouver and so that Bloc members of Parliament could dance in the streets to the sounds of Francophone music in Vancouver. They spoke out against that investment during the election campaign, but there you have the results. We respected our artists, our commitments and the Francophone fact across the country.

That is very important. When I convene meetings in the regions of Canada, the importance of the arts and culture is very evident. It is closely connected to the official languages, because this is not only a way of protecting and speaking French; it is also a way of celebrating and talking about our heritage, about the future and the difficulties of the past, and of adding some energy to the historic importance of the official languages of Canada in the regions. That is

why we are investing in arts and culture at a level never seen before in this country.

As I said previously, the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality has a new component. There is cultural content now that did not exist under the Culture Development Fund. Mr. Dion's old plan did not earmark a penny for it, whereas our government is now investing \$14 million in book translation. We are talking about books in our libraries and in the schools. We are talking about the importance of schools. I am sure that Mr. Gravelle can see that in his own region. It is essential that books that are part of the new Francophone literature be available, so that young people can learn French. We have a new \$5 million program in place, whereas Mr. Dion's old program did not budget anything for that.

These are key components when it comes to protecting, respecting and properly celebrating Canada's official languages.

•(1010)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much, Minister.

Coming from Quebec, we hear very little about Francophone artists outside Quebec. So, I think it is very important to showcase them. Indeed, there are some very good ones in New Brunswick and in Saskatchewan as well.

Ms. Shelly Glover: And in Manitoba.

Ms. Sylvie Boucher: There is Wilfred Le Bouthillier. And it is a well-known fact that Roch Voisine is not a Quebecker.

A member of Parliament: Daniel Lavoie.

Ms. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boucher.

We are going to complete our third round with Mr. Dorion.

Welcome to the Committee.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, thank you for being here today.

I would like to come back to comments you made previously in front of this Committee, and which were reported to me, regarding the bill that aims to ensure that all Supreme Court justices can speak both official languages, French and English. We have already begun to study it in the House and we will be continuing to do so later. In your opinion, legislation such as this would divide the country.

Others have raised the objection that this bill would prevent some extremely well-qualified candidates from ever being appointed to the Supreme Court.

Of course, the possibility of people acceding to senior positions may be an important point, but do you not think that litigants should take priority? When someone is making his case in front of a court and the judge requires simultaneous translation, or when a lawyer is arguing an extremely subtle and complex case in front of a judge who is unable to grasp all the subtleties of the written arguments presented to him, do you not see that as a very major handicap for a litigant?

We know that the unequal treatment—as is the case here and everywhere—is always in the same direction—in other words, it is always Anglophones who do not know French, because usually, Francophones know English and are able to read complex material in English.

Do you not think that the interests of litigants should take priority?

•(1015)

Hon. James Moore: The Supreme Court of Canada has served Canadians well for more than 140 years without any need for this kind of legislation. This bill is nothing more than a game—a political game that is completely unnecessary, and that is what I said.

The Supreme Court of Canada must be bilingual and respect all Canadians who come before it. However, if someone is unable to perfectly understand technical arguments in both official languages, without translation, that should not mean that he has no business sitting on the Supreme Court of Canada. There have been a number of Supreme Court justices who have served Canada very well in the official language of their choice, albeit with some difficulty because they were not perfectly or completely bilingual. That is the point I want to make.

As I said to my federalist colleagues who are members of this Committee and believe that Canada is better off when we are united and respect Canada's two official languages, I find it interesting that, when Bill C-232 received the support of the House a month and a half ago, it was the Bloc Québécois that was happiest with that result; it is the Bloc Québécois asking the most questions in this Committee; and it is also the Bloc Québécois celebrating the victory of that bill's passage by the House. That is not a good sign for Canadian unity.

I repeat that the Supreme Court of Canada is an institution which has no need for this bill, because it has served Canada very well for more than 140 years, without such a bill. Furthermore, when the Liberal Party was in office, it did not seek to make such a change to the legislation. To be perfectly frank, we do not need this bill.

Mr. Jean Dorion: You say the Supreme Court has served Canada well. I pretty much agree with you that it has served Canada well; on the other hand, it has not served Quebec very well. As a general rule, whenever there are disputes or disagreements between Quebec and the Canadian government, the Supreme Court, as our former Premier, Maurice Duplessis, used to say, is like the tower of Pisa: it always leans in the same direction.

Could that be attributable, at least in part, to the fact that a certain proportion of judges do not even understand French and have really never shown the necessary sensitivity to the Francophone population of Canada to hold such a high office? You really believe that there are two components to this system, one Francophone and one

Anglophone. But should we not ensure that the most important and decisive institutions in the country can operate equally well in one or the other language, with respect to each—

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. James Moore: The institution has to operate that way and the individuals should as well. That is certainly a goal, but it should not be the law. As I said to my colleagues around the table who voted in favour of that bill, we see the kind of games Bloc members are playing now. They are attacking the Supreme Court. That debate is not in Canada's best interests. That is the kind of thing that is triggered by this bill under the direction of Thomas Mulcair, who wants to win back his seat in Outremont. It is a cynical game, and I am really sorry to see the Liberal Party playing along.

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

We will now begin our fourth round, with Mr. Gagné.

Mr. Bernard Gagné (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Minister, as part of the work of this Committee, we have had several meetings in recent months where we heard from the representatives of groups such as the FCFA and the QCGN. They talked to us about a number of exciting things happening in their communities. They demonstrated an exemplary passion regarding the Francophone communities. One of the topics that came up over and over again was consultation and dialogue between the communities and our government. In your opening statement, you mentioned the Dialogue Days that took place last week. Can you tell us what the government and your Department are doing to maintain an ongoing dialogue with these groups, and how often these meetings are expected to occur in future?

•(1020)

Hon. James Moore: I am going to ask Pablo to talk about the meetings held last week, but I would first like to clarify a couple of things.

When I was appointed Minister of Official Languages in June of 2008, the first thing I did was to embark on a cross-country tour of Canada to speak to the representatives of organizations on the ground. For example, a small Francophone organization in Nanaimo, British Columbia, has only two people. The Francophone community in Prince Edward Island that I visited when I was passing through Charlottetown includes grassroots organizations whose budgets are not in the millions of dollars, unlike other organizations. They have real needs and real concerns with respect to the future use of the official languages in Canada. I talk to people in these organizations very often.

I believe that less than 2% of the voters in my riding are Francophone. Existing organizations are therefore very small and there are very few of them. I am always in contact with their representatives. People at the FCFA and the QCGN can always get in touch with me. I have met with them in the past at meetings, and I certainly expect to speak to them again. In addition, official discussions took place here, in the National Capital, last week.

Pablo, could you tell us how those meetings went?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes. The Dialogue Days took place on May 18, 19 and 20. The first day, the 18th, was set aside for minority Francophone communities. The second day—the 19th—was set aside for communities where there is linguistic duality, and the third—the 20th—for minority Anglophones in Quebec. The agenda for these meetings was developed in cooperation with the organizations themselves. We wanted to be sure that the topics to be addressed reflected the issues they wanted to discuss. We met with more than 90 organizations. Representatives from almost all the departments were present for the three days. We discussed current programming under the Roadmap, the way those programs are implemented in the communities and potential changes. They also gave us their views on the approaches they feel are necessary to implement these programs.

They were good discussions. A report on this dialogue with the communities will be produced and shared with everyone. I might also add that a large number of permanent mechanisms are in place in all the departments to meet with the communities regarding immigration and health care, in particular. There are standing committees through which there can be consultations between government officials and the people our programs are aimed at.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: You said that 90 organizations were in attendance last week?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes, exactly. That was for the three separate groups.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: I imagine that includes small and very large organizations?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: There were some small organizations. There were actually fewer small organizations, because they really do not have an ability to travel; but the umbrella groups were there. The third day, there were about 30 organizations from Quebec, the North Shore, Montreal, Quebec City and a number of rural communities as well.

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: And what conclusions were drawn from that three-day meeting and dialogue? Anything of interest?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: We are moving in the right direction. There are gaps that must be filled. All of that will be discussed in the meeting performance report.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. G  n  reux.

We will move on now to Ms. Zarac.

• (1025)

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—  mard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will be brief, because I do not want to spend a lot of time on this. When do you expect the report to be released?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: In the coming weeks, and it will be made public, since it is to be shared with all the organizations.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Would it be possible to forward to the Committee a list of the people who took part in this dialogue and to ensure that we receive the report as soon as it is released?

Hon. James Moore: Could you just name some of the groups?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes. There was the F  d  ration des communaut  s francophones et acadienne du Canada, the Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, the communities—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I do not want you to list them now. You can just forward the list to us. That would be great. Thank you.

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes, certainly.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Mr. Moore, in your opening statement, you mentioned that 71% of the commitments have been announced. I do hope the funding is going to follow because, last year, we found out here in the Committee that the cash was not flowing quickly. So, I hope that will not be the case this year.

However, that is not the point I wanted to raise. The FCFA—and Mr. G  n  reux referred to their exemplary passion—is questioning the Department's transparency. You mentioned the departmental website for Canadian Heritage. But the FCFA says that it cannot trace the programs that are funded.

Is there a report showing exactly where the money is going year after year, department by department? If so, will that be posted on the website?

Hon. James Moore: Yes, there is such a list. It is posted on the website and is available to everyone. I know the QCGN—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In terms of what currently exists, the FCFA says that it is impossible to trace these things, and that absolutely nothing can be found. Is there a budget breakdown where we can find these programs?

Hon. James Moore: Yes, and we have new ways of reporting that information.

Judith may wish to address that.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: In our report on priorities that we table in the House, there is a section that is now devoted to the Roadmap.

That is fairly new, is it not, Pablo?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Yes, it has been in place for a year.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: It has been a year. We were very much aware of the fact that people were having trouble finding the information. So, we prepared a compendium. One section is devoted to the Roadmap in that report—the Report on Plans and Priorities for the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: When will that be released?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: It is already on the website. We met—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: How long has it been on the website?

Mr. Pablo Sobrino: Since last September.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: We met with the representatives of the FCFA in the weeks leading up to today's meeting, and they again criticized the lack of transparency. It is not really possible to find information in the report you refer to. If an organization like the FCFA, a large organization, cannot find what it is looking for, cannot find the programs—

Hon. James Moore: We could provide them with the direct links on the website. However, they are the only ones to have pointed to that problem.

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: I am surprised to hear that, but I would be very pleased to follow up directly with FCFA representatives—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Fine. So, we can tell them to get in touch with you and they will be able—

Mrs. Judith LaRocque: Yes, exactly.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: It was glaring. In fact, that is one of their four recommendations: more detailed breakdowns, so that they can find what they are looking for and be able to follow.

Hon. James Moore: We can certainly share that information; it is in our interests to do so.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Perfect. If you are prepared to do that, that is great.

You also said that immigration is a crucial issue for the development of the Francophone community in Canada. I fully agree with you. Recently, we also heard from witnesses who told us—despite the \$20 million in funding you are allocating for immigrant recruitment and integration—that they have no specific goals that relate to Francophone minorities. They consider immigration in general. In no way will that protect our minorities.

How do you see that? Several weeks ago, we met with witnesses who told us that this was not one of their objectives. How can we ensure that we provide our minorities with all the necessary tools if we are not looking at, as regards immigration, where we will place these people?

Hon. James Moore: In terms of available funding, I would like to point out that we created these funds following discussion and consultation with groups that assist immigrants all across Canada. I, personally, arranged meetings and roundtables in Edmonton with communities representing people originally from Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire. They wanted specific funding and more openness in terms of the way services are delivered to newcomers.

● (1030)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: These people told us they were going abroad.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Zarac.

Mr. Gravelle, please.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, I have been a member of Parliament for about a year and a half. When I arrived in Ottawa, I was a little surprised by the number of Anglophones who had learned French. Members of Parliament do that kind of thing because they want to advance their careers, and some day become parliamentary secretaries, deputy ministers or even ministers.

If I were a young lawyer who wanted to move up the ladder, do you not think I would learn French in order to one day become a judge? I might not do that only to become a Supreme Court justice, but because I wanted to be judge at the provincial court level and, ultimately, a Supreme Court justice. Do you not think that would be a good reason to learn French? Perhaps if young lawyers learned the French language on their own, things would be better. This would not divide the country.

Hon. James Moore: Thousands of young lawyers already do that and thousands of young lawyers are engaged. The Roadmap for

Canada's Linguistic Duality includes funding to help new lawyers learn French. That is already happening. The Supreme Court is already bilingual. It does not need an NDP bill to understand the benefit of providing services in both official languages. That is already happening, without this bill.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: If it is already happening and thousands of lawyers are already learning French, what is the problem with ensuring that Supreme Court justices are bilingual?

Hon. James Moore: I am in favour of Supreme Court justices being bilingual. However, I am against the idea of telling people who are not perfectly bilingual that there is no room for them in an institution of the Government of Canada. It is not in Canada's interests to tell people across the country that they cannot be part of our system of governance because they are not perfectly bilingual.

As I said, it is also important to talk about numbers. Of the 4.1 million Canadians who were born in British Columbia, approximately 60,000 consider themselves bilingual. How many of them are lawyers and how many of them are lawyers working at the Supreme Court?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: You just told me there are thousands of them.

Hon. James Moore: How many of them are completely bilingual?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: You just told me that thousands of young lawyers are learning French. I am sure there must be some in British Columbia who want to advance their careers and who may one day become judges because they made the effort to learn French.

Hon. James Moore: Yes, but I believe that it was a very good thing that Beverley McLachlin was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. I believe she has served Canada very well for 20 or more years. Had the NDP bill been passed 20 years ago, she would not have been able to serve Canadians.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Had this bill passed 20 years ago, Ms. McLachlin might have learned French.

Hon. James Moore: Are you unhappy with the way Ms. McLachlin has served Canada?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: I do not know Ms. McLachlin at all. You have mentioned her name, but I do not know her at all. I have no idea whether she is good or not, but had there been legislation in place 20 years ago requiring judges to be bilingual, Ms. McLachlin might have learned French and would have served the country as well as she apparently has.

Hon. James Moore: The Supreme Court has served Canadians very well for 143 years, without the need for this bill—

Mr. Claude Gravelle: That is true.

Hon. James Moore:—and it has done so in both official languages.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Yes, but do you not think that if judges were bilingual, Canada would still be very well served? If they have been doing that for 143 years and our country has been officially bilingual for 40 years, could we not have bilingual judges?

I do not understand why a 69-year-old man would be forced to sleep in his car in order to register his grandchildren at a bilingual school. I do not understand that. As I said earlier, I have not been a member of Parliament for long, but there are a lot of things that I do not understand, including some of what you have said today.

Hon. James Moore: We certainly want Supreme Court justices to be bilingual, but it is not necessary to pass legislation in that regard. Furthermore, we believe that Canadians like Ms. McLachlin, who is not completely or perfectly bilingual, should not be discriminated against under legislation of this kind.

• (1035)

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

We will complete our fourth round with Mr. Carrier.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is difficult not to pursue that line of questioning.

Minister, you say that this bill will divide the country, that it is supported mainly by the Bloc Québécois and that that is a shame for Canada. But it seems to me that comments like that only serve to degrade the work of members of the Bloc Québécois, who participate in the work of this Committee with a view to representing, as best they can, the opinion of their constituents. If we decided to support this bill, it is because we find it perfectly logical. Furthermore, it was tabled by Mr. Godin, who is a French Canadian, and not a sovereigntist Quebecer. He, too, believes in bilingualism. That is what we are talking about today, at the Official Languages Committee. My feeling is that the Bloc Québécois could not have voted against this kind of legislation, because it is the logical way forward.

You say that, under this legislation, Supreme Court justices will have to be completely, perfectly bilingual, and that you are opposed to that. But, as I understand it, that is not the case. I believe the bill simply says that justices will have to understand English and French. In my own case, I consider myself to be bilingual. I do not speak English perfectly, because I do not speak it often, but I do understand it. I can at least say that I am bilingual. I often listen to testimony in English—in other words, in the original language. I think that is the logic behind this bill. As Mr. Gravelle was saying, if that requirement had been incorporated into legislation 40 years ago, we would not be talking about it today. It would be considered perfectly normal. I am surprised to hear the Minister, who is supposed to defend bilingualism in Canada, say that demanding that these people understand both languages would be divisive.

Hon. James Moore: To be perfectly frank, I do not think you are as familiar with the content of this bill as one might believe. The bill states that, for every appointment, the individual being appointed must understand French and English without the help of an interpreter.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Yes, exactly.

Hon. James Moore: In light of the highly technical discussions that occur at the Supreme Court, that is an extremely stringent requirement in terms of bilingualism. We are not in favour of that. I agree with John Major when he says that this bill makes no sense and that sacrificing competency in favour of language skills is a mistake. He is of the view that it is absolutely critical to choose the

most competent lawyers, in terms, not of their language proficiency, but their skill in a court of law. I agree with him.

Mr. Robert Carrier: I understand your position, which you have repeated several times now. You think that competency is only important in English, and that it cannot be demanded in French.

Hon. James Moore: That is not what I said.

Mr. Robert Carrier: My colleague asked you a question earlier about litigants—the people who need to go through our judicial system to have their case heard. The possibility for these Canadians, whom you are asking to respect the two official languages, to at least be heard in their own language is not a priority for you. The priority is to respect unilingualism.

Hon. James Moore: No. For 143 years, the Supreme Court has listened to whomever—

Mr. Robert Carrier: We know all about the past, Minister. Here we are talking about the future, which we are trying to improve.

Hon. James Moore: I do not think this bill improves the process for selecting judges. The current process works very well. The Supreme Court is bilingual.

Mr. Robert Carrier: According to you, it works well. Fine.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Robert Carrier: I am going to give it to my colleague.

Mr. Jean Dorion: Minister, you are suggesting that it would be impossible to implement this bill or to find enough Anglophones who would be capable of making rulings or performing their duties in French. Does that not demonstrate that the very nature of Canada means it is impossible for Quebec litigants to have a trial before the Supreme Court of Canada where people would speak their language perfectly? Can you imagine judges not speaking French in an independent Quebec? I think they would all have that ability.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dorion.

Hon. James Moore: But—

The Chair: Please be brief, Minister.

[English]

Hon. James Moore: It's not impossible to impose this bill that Monsieur Godin has put forward, but let me just say this, and it's an important point. I tried to explain as well as I could in French, but I might have a little more luck in English.

This way of selecting Supreme Court judges, by having a filter of language on it, is something that does bother and concern me. As someone who strives to be as bilingual as I can be—I'm not perfectly bilingual. As you've said, you struggle in English; from time to time I struggle in French as well. But the idea of having nominees for the Supreme Court come before the justice committee to talk about their possible role on the Supreme Court, and having members of the committee saying to a possible nominee to the Supreme Court, in quite an Americanized fashion, by the way, "Say a little something in French", and then listening to them and saying, "Not enough; you can't be on the Supreme Court"—that is not what Canada is supposed to be about. That is not why we have an Official Languages Act and that's not what the process should be about.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Hon. James Moore: Having this filter where you have individual members of Parliament poking fun at or having some kind of angle where you would try to criticize people based on their capacity to speak English or French is divisive, it's not in the best interests of this country, and it will pit one part of this country against the other, based on language. I suspect that's exactly why it has the full-throated support of the Bloc québécois.

[Translation]

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

We will now begin our fifth and final round. Everyone will have three minutes.

Mr. Coderre, could you begin the final round?

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): The Minister is lucky that I only have three minutes.

Mr. Chairman, I am not a sovereignist. I am bilingual and proud of it. I just heard the Minister of Canadian Heritage talk about discrimination and division, which is not worthy of the office he holds. I couldn't care less whether the NDP wants to win more seats in Montreal. However, I do not want a Francophone who comes before the Supreme Court, the highest court in the land, not to be entitled to natural justice, because of a language and comprehension problem. If that were the case, there would be a problem in this country. You say that the system has worked well for 143 years. If that is so, one may wonder why the Official Languages Act was passed 40 years ago. It is exactly the same philosophy. Minister, I find it quite unpleasant to hear this kind of argument—that the sovereignists are trying to divide the country and that we should not support this bill for that reason.

Prior to prorogation, I tabled a private member's bill aimed at ensuring that judges would be able to understand the two official languages. I have been fighting for my country for 25 years now and, as a Quebecker, working to be respected as a Francophone for 25 years.

It seems to me that you are showing the same sensitivity on official language matters as you did when you said that the Vancouver Canucks were the only hockey team that could represent Canada.

But seriously, I note that there is a consensus in the National Assembly. We should also consider what Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé said. You talked a lot about John Major, but why not talk about Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, who is apolitical, and who was an extraordinary lady at the Supreme Court. She knows that when judges are deliberating on a case, there is no translation; the discussion occurs among judges alone. And if a judge does not have the sensitivity or technical ability to defend the viewpoint of a Francophone, for example, we will not meet the goal of ensuring that justice is done when a Francophone comes before the Supreme Court.

Do you not think that, rather than talking about discrimination and division, we should be making a distinction between someone who

can understand the two official languages and the idea of requiring that a person be able to express himself in both official languages? There is a very important difference between the two, which means that Francophones will not feel like second-class citizens.

Hon. James Moore: No one should feel like a second-class citizen. Everyone must be respected at the Supreme Court, including Beverley McLachlin, who, if this bill were to pass—

Hon. Denis Coderre: She speaks very good French now.

Hon. James Moore: She is bilingual now, but she would not have been appointed to the Supreme Court in 1989 had this bill passed previously, something that would not have been in the best interests of Canada—there is no doubt about that.

When you were in office for 13 years, you never proposed legislation like this, because you knew full well that it was not in Canada's interests.

Hon. Denis Coderre: The changes that have occurred in Canada are such that there is a need to ensure that Francophones have rights that are equivalent to those of Anglophones. It is perfectly natural for change to occur and that is the reason why the Official Languages Act was passed 40 years ago.

At that time, we could have said that for 100 years, the system had worked well. In that case, we should not have passed the Official Languages Act.

•(1045)

Hon. James Moore: I would just like to say, Mr. Coderre—

The Chair: Excuse me, Minister—

Hon. James Moore: We are both federalists. Look at the energy and negativity between you and me, two federalists who are in favour of Canada's official languages and of bilingual institutions. That is the game Thomas Mulcair is playing with the Bloc Québécois.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Forget about Thomas Mulcair. The NDP won't win more seats in Montreal; that's where I'm from.

The Chair: If we want to stay within the two-hour limit for the meeting, we will have to try and keep everyone to three minutes.

Mr. Dorion, would you like to add something? You have three minutes.

Mr. Jean Dorion: Yes, of course. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, in the final analysis, by admitting that Canadian society is not capable of providing Supreme Court justices that all speak French—in practice, that is what you are saying—are you not acknowledging that Canada's evolution is always against French?

In other words, we have Supreme Court justices who all speak English and who are all able to understand arguments in English, but some of them are not able to understand the subtleties of arguments made in French. The result, obviously—as we can easily surmise—is that the Court generally operates in English and that there are two official languages according to the way things usually work—the Canadian way, which means that we have English and simultaneous translation. Are we not talking about a situation which, in actual fact, is unlikely to improve? At the time of Confederation, more than one third of Canada's population was French-speaking, whereas now it is 22% and is declining more quickly—indeed, at an ever-increasing rate for several decades now.

If, with a Francophone population of 22%—which is already not that high—we are unable to have judges at the Supreme Court who speak French, I doubt that 5, 10 or 20 years from now, when the Francophone population has declined to 15% or 18%, we will be able to introduce a similar requirement.

Does that mean that we, Quebecers, will forever more be second-class citizens, as other members of this Committee have already said? Do you not think that a Quebec that had its own government and its own courts could better serve its citizens in their mother tongue? In that scenario, all judges, up to the very highest level, would speak fluent French.

Hon. James Moore: I think we should be addressing these concerns the other way around. We should be helping organizations on the ground, helping new Canadians learn Canada's two official languages and helping our young people. We should not be starting with a bill like this which, in my opinion, is extremely divisive. I note that every newspaper in the country is saying that it is not in the interests either of the institution, or of official languages, to pass a bill like this.

There should never be a country where people have the sense that their mother tongue makes them second-class citizens. We should never reach that point. That is why our government has made a commitment, through the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality, to help grassroots organizations, help young people, help our schools and celebrate Francophone culture and the French fact across the country. That is why we are making these commitments.

It is certainly not in the best interests of Francophones; there are more than 2 million Francophones outside Quebec—

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. James Moore: —and it is certainly not in their interests that Quebec be an independent republic in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. James Moore: It is in the interest of all Canadians and all Francophones in Canada that we remain united.

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

We will move on now to Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Minister, you referred to a lot of English-language newspapers.

Are you prepared to name some French-language newspapers? I have read the French-language newspapers and I do not see the same

sort of thing as in the English-language papers? Have you read the French-language papers?

Hon. James Moore: Yes.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: And are you able to name them?

Hon. James Moore: I certainly understand the debate and the views expressed by everyone—Francophones and Anglophones. Lysiane Gagnon, who is not exactly an Anglophone, said: “I am totally opposed to this bill. It is an unrealistic idea which is dangerous. It would considerably reduce the pool of qualified candidates.”

I believe Lysiane Gagnon is a Francophone, is she not?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Yes, but as I said, you named English-language newspapers earlier.

Hon. James Moore: Well, I—

• (1050)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Earlier, you said that it would be tantamount to adopting the American system if we questioned judges in French. Did you not say it would be a little like the American system? If we were to ask a question in French to a candidate for a judgeship, that would be discriminatory if they were unable—

Hon. James Moore: Is that what I said?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Well, I am asking you. Is that what you said? That is what I understood.

Hon. James Moore: You are familiar with the process whereby judges are appointed. We are seeing that now, with the new appointments made by Mr. Obama. In the United States, there is always a debate about abortion. There will not always be a debate on bilingualism.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: In Canada, there is, and always will be, a debate about abortion.

Hon. James Moore: But not at the Supreme Court. My view is that it is difficult and unnecessary. For 143 years, the Supreme Court has served Canada without this bill. It is not necessary.

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

Ms. Glover, you will have the last word, I guess.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In the three minutes I have available to me, I would like to make two points.

First of all, Ms. Zarac, we distributed the tables you referred to this morning. If you would like to share that with the organizations that have been requesting this information, I believe you have it in your copy.

Secondly, I have been studying French for 40 years now. I believe I am bilingual. On the other hand, when I am in the House or in committee, I sometimes do not understand the French spoken by some people. In some cultures or regions, the accents are so pronounced that I have trouble understanding. Thanks to simultaneous translation, I am able to understand everything that is said. Mistakes are made at times, but it is much better than just letting the discussion go.

I, too, am opposed to the bill tabled by Mr. Godin. The reality of our country is that we are not ready for this. Yes, we want judges to be bilingual, but there are not enough fully bilingual individuals in the pool.

I would like to come back to what Mr. Coderre said. In fact, last week before the break, a Liberal MP made a joke about the English spoken by one of our ministers from Quebec. It was pitiful. I raised a point of order, asking that she apologize. If Liberals show no respect when they are in the House, what is going to happen in the kinds of situations you mentioned? The language proficiency of candidates for a position on the Supreme Court is tested. I fully agree with you. I am bilingual and proud of it. However, according to this bill, I would not be bilingual enough to apply for the job if I were a lawyer.

I would like to come back to what the Bloc members said. I, too, have some concern when Bloc members have reason to celebrate. At Canadian celebrations, like the ones in honour of our Olympic athletes, the Bloc members were the only ones to not proudly sing the national anthem, in honour of all the athletes, most of whom were from Quebec. Once again, that was pitiful.

Let us talk about reality. We are not really ready, but we are encouraging bilingualism. Right, Minister?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Glover.

Hon. James Moore: When I felt confident enough about my ability to speak French, and my assistants were equally confident, I took part in my first panel in French. Among the participants was Mr. Yvan Loubier, a former Bloc member who speaks very good joual, Mr. Godin, who speaks Acadian French, and Mr. Simard, a Franco-Manitoban. There were four completely different styles of French. I understood approximately 6% of the conversation.

I am perfectly serious. There are different ways of speaking French, different expressions and accents. To be fully bilingual is not as easy as some people believe.

●(1055)

The Chair: That language, like English, is a great asset for our country. I hope you will forgive me if I spoke with a Québécois accent; one must never betray one's origins.

Minister, thank you very much. That is all the time we have. Thank you for agreeing to attend a two-hour Committee meeting, at our express request.

Thank you and we hope to see you soon.

The meeting is adjourned.

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