



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 032 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, March 15, 2012

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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(0845)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages on this Thursday, March 15, 2012. Today's meeting is televised.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, today we are studying the evaluation of the roadmap, for the purpose of improving programs and service delivery.

Today we have representatives from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Mr. Fraser, you have the floor.

Mr. Graham Fraser (Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[English]

Good morning.

[Translation]

Thank you for your invitation to discuss the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality.

[English]

The road map initiative is of central importance to the vitality of official language minority communities, and to the promotion of linguistic duality in Canada. We've discussed the road map on numerous occasions over the past few years. I'm pleased to appear before you again to reiterate my interest in seeing this initiative renewed.

[Translation]

Here with me today are Lise Cloutier, Assistant Commissioner, Corporate Management; Ghislaine Charlebois, Assistant Commissioner, Compliance Assurance; Johane Tremblay, General Counsel; and Sylvain Giguère, Assistant Commissioner, Policy and Communications.

First let me clarify my recommendations on the future of the roadmap. I have said it before and I will say it again: I strongly encourage the government to renew the roadmap and implement a fresh five-year plan. We must protect our assets and the initiatives that are already under way in the 2008-2013 roadmap.

[English]

What have been the results of the road map? It's not my place to provide you with a full accounting today; that will be up to Canadian Heritage and other participating departments. Like you, I will be reading their reports closely once they are available.

That said, I can tell you about some of my initial observations and suggest some ideas for moving forward.

[Translation]

My many visits to the communities, along with the regular analyses my office conducts, allow me to report some fine success stories. Most often, these successes depend on the ability to tailor programs and initiatives to the realities of a particular community. This flexibility is essential and must be based on good cooperation between the federal and provincial governments, and community organizations.

[English]

I've previously spoken about the special challenge the road map poses for the English-speaking communities of Quebec. I know you're aware of this issue. In some cases, road map initiatives have been launched in response to the specific realities of French-speaking minority communities. The government and the departments then tried, as best they could, to adapt these initiatives to the needs of anglophone communities, something with which they do not necessarily have much experience. It's important that, right from the outset, initiatives reflect the specific realities of a community and meet real needs. There must then be a sustained dialogue as the initiative is implemented, and if necessary, tailored to their circumstances.

[Translation]

If the government is to continue to protect Canada's linguistic duality, it needs to keep certain things in mind. The social objectives that form the base of the roadmap call for long-term investments. Like the communities, I think the government needs to take steps that will strongly entrench linguistic duality as a Canadian value. For example, it should place more emphasis on ways of giving citizens opportunities to improve their second language skills, like exchange programs and language training programs in both languages for newcomers and their children.

● (0850)

[English]

The latest data from the 2011 census show that immigration is an evermore important factor in Canada's demographic growth. It's playing an increasing role in the preservation of our official language communities. If linguistic duality is to remain an important aspect of Canadian society, then French-speaking immigrants who settle here will have to decide to stay. To achieve this goal, it's essential that their integration into these communities be properly planned. The road map provides an unrivalled tool for doing that.

[Translation]

Furthermore, as I mentioned in our study of second language learning in Canadian universities, I recommend that the Government of Canada provide financial assistance to universities so that they can develop and carry out new initiatives to improve students' second-language learning opportunities. There needs to be a continuum of second-language learning from elementary school to the post-secondary level and then into the workplace. This recommendation must be taken into account in the next roadmap.

[English]

I also recommend making permanent the Canada School of Public Service's pilot project to provide its learning products to Canadian universities. This project has been very successful, and it deserves a central place in the new road map for 2013 to 2018. Let's not forget that second-language education is one of the important elements that contributes to the promotion of linguistic duality.

[Translation]

If I may make a brief aside here, I'd like to say something about public consultations on the renewal of the roadmap. On February 16, representatives of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages came here to tell you about the role of the work of your committee in this exercise.

[English]

Following these public statements, my office received numerous complaints, which we will examine with our usual thoroughness. I cannot say any more on this subject for the time being.

[Translation]

The government has made the roadmap the cornerstone of its work to support the development of official language communities and promote linguistic duality in Canada. It has reason to be proud of the roadmap.

But let's not forget that only 14 federal institutions are involved in the roadmap, while part VII of the act applies to all federal institutions. We absolutely must expand the scope of the roadmap and get everyone participating. It is also important, for the present and future success of the five-year plan, that departments work together for the benefit of communities and citizens.

[English]

If we were to coordinate the initiatives of institutions that are already making laudable efforts in the area of linguistic duality, the positive effects of their work could be multiplied. I therefore reiterate

the recommendation I made in my 2010-11 annual report that institutions must commit to implementing part VII.

Now I would like to speak briefly about two other matters that I feel are important.

[Translation]

First, I don't expect official languages programs to be sheltered from the forthcoming budget cuts. However, the government needs to ensure that these programs do not suffer disproportionately. The spending cuts in 1995 had a major impact on the development of official language communities, to the point where twice the effort was required to recover from them after 2003.

In addition, to comply with their obligations under part VII of the Official Languages Act, the federal institutions will have to make sure they analyze the impact of the cuts they intend to make to their programs and services. As a result of the negative consequences for the vitality of the communities, they will have to find and take measures that can minimize those consequences.

[English]

Some official language communities are so fragile that major cuts in certain programs could seriously compromise their vitality. I would remind the members that education funding, which is an essential part of the road map, is critical to the vitality of our official language communities.

I would like to say a word about visibility.

I am always astonished at the number of supposedly well-informed people who know nothing whatsoever about the road map, even though it's a \$1.1 billion program lasting five years. Being transparent does not mean the government has to become invisible and silent with regard to the road map. In fact, it is vital that the government promote the road map and do so effectively, just as it did with the economic action plan, for example.

● (0855)

[Translation]

If the government wishes to achieve the objectives of the Official Languages Act, it needs to renew the commitments in the 2008-2013 roadmap. If it fails to do so, there could be disastrous consequences for our official language communities. People would also come to doubt the ability or even the willingness of the government to protect Canadian values.

[English]

Thank you very much for your attention.

[Translation]

I am now happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We have nearly 1 hour and 45 minutes for questions and comments.

We will begin with Mr. Godin.

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

I would like to welcome Mr. Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages, and his entire team.

Mr. Fraser, let's talk about your report on official languages for 2010-2011. I won't cite all the recommendations, but I will give you one or two examples.

Your third recommendation reads as follows:

The Commissioner of Official Languages recommends that, by November 30, 2012, the President of the Treasury Board establish CBC/CBC as the minimum level of language skills required to supervise employees in regions designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes.

Your fourth recommendation reads as follows:

The Commissioner of Official Languages recommends that, by March 31, 2013, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities make the necessary legislative changes to clarify the language obligations of airport authorities and thus confirm the right of the general public to communicate with them and receive services in either official language, pursuant to Part IV of the Official Languages Act.

I could continue because there are a lot of recommendations. Has the Prime Minister acted on the recommendations you made to him in this last annual report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We haven't received any official news on that matter. Informally, I heard, for example, that the potential impact of the recommendation that a CBC level be required for all managers responsible for supervising employees who have a right to work in the language of their choice in a designated region was being studied. I was told that was under serious examination. Someone told me that at an informal meeting.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Did anyone promise that you would have responses to your report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I've had no official response to that effect.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Was a promise made that you would be given one?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That wasn't promised to you?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have had no comments.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The same is true for the Clerk of the Privy Council, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the President of the Treasury Board: no one is responding to your report.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have received information to the effect that those recommendations were being examined, but that's all.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The Commissioner of Official Languages conducts a study, prepares a report—that's his responsibility—and submits it to the government. The government studies the report and does not promise that it will respond to it.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Pardon me, I don't understand.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The Commissioner of Official Languages prepares a report, has studied the entire problem and has made recommendations. However, the government didn't even tell you whether it was going to respond to your report. Is that in fact what you're telling me?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm going to ask Mr. Giguère, who has been in touch with certain departments, to answer your question.

Mr. Sylvain Giguère (Assistant Commissioner, Policy and Communications Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): As regards the recommendation made to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, we are in talks with the department to clarify what we want and so on. This is something we are working on now. It is in progress and it is still too early to say whether we will get any results.

The same is true of the recommendations on the CBC level. We are continuing discussions with people to see how we will move this file forward. So we are in quite frequent talks with our colleagues in other departments.

• (0900)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Commissioner, after hearing the representatives of one department say before this committee that they considered the committee's proceedings as consultations, you said that there had been a number of complaints on the subject and that you did not want to state an opinion on the subject. I believe you wanted to tell us in advance not to ask any questions on this point because we were not going to get any answers.

I just want to read you a passage from part VII of the Official Languages Act, which is very clear about consultations:

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

It also talks about public consultations. Do you believe that we, the members of this committee, are the only members of the public? We are members of the public, if you will, but we are also elected representatives. There is a difference between us, the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, and the general public.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I will answer you by repeating subsection 43(2) of the Official Languages Act, which you have cited, and which states, in reference to the minister: (2) The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take such measures as that Minister considers appropriate to ensure public consultation in the development of policies and review of programs relating to the advancement and the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society.

We are conducting our investigation based on this subsection.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The public is all across Canada.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We are conducting our analysis based on subsection 43(2).

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's exactly what we're talking about, commissioner.

In your opinion, has the roadmap actually led the departments concerned to cooperate more on community development issues that require horizontal action, in immigration, for example?

Mr. Graham Fraser: You mentioned immigration. I believe there are very positive examples of cooperation in that area. I often cite the example of the cooperative relationship between Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Government of Manitoba, the Société franco-manitobaine and Destination Canada, a program that has been mentioned before this committee.

I believe the difficulty involved in conducting a comprehensive analysis of the roadmap lies in the broad variety of elements it covers. It's a bit like the Indian fable in which blind people are asked to describe an elephant. One touches the elephant's tail and says it's a snake; another touches the elephant's side and says it's a wall. The idea is to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of a program that contains a lot of elements.

That's not my role, but rather that of the institutions. In compiling initiatives and examining the reports on plans and priorities and the departmental performance reports, we discovered that it is quite difficult to conduct the kind of evaluation you want to have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin and Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Weston, it's your turn.

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

Thanks to Mr. Fraser and the other witnesses for being with us today. It's always a pleasure to have you.

I believe that, if there is a model promoter of linguistic duality, it's you, Mr. Fraser. You do your job with a great deal of passion and energy.

Today you told us it was very important to renew the roadmap and to implement a new five-year plan. With your permission, I will ask you whether the present study is very important. There are some who believe that the study we are conducting has been too long and that there are too many witnesses. If it is so important to renew the roadmap, what do you think about this study that we are conducting right now? Is it that important?

• (0905)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, I believe it's very important. I have read a large portion of the evidence you have heard, and I have been struck by the amount of information you have received from witnesses. I believe you have already gathered an enormous amount of information and already have a basis on which to draft a report that I would find very useful for us and for our own analyses.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Fraser, you just used the image of an elephant to describe the roadmap. If the roadmap is an elephant, can we say it is good to know the perspective of the witnesses from the various communities across the country?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's correct. I believe the government programs contained in the roadmap, as well as certain programs not in the roadmap, are examples of success. Part VII of the act states that all federal institutions are required to adopt positive measures for the vitality of the communities and to promote linguistic duality. The major successes have been the result of cooperation between the federal institutions and the communities. I believe it is very important to hear people who are working on the ground report on their experience.

Mr. John Weston: You mentioned a few times the success of British Columbia, the province where I come from. Can you give us some examples of those kinds of cooperative efforts?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No examples immediately come to mind. I can say that, in education, I was struck by the testimony of people from British Columbia who talked about the growth of immersion

programs. Second-language learning programs are often the result of a contribution by the official languages support programs.

Mr. John Weston: Can you help us a little and tell us which programs you think should be extended and which options you anticipate after the current version of the roadmap expires?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, I am reluctant to sort programs in that way. If I review the entire range of programs in an attempt to evaluate the major successes—as I would do to find programs that have been less successful—and I find three, four or half a dozen, I could give the impression that others did not work as well, whereas I have no intimate knowledge of how they worked. All those programs were carefully developed and all have an important role to play.

I would add one thing. I noted that certain programs are vulnerable, or could be vulnerable, because they are part of a five-year plan. We could say that they should be permanent and not renewable every five years. I am thinking, for example, of PWGSC's Termium Plus program and the Treasury Board's centres of excellence, which I think should be permanent and part of the permanent governance of the departments. In a way, certain programs that are part of the roadmap are vulnerable because they are renewable every five years, whereas they should be permanent instead.

• (0910)

Mr. John Weston: Can you tell us which programs did the most for the vitality of linguistic duality?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I would go so far as to say that certain elements are very important. Everyone talks about the known successes of the health networks and the importance of certain education programs, such as the early childhood programs. I want to point out that, if I fail to mention other programs, that does not mean that they were not successful.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston and Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Bélanger, it's your turn.

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

Good morning, commissioner. I would also like to welcome your entire team.

Since you raised the issue of Canadian Heritage, I'm going to go back to it. In fact, I'm going to admit to you that, when the three representatives of that department appeared before us, there was a very strong reaction, which I thought was entirely warranted. However, I am disappointed that I forgot to ask them a question—in fact, we all forgot to do it—to ask them who at the department made that decision. However, perhaps Mr. Gourde could enlighten us on that point. If the minister made the decision, that's an entirely different matter. I hope you'll be able to answer that question in the course of your investigation. I believe it would have been very important to ask it. If those people appear before us, I will definitely put it to them.

You don't want to offer any comments, Commissioner, but you made one this morning, as may be seen from your brief:

What have been the results of the roadmap? It is not my place to provide you with a full accounting today. That will be up to Canadian Heritage and other participating departments. Like you, I'll be reading their reports closely once they're available.

I too hope to read those reports, particularly that of Canadian Heritage. However, when they appeared before us, the people from that department told us that they were not preparing one and that they were relying on us. You will be able to determine from the way the questions are asked that the people from that department displayed a flagrant lack of professionalism and transparency. I am anxious to read your report.

This morning, I especially want to focus on one question that is fundamentally important not only for the roadmap, but also for the country: education. When Mr. Corbeil, from Statistics Canada, came to meet with us, he provided us with some disturbing statistics from the last census. A number of parts concerned education. You mentioned early childhood, which has also been cut by the new government. Whatever the case may be, two major components were part of the action plan and appear in the roadmap. The first is first-language education in official language minority communities. I believe that \$280 million was allocated to that. There is also second-language learning, thus the learning of French as a second language. Unless I'm mistaken, there was also a significant amount of funding for that.

Mr. Corbeil told us that, within a certain age group, the number of anglophones taking courses in immersion programs had fallen from 16% to 13% in the past five years, a 30% drop. And yet the target of the roadmap and the action plan was to double the number of young people learning the other language. In other words, we are not moving forward, we are falling behind. This situation very much concerns me.

In addition, you will remember that, when you last appeared, I believe, I asked about your ability to verify whether the funding transferred to the provinces was being properly used. You gave the following answer, which I will read so that my colleagues can hear it:

Mr. Chairman, I raised the matter of following the money sent to the provinces by Ottawa with the clerk. It was explained to me then that the nature of current federalism and the principle of provincial accountability mean the provinces have full responsibility for the money they receive, including from the federal government.

Money is sent by Ottawa with an explanatory letter stating that the money must be used for minority language education or second language education. However, it is very difficult for me to know exactly how that money is spent, since I do not have the authority to investigate what is being done by a provincial ministry or a province. A provincial minister of education personally admitted to me that when a cheque would arrive from Ottawa, he tended to spend it for whatever he felt was a priority.

So, I can't give you a clear answer to that question. What I can say, though, is that the way the money is spent is often a mystery.

● (0915)

Do you remember that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Very well, and I still have no reason to correct what I said in that statement.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm not asking you to correct yourself. However, I believe you have the obligation and authority under the Official Languages Act to investigate federal institutions.

As a federal member of Parliament, I have a responsibility to ensure that there is accountability for expenditures made involving Canadian taxpayers' money. However, you're telling me you aren't able to verify that. So who can do that, if not you? How is the money being spent? Our role as members, regardless of party, is to ensure that the money is spent on the items that have been authorized. If not you, who can report to us on that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's a very good question. I can't answer you off the top of my head. We have received one complaint on that point, and we will try to do what we can to investigate the matter.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm pleased you didn't tell me it was the Auditor General.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: However, I get the feeling that may be where the authority lies.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I should add that there are agreements between the federal and provincial governments and that the Canadian Heritage people say the provinces should be transparent.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's already been said. However, people from a delegation from the Saskatchewan francophone community clearly told us that there was no transparency and that they were not even being consulted. So, if they are not being consulted and there is no transparency, if the Canadian Heritage people, when they were here, were unable to tell us the percentage of rights holders—we're still waiting for the answers—if no one has any information to give us, how can we, as members of Parliament, do our job, commissioner? We don't have the information, and no one seems to have the authority to give us any assurance that the money has actually been spent on what was authorized by Parliament. We are talking about a fundamental principle of democracy. I am no longer even talking about official languages, but about a fundamental principle of democracy.

I believe that you, as an officer of Parliament, may have the authority to investigate, at least among the federal institutions. Come back and tell us whether you are satisfied with the job that Canadian Heritage is doing to verify whether the money is being properly spent or not. If not, there may be some reason to correct the situation. Otherwise, we are all somewhat feeling around in the dark, and we will never be able to determine whether the hundreds of millions of dollars of Canadian taxpayers' money that we, as parliamentarians, authorized to be spent are being properly used in accordance with the will of the Parliament of Canada.

● (0920)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have received a complaint on that matter and we will be investigating. We will also be preparing a report following that investigation.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will it be made public at some point?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That will depend on the complainant, not on me.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If I filed a complaint, I too would get a copy of the report. Is that correct? In that case, I'm going to file a complaint. Thank you.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's a somewhat awkward way of operating, but if it's the only way to get information to determine whether the decisions of the Parliament of Canada are actually being complied with, we'll do it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Williamson, it's your turn.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Fraser. We have not yet had the opportunity to speak outside this room, but I believe we will be able to do so within two weeks. I can't wait.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes, we both have quite heavy schedules.

Mr. John Williamson: Yes, that sometimes happens in Ottawa.

To begin with, I am grateful to you for being aware of the budgetary situation here in Ottawa. I believe that the requests you have submitted are quite reasonable. Thank you for that.

In committee, here and elsewhere, witnesses often tell us that we must not touch their programs. I believe you are aware that changes are taking place. I would like to ask you a few questions. I will keep going until the chair cuts me off.

Are there any programs for which you think resources have not been properly used or spent, and what changes would you make to those programs? I'm talking about the roadmap.

Mr. Graham Fraser: In fact, I heard about situations where it was determined that amounts were not spent by reading the transcript of remarks by witnesses who appeared here—but whom I cannot name. I can't repeat those remarks. However, all the elements of the roadmap that we are considering were established for good reasons, but it is becoming quite difficult to evaluate the results.

Our staff has gone over the reports on plans and priorities and the departmental performance reports. All we can say is that funding has indeed been determined. In some cases, there is no mention, while in others there is information to the effect that such and such an amount has been spent. Whatever the case may be, this is not a sufficiently specific instrument to conduct the evaluation you are requesting.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

Are there any aspects of the present roadmap that you would like to see allocated or done differently after 2013?

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I emphasized earlier, I believe that some elements should not be subject to renewal every five years, but should instead be included permanently in departmental budgets. The questions arising about the relevance of emphasizing certain programs, like the evaluation you are conducting here today, may be somewhat existential in nature, but that nevertheless adds a certain amount of instability, uncertainty. I believe that cancelling a number of roadmap programs would be disastrous. In this kind of evaluation, we could determine whether those programs should be permanent, whether they should be included in the permanent budgets of a department.

• (0925)

Mr. John Williamson: Very well.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have three minutes left.

Mr. John Williamson: I would like to compare the period from 2003 to 2008 with that from 2008 to 2013, which has been the subject of some changes. Have those changes been positive? Should some aspects of the previous program that were not included in the present program be part of that program?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe that adding the cultural component to the roadmap was very important. That component was not part of the 2003-2008 action plan. That is more or less the reason why the \$750-million action plan was transformed into a \$1.1-billion roadmap.

However, the target established in 2003 of doubling the number of bilingual high school graduates was dropped. Some specific objectives concerning increases in the number of rights holders attending French-language schools or, in the case of Quebec, English-language schools, were also abandoned, I believe.

Mr. John Williamson: Would you say that the target of doubling the number of bilingual graduates was abandoned because it was too hard to achieve?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I wouldn't be able to tell you the reasons why it was dropped. Like you, I can speculate about those reasons. That target was not reached in the first five years. However, I can't tell you exactly why it was abandoned.

Mr. John Williamson: You mentioned that it's important to give Canadians information, somewhat as is done for the economic action plan. If we have a fixed budget for the roadmap and official languages, it seems to me it makes more sense to direct it to the communities and programs rather than to signage, radio and television.

Do you agree with me on that point?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. Fraser, you may answer briefly.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I've made that comparison partly because I'm very much aware of the lack of visibility of federal funding allocated to education programs. Some members of Parliament often don't know that federal funding is allocated to schools in their ridings.

On the one hand, it is very difficult for me to know exactly how funding has been spent. On the other hand, every time a federal dollar was spent under an economic program, you couldn't drive two blocks without knowing that money was being spent. So there is a contrast between the invisible nature of education spending and the high profile of economic spending.

I'm not necessarily saying that the one is good and the other bad. However, when you talk about invisibility and transparency, I believe there is a happy medium where people are more aware of how federal funding is spent.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Gourde now has the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here, especially Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Fraser, I'm going to draw on your vast experience and your vision of Canada's linguistic duality. Some events in the history of our country have marked the history of linguistic duality. I am thinking of Expo 67, the Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver Olympics, as well as Canada Day, July 1st of every year, when Canadian Heritage organizes major celebrations promoting linguistic duality.

Mr. Fraser, in five years, we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Canadian Heritage is currently conducting a study to see how those celebrations could be organized.

Do you think this committee could also conduct a study to determine how to include linguistic duality in that event? How could we include ourselves in those festivities? The celebrations for Canada's 150th anniversary could be a springboard. They will no doubt become a global showcase. How could we be a part of it?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe that 2017 will be a very important year for the country. Like the member, I have always thought this kind of celebration could be a very important way for the Canadian population to understand its past and present and to trace out its future.

I visited Expo 67 and I often thought that the very positive experience of linguistic duality at that event created an atmosphere that was conducive to the introduction and passage of the Official Languages Act, with the support of all political parties. We saw official bilingualism in action, if you will, at all the Canadian facilities on Île Sainte-Hélène during Expo 67.

I therefore think it is very important for linguistic duality to be part of the conception, planning and implementation of the celebrations for the 150th anniversary in 2017.

By comparison, the studies on preparations for the Olympics started roughly five years before I even arrived in 2006. Our engagement was quite significant, and we have learned some lessons from that. We have produced a guide for major sporting events. That guide is being used by the organizers of the 2015 Pan-American Games, as well as the Canada Games in Sherbrooke.

I believe it is possible to ensure that linguistic duality is central, in the same way, to planning for the 2017 celebrations.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I believe we've played a trick on you, Mr. Fraser, by virtually betraying your age, since you may be one of the only ones here who attended Expo 67.

If our committee decided to conduct a study to support or supplement other studies on linguistic duality, what top organizations should we include or which people should we invite whose experience might help us?

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

You may answer, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Canada has acquired considerable experience at international exhibitions. Canadian Heritage has often spearheaded those exhibitions and appointed commissioners general for the occasion. I believe we have practical experience and the necessary expertise to present the face of Canada internationally.

The people who organized the millennium celebrations also acquired experience. So it is very important to go after people at the City of Ottawa and the National Capital Commission because I believe Ottawa should play a prominent role in the celebrations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde and Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Aubin, it's your turn.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Fraser. Good morning to your entire team, and thank you for being here. Thank you in advance for your clarifications on the evaluation of the roadmap. That moreover will be the topic of my first question.

We have heard from representatives of various organizations in recent months, and I have tried on numerous occasions to get a clear idea of the methodology for evaluating the roadmap to determine whether it should be extended. As you mentioned in your presentation, you very much want to see the roadmap extended.

However, there does not appear to be any common evaluation methodology at any of the institutions concerned by the roadmap. It's a bit Kafkaesque to say the least. A number of observations have emerged from all the interviews I've listened to. I will mention a few of them, and I would like to hear your reaction to that.

Among other things, it seems to me it would be necessary to put in place a clearly established consultation process that is common to all departments concerned.

In addition, representatives seemed to consider it appropriate for the evaluation to be conducted on an ongoing basis. They didn't want us to wait until the end to request a success story or an example of a failure or to conduct the evaluation at that time. They also wanted the consultations to be better coordinated.

Do you have any comments or criticisms on those recommendations, which I feel have emerged from our consultations?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe we are also very much aware of the difference from the standpoint of accountability and the reporting process. Some departments have very clearly stated in their departmental performance reports what they have done and spent, while others have made no mention of that. So it's quite difficult to follow the progress of those programs based on public documents.

At one point, we talked about a lack of horizontal coordination. The government responded by introducing a horizontality report. That's very important. However, it's still a balance. We have to be consistent in the way we conduct consultations.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Considering that desire for consistency, do you think the report that eventually appears can be credible?

• (0940)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Pardon me, but I missed the start of your question.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Given all the inconsistencies just mentioned, can the upcoming report on the evaluation of the roadmap be credible?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Everything depends on the process. We haven't reached the end. Some departments say they are conducting the evaluation. So everything will depend on the process that Canadian Heritage and the specific institutions use when they make their reports.

I can't comment on the credibility of reports I haven't seen.

Mr. Robert Aubin: We're talking about methodology. No one has seen the report, but we can imagine the main points or findings that might be made if the evaluation is conducted dichotomously.

Let's move on to another subject. I would like to hear what you have to say about the Canada School of Public Service. Among other things, there was one project that I found very interesting. I believe \$2.5 million was allocated to a program to train university students in their second language so they could eventually enter an already bilingual public service where candidates would already be bilingual. No one can be opposed to virtue. I even think this is a praiseworthy objective in the long term. However, between today and the day that objective is achieved, I will have had the time to serve out my entire career, and perhaps more.

In more concrete terms, we are seeing on a daily basis that the expertise of the Canada School of Public Service has been removed. I believe the public service must be a leader in bilingualism. If we can't have a bilingual public service in Ottawa, it will be hard to send the message to the rest of the country. What are your comments on the job cuts at the language school?

Mr. Graham Fraser: First, this is the culmination of a process that started about six years ago. We are conducting a study on language training offered in government. We will be taking a close look at the impact of making the departments accountable and decentralizing the language training process.

In my view, what is important are the results of language training. I'm not in a position to say clearly that one approach is better than another. We will be able to discuss that once we've finished and published our study.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aubin.

Thanks to you as well, Mr. Fraser.

[English]

We'll suspend for five minutes.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (0945)

[Translation]

The Chair: We are continuing the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Gourde has the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will continue asking my questions on the same subject because I didn't get to what I wanted to say.

What do you think would be the benefits of involving the official language minority communities in the 150th anniversary festivities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe that would be very important, just as the involvement of the official language minority communities was a very important aspect of the Vancouver Olympic games. The communities took part in the Olympic torch relay and in the cultural events. They were involved to a significant degree in the planning, implementation and celebrations that took place in Vancouver.

This is a very useful model that will have to be looked at closely during the planning for the 2017 celebrations.

• (0950)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: If the committee decided to conduct a study, would your office be prepared to submit a list of potential witnesses to us along with your opinions and suggestions for such a study?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm always available for consultations, official or informal. I'm proud to make myself available to answer questions from members or the committee.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thinking back, do you think there are any overall benefits of linguistic duality associated with events that have marked the history of our country, whether it be Expo 67, the Olympic games or other events, that could be developed or even pushed a little further in the context of the 150th anniversary festivities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Since that's quite an important question, I'm reluctant to give you a definitive response off the top of my head. I was very young at the time of Expo 67, but what struck me was that the two official languages were part of the very atmosphere of the celebrations. You mentioned that the same was true for the July 1st celebrations.

Full bilingualism has always been the case at those celebrations. Matthew Hayday, who is a professor of history at the University of Guelph, has described in his studies how the July 1st celebrations have represented Canada throughout its history. It is fascinating to see how the planning for an event of this kind is an opportunity for the country to reflect on its history, to represent itself in the present and to look to the future. The organization of this kind of event, which seems quite simple, is in fact very important from a symbolic standpoint.

To determine exactly what aspects of the country we will want to present to Canadians and the rest of the world in 2017, I believe we will have to conduct a more in-depth analysis of past celebrations.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Would it be advantageous to promote Canadian unity at those festivities?

[English]

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I believe we're currently studying the road map on linguistic duality, not the Canada 150 celebrations. That is a suggested study topic for the committee to undertake when we've completed this study. Perhaps the member can keep it relevant to the study we're currently undertaking.

The Chair: Thank you for that point of order. I've given members a great deal of latitude in asking questions.

Mr. Dan Harris: We've had 10 minutes of questions on a study we're not doing right now.

The Chair: That is true, but there have been many questions about Radio-Canada, and things like that. I think if it's tangentially related to the road map it's permissible. I'm going to allow Monsieur Gourde to continue.

Thank you for your intervention.

Monsieur Gourde.

• (0955)

[Translation]

Mr. Graham Fraser: Could you repeat the question?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Yes. To respond to Mr. Harris, I note that, at the start of my questions, I talked about the importance of the festivities in the context of the next roadmap. There are no doubt synergies to develop in that area.

Would it be advantageous to promote Canadian unity at the upcoming celebrations?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Absolutely. I believe it is essential for linguistic duality to be an integral part of those celebrations, both when they are planned and when they are held.

The Chair: All right.

Thank you, Mr. Gourde and Mr. Fraser.

[English]

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Dan Harris: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Fraser and colleagues, for appearing today again on the same study.

How many months ago did you last present to the committee?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I was before the committee in the fall for my annual report.

Mr. Dan Harris: That's right. Of course, we had already undertaken this study.

In your time as Official Languages Commissioner, have you seen many studies conducted by this committee that have taken as long as this one to undertake?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It's not one of the things that I've been evaluating. I report to Parliament. I don't evaluate parliamentary activities, so I would not....

What I've found in our own organization is that what is important is not the length of time a study takes but the quality of the study that is produced.

Mr. Dan Harris: Certainly, from what we heard from Heritage Canada witnesses, they think the study will be of such quality that they don't need to consult anywhere else, but I completely understand that you can't comment on that, having received complaints about that.

Following up on, perhaps, some of the other testimony that Heritage Canada witnesses gave at that same meeting, they brought up that they are now using a filter with staff to determine whether they have official language consequences or responsibilities. Of course we've asked them to provide that to the committee, so we can determine whether it's of value or not.

They did mention one other thing, and it was quite interesting that they were able to quote you directly. I asked about your fears and concerns about budgetary cuts and the unintended consequences of said cuts. They were able to quote those exact words back, which I thought was great, but at the same time, they have not done anything or developed any kind of plan to monitor whether there could be unintended consequences. Could you perhaps comment on that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let me just repeat the position that is familiar to you. I think it is extremely important that, when institutions are engaging in the budget-cutting process, they do an evaluation of the impact, and often the only way one can do that evaluation is by checking with the people who will be affected.

Let me give you an example—

Mr. Dan Harris: Sorry, just because I only have the five minutes.... Perhaps at the end after I've used that time.... You mentioned that, and certainly we think that's true, and it brings up another concern because they reported to us that, of course, they are only going to one third of the ministries each year to get evaluations from them on the road map. And then of course with virtually every ministry we've had before us, we've asked them about their evaluations and virtually none of them have completed evaluations that were supposed to be done by, usually, February of this year. Some of them are doing it, and some of them are not.

It seems that process is off the wheels. I mean my colleague was talking about methodology. There doesn't seem to be any. When we talk about unintended consequences—we see all the warning signs here that there could be serious things, but we won't really know.

We could be into the next road map before we start actually seeing the effects. Regarding the public service school cutting back its translation services, I mean, we asked them directly and they're not going to be able to continue some of those things unless they receive more funds. It just causes one problem after another.

Sorry to throw it all out there. I know the chair is going to cut me off now, but could you respond as much as possible to what I've just said?

• (1000)

Mr. Graham Fraser: The example I have in mind is that at one point an assistant deputy minister phoned me up and said there was a program they were funding that they didn't think worked, and he asked what my reaction would be if they were to cut funding to it. I said, "Hypothetical question: if you were to cut and if I were to receive complaints and were to do an investigation, the first thing I would ask is what kind of consultation you did to evaluate the effectiveness of that program." And he said, "Oh, consultation".

Six months later he phoned back and he said that they did consultations across the country. They found the people in the communities did not think that was a very effective program, and so they were proceeding.

Well, funding was cut and we're receiving complaints, but I was struck by how effective that process was in evaluating what the impact would be of reducing the funding to a program that the department found had not been effective.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris, and thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Boughen.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the panel for appearing this morning and for sharing your time with us.

In your remarks, Mr. Fraser, you talked about visits with some of the communities. I'm just wondering, what do your visits focus on? What do you look for when you're in the communities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It really depends. I've been to every province and every territory, at this point, and there are some communities, some provinces, that I've visited more often than others. I meet with the minority community organization, and often talk about the problems they've identified or the successes they've had.

When I'm travelling across the country, I also try to meet with universities and university presidents. One of the reports we did, and that I tried to make as relevant as possible, was the study on second language learning in Canada's universities.

For example, most recently I was in Winnipeg for the Festival du Voyageur. I met people from the federal council. I met people from the Société franco-manitobaine. I met with the presidents of the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. I was at the banquet of the Festival du Voyageur and gave to them the commissioner's prize for the promotion of linguistic duality.

I then went to Regina and Saskatoon, and went to Duck Lake for the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Association communautaire fransaskoise.

I then went to Windsor and met people at the community association there. I met people at the University of Windsor. I met people at Collège Boréal. I met people at Border Services who have developed a partnership with Collège Boréal.

Those are only some of the activities I've engaged with. Usually I try to combine meetings with community organizations, meetings with federal institutions that are dealing with those organizations, and with universities as well.

Mr. Ray Boughen: As you look down the highway—or in the crystal ball, whichever you will—how do you see the French program becoming more universal?

In Saskatchewan, for example, outside of Lafleche and Gravelbourg, French is not a language that's spoken. You wouldn't hear a paragraph in French in a year.

•(1005)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Well, you would if you listened to Radio-Canada, which plays an extremely important role. And 250 people showed up at this celebration in Duck Lake.

We did a vitality study in Saskatchewan, and there's no question that one of the real challenges of the francophone community in

Saskatchewan is that it is dispersed. As people from those communities move to the cities, they don't have a concentrated neighbourhood to be in.

So they do have a challenge of visibility, but they are active. They are vital. They have a school system. They have school boards. There's the Association des juristes d'expression française de la Saskatchewan, which is very active.

I agree that you don't necessarily hear French spoken on the streets. What adds to the challenge, if you like, of the visibility is that members of the community are so bilingual that occasionally two members of the francophone community will encounter each other and not be aware that they are francophones just because their English is so accent-free.

That, I think, speaks to the importance of establishing French language spaces in which people can meet. It speaks to the critical importance of Radio-Canada and community radio stations, and to the importance of the schools and schools boards that have been created over the last 25 years.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Boughen and Mr. Fraser.
[Translation]

Mr. Ravnat now has the floor.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the commissioner and the other witnesses for being here.

As you perhaps know, my riding is 20 minutes from here in western Quebec. There is a strong anglophone minority in part of my riding, Pontiac. I'm thinking of communities such as Shawville and Luskville. I say that to provide some background to my question.

Among the weaknesses that you denounced in the roadmap, you mentioned linguistic duality and, in particular, second-language instruction. I would like to hear what you have to say about the place of the anglophone minority in Quebec. Is that group taking enough advantage of the roadmap?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We've detected a problem in that regard, and it was moreover pointed out to this committee by representatives of the Quebec Community Groups Network. Some aspects of the roadmap were shaped based on francophone groups and then applied more or less as such to the needs of the anglophone majority. Some aspects are not that relevant to the needs of the anglophone community in Quebec.

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat: I could be more specific; that would help you.

There is a shortage of resources in that community. Unlike francophones outside Quebec, the institutions of Quebec's anglophone community have no history. So they need to acquire resources.

Did the roadmap take this lack of resources into account? Could it take it into account in future, and, if so, how?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Some elements of the roadmap have played a very important role in the anglophone community. I am thinking of the community learning centres, which were created by the provincial government and the community. There is a network of those centres across Quebec, which is extraordinary. The network's strength is that it brings the community together and gives remote communities the opportunity to have access, through technology, to all kinds of things. That would previously have been unthinkable.

I saw a presentation at the opening of one of those centres in the Magdalen Islands. Those people have established a direct link with the inhabitants of Rivière-Saint-Paul, who described a little of what they had done. That's one example of resources that have been reinforced.

•(1010)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Thank you for those examples, commissioner. Now I'm going on to another question because I don't have a lot of time.

I'm originally Franco-Ontarian, and the assimilation of francophones outside Quebec is a great concern to me. I want to talk about research because assimilation is a sociological and demographic phenomenon. Without federal government research or research coordination, we will have a poor understanding of the issue and might risk taking a wrong turn when we move into action.

Do you think the roadmap has done enough for research and research coordination? What could be done in future to overcome this lack of knowledge?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's a very good question. I'm reluctant to give you an answer.

Sylvain, can you add a comment?

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: Not really, because we haven't really looked into that aspect. We would have to conduct some research in order to answer you.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Could you give us an answer at a later date, if possible?

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: Certainly.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Certainly.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: I want to ask you a question about the 2012 evaluation and prospects for 2013-2014. You're clearly saying you think federal government funding is inadequate. We also know that your computer systems are very much out of date. You also don't have the resources to carry out your evaluation activities properly.

Have you requested government funding to meet those challenges? If so, what was the answer?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We filed a submission with the Treasury Board that has not yet been accepted, and we are waiting for a parliamentary mechanism to be created. There was a parliamentary review panel—

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Commissioner, I suggest that you not wait in this situation of austerity and that you be as proactive as possible in order to secure the funding necessary for what you need to do since what you do is very important.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Mr. Weston, it's your turn.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

If there is a clash on a darkling plain between two adversaries that keeps coming up in this review, whether they're real adversaries or only illusory ones, it's between the need to lower government expenditures on the one hand, and the need to make our cultural and linguistic duality flourish on the other.

My colleague, John Williamson,

[Translation]

has done a lot of good work to reduce waste in government funding. However, we've only talked about waste.

[English]

We have to also make difficult decisions to reduce government costs, as Mr. Williamson would say, even where it's not waste. Costs still have to be reduced in order to get money into the hands of Canadians as opposed to the hands of bureaucrats, one would say.

So can you help us? Can you point us to areas where the two are not in conflict? Can you help us by suggesting how the young gentleman who is here in the corner, the little fellow, will grow up in a country where there is a flourishing linguistic duality at the same time as we reduce our government costs?

Can you say, for instance, that the growth of immersion schools in British Columbia, which is motivated as much by the private sector and the individual desire to know both languages as it is by government investment, where the two are not in conflict, where they in fact enforce one another...?

•(1015)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let me identify one area where I think there is money being spent that is not achieving the objectives for which those funds were originally intended. That is the bilingualism bonus for public servants in bilingual positions. This was introduced 35 years ago, in the early 1970s, and at that point it was a fairly substantial amount of money, an \$800 bonus to act as an incentive for public servants to get their language levels and move to bilingual positions. There is a general recognition and agreement with successive commissioners of official languages, who have said that this was not an effective way of encouraging the use of both languages and that it was discriminatory because it was not given to many bilingual public servants because they were not in jobs designated as bilingual positions.

There has been an implicit recognition that this is not an effective program because the bonus has not been increased since the early 1970s and \$800 in 2012 is not an incentive the way it was in 1972 or 1974 when this was introduced. The program costs a total now of some \$60 million. If that \$60 million were redirected to language training or to various other programs, it would be a much more effective promotion of linguistic duality.

Mr. John Weston: That's a really helpful response.

[Translation]

Can we see any other examples in the private sector in which individuals want to learn a second language, with or without government support, and in which the government's contribution is reduced whereas linguistic duality is increasing in vitality?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weston.

Mr. Fraser, you may answer briefly.

Mr. Graham Fraser: One of the chapters in the annual report, which is scheduled for release in October, will address the experience of certain private businesses. There we will talk about what has been done about linguistic duality in specific businesses.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin, it's your turn.

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

Mr. Fraser, earlier there was talk about funding for your office. I would like to know when you made your submission to the Treasury Board.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe it was three years ago. I'll put the question to Ms. Cloutier, who, in a way, is in charge of this.

Ms. Lise Cloutier (Assistant Commissioner, Corporate Management Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): We've had a signed submission since July 2011. We are waiting for a decision on the matter.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You made a submission in July 2011, but you have received no response regarding the funding you need to discharge your official language responsibilities. Is that correct?

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I said—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Fraser, I don't want a political answer. In July 2011, you submitted to the Conservative government a request that is important for the country's minority communities. You said at the outset that you understood budget cuts would be made in the current circumstances, but can we afford more cuts within the minority communities that are subject to violations? You receive complaints concerning violations virtually every day.

We are talking about conducting a study on the 150th anniversary in 2017. However, since the 2002 election, the roadmap has been all we talk about. Despite that, our communities are subject to numerous violations. To top it all off, the Conservative government has not yet told you what is happening with your funding. Your computer system is obsolete. You say you understand that there may be more cuts. I don't want to be nasty with you, Mr. Fraser, but where else do you want cuts to be made?

● (1020)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have previously designated a sector where I think funding is not allocated effectively. I'm talking about bilingualism bonuses. Like my predecessors, I believe they do not achieve the desired objective.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Fraser, section 43 in part VII of the Official Languages Act states:

(d) encourage and assist provincial governments to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities generally and, in

particular, to offer provincial and municipal services in both English and French and to provide opportunities for members of English or French linguistic minority communities to be educated in their own language;

The government is responsible for transferring funding to the provinces. You say that it is not part of your mandate to verify whether the money goes to the right place. You also said that officials and ministers had said they used that funding for other purposes.

What are our commissioner's powers? If you are unable to investigate in the province, you could at least do so in the departments in order to see whether there is any accountability.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm trying to follow that as closely as possible. I'm conducting investigations and audits in the federal institutions to determine how they are discharging their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Fraser, even the Office of the Auditor General has had cuts and been unable to conduct certain investigations. Now it's difficult even for your office to do it. Is that true?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It has to be said that we are experiencing an annual negative growth because we absorb a number of costs. For example, wage increases negotiated by the government are absorbed by each institution. So we are undergoing cuts on an annual basis.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Fraser, if there are further budget cuts, you won't be able to discharge your responsibilities as an officer of Parliament.

Mr. Graham Fraser: And that's why we made that submission to the Treasury Board. We want to modernize, update and protect the integrity of our technological system.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I believe you favour one group of individuals. Do you favour one? Are you asking the Treasury Board president to put an end to that, with the Speaker of the House? Are you asking to have the control group put in place so that you can speak out?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Absolutely.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you think there is an urgent need for that to be done?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It's very important. That file has been going on for nearly 10 years now. It involves the independence of the officers of Parliament and the importance of having a parliamentary mechanism through which parliamentarians can examine funding requests from officers of Parliament. A mechanism independent of the Treasury Board is necessary.

The Chair: That's fine, thank you.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to go back to part of what Mr. Godin and Mr. Bélanger said about the cash transfers to the provinces for education under the roadmap.

As you said, that's supported; that's for certain. In my opinion, the roadmap should supplement the services already provided by the various departments at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. In certain cases, the municipalities are also putting money into the promotion of linguistic duality.

When money is sent to the provinces to provide certain services, a letter outlining priorities is also sent. We do not necessarily receive another letter explaining how the money was used, why certain activities were selected and how they relate to priorities. You seem to be saying you haven't seen any such letters. Historically, I believe we have never seen any either.

Would it be possible that services have not become complementary? Have certain provinces withdrawn from the basic services they were to offer, using federal government money to provide the same services that they would have offered in any case? Is it possible that what the roadmap could also have given to those communities and schools, by encouraging initiatives that would have been desirable, was forgotten?

• (1025)

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's exactly the kind of question we consider when we look at the amounts that are sent from Ottawa and the reports we receive from groups in the field.

I should say a word about the very important role played by Canadian Parents for French, whose members very closely monitor how the school boards, schools and provincial departments spend the money they receive from the federal government. They find it very difficult to follow this movement.

The very nature of education systems in Canada is such that school boards have a certain autonomy—at least in some provinces—which makes the accountability process more difficult.

Has the money sent for a specific purpose really been spent for that purpose? Those that have members in the field observing the actual effects in the schools and classrooms themselves find it difficult to clearly follow these spending movements.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In a manner consistent with this principle of autonomy, I believe the roadmap should still offer supplementary funding for initiatives already in place. Of course, if the roadmap replaces the money that would have been available nevertheless, I believe that's simply a waste. We would be cancelling the effect that could have.

What supplementary initiatives should we prefer in a manner consistent with the autonomy of the provinces, to be sure that money serves the right causes?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm going to give you a fairly general answer.

I've noticed that, in cases where there was a high degree of cooperation between the federal government and the provinces, that facilitated matters, in immigration, among other areas, which is a shared jurisdiction. There is the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, where problems common to those ministers can be discussed. However, I am unaware of the nature of the cooperation between Canadian Heritage and the ministers of education. I have met with ministers of education for whom second-language learning was a priority. On the other hand, it is less important for others.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Bélanger, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I would like to encourage Mr. Boughen to visit a few more communities in Saskatchewan—if he'll listen.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, could you direct your remarks through the chair?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's fair enough.

Mr. Chair, if you would encourage Mr. Boughen—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: —to visit a few more communities in Saskatchewan, such as Bellevue or Hoey or Domremy or Zenon Park or even Prince Albert, he would find fairly large francophone communities. In Prince Albert, he might even find a school or two, and *un centre scolaire communautaire, un centre culturel*.

I just thought I'd throw that in there.

[Translation]

I'm going to act a little like Mr. Gourde, who wants to use the commissioner to support his motion that we devote a year or two perhaps to preparing for the 2017 festivities. He's going to introduce it to us at some point.

There has always been a good partnership between the committee and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. Commissioner, if the committee adopted a motion asking you to investigate the appropriate use of funding paid to the provinces for education, would that be of use to you for the purpose of your work?

Mr. Graham Fraser: As you say, there has always been a good partnership. As an agent of Parliament, I am accountable to that institution. According to my interpretation, that obligation also prevails in relation to this committee. I believe we have always had a very constructive relationship. I handle requests by parliamentarians and complaints that members submit to the office with a great deal of respect. They are always treated on a priority basis and with a great deal of care.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Would you be trying to say yes?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm trying to avoid immediately committing my office.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I sensed that you wanted to say yes. Am I mistaken?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I always handle the committee's requests with the greatest respect. Would it be an audit, a study? That would be a very interesting topic of discussion for us.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Perhaps I'll give it another try and submit a resolution to the committee. I haven't had a great deal of success to date. We should ask the Saskatchewan people to come and talk to us about education, an issue of considerable concern to me.

As regards the roadmap, I wonder whether we shouldn't simply stop the study. I'm going to read you a statement that a government minister made and that was cited in the St. John's *Telegram* today. I quote Bernard Valcourt:

For more than 20 years, I have observed incredible progress in every province, the most recent, in my opinion, being that the number of francophiles in our country is constantly increasing. The next Roadmap for Official Languages must make it possible to continue this evolution of the French language in our country, despite difficult economic circumstances and a budget that unfortunately will be shrinking.

The minister has just announced that there will be another roadmap but that it will have less funding than we currently have. In view of all that, I wonder whether it's really worth the trouble to continue the business we started last fall and that will drag on endlessly because we have another 30 witnesses or so to hear from.

That was my comment to give you some food for thought on this question.

• (1035)

The Chair: Since the committee has asked to continue its work on this study; we will therefore continue.

Mr. Bélanger, do you have a question?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, it will be brief.

I would like to go back to my very first question. You didn't get a chance to comment on it. I was talking about the 30% decline in the number of young anglophones learning French. Is that a concern for you. Do you intend to take a closer look at that? Will that not distort the entire roadmap?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I believe there is a learning phenomenon that we must take note of: there is a kind of split. Across the country, we are seeing an increase in the number of immersion students, even though they represent only a small percentage of all students. At the same time, we are observing a decline in core French courses. This is causing a significant gap at the end of high school between immersion graduates, who are among the most bilingual graduates we have ever seen in Canada, and the vast majority of students who aren't bilingual at all.

I very much appreciate immersion programs. However, there are some unforeseen harmful effects. They drain off the best teachers from the core French courses. There is the feeling that core French is for poor students. In short, there are some serious problems in the second-language learning system, even though there is an improvement in the results of a small minority.

We often see that guidance counsellors suggest that students drop French because, in their opinion, the universities only look at marks. I know some young people who are reluctant to take French courses because they're afraid that universities will neglect the fact that they've taken a tougher path, which explains why they have lower marks. They are also reluctant to take part in a linguistic exchange in Quebec or France because that can alter their marks. Universities and high schools have this kind of obsession with numerical marks but do not take a more comprehensive view of students' experience. I believe that's harmful for second-language learning.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, on the last page of your brief, you say that the "spending cuts in 1995 had a major impact on the development of

the official language communities." Unless I'm mistaken, that had to be under Jean Chrétien's Liberal government, my colleague's party.

What were the consequences of those cuts in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000? Where did that really hurt the official language minority communities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: The most striking example was the closing of the Royal Military College Saint-Jean. That was done in a spirit of fairness because Royal Roads Military College had been closed. So it was thought that the same thing should be done with the Royal Military College Saint-Jean.

The long-term effect was harmful to Canadian Forces recruitment, the linguistic capacity of the Canadian Forces and language learning by officers. It caused serious difficulties for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces in the ensuing years and until the present.

That's the most striking example, when you consider the unexpected results following a cut. That's the example I always cite when I say that, when you make cuts, you have to be very careful to analyze potential consequences.

• (1040)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I'm going to give my colleague the rest of my speaking time because she said she wanted to ask you a brief question.

[English]

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Fraser, thank you for coming to speak to us today.

I have a bit of a personal question, I guess you could say, and I'd like your personal opinion and views as an answer.

My daughter, who is now 17 years old, has attended exclusively English-speaking schools. When she was going into kindergarten, I wanted to put her in a French school. We have in the Greater Toronto Area, where I live, both French schools and French-immersion schools, and either one would have been fine, but there was a French-immersion school close by. We were not allowed to send her there, because neither my husband nor I fluently speak French.

Do you believe that this requirement should be changed? I know I do, because I think that many parents like my husband and me would have loved having our children be bilingual. But because I don't speak French, my children were not allowed to attend that school.

This is just a personal question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Let me clarify. Did you want your child to go to the French school, as opposed to the French immersion school?

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Either would have been acceptable. I wasn't allowed to send her to either.

Mr. Graham Fraser: To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time I've heard of an immersion school blocking the admission of a child because parents did not speak French. For the French-language schools it is a different situation, because admission to the minority-language schools, whether it's English schools in Quebec or French schools outside Quebec, is governed by section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is a right that is defined and limited to those who were educated in that language in Canada.

Mr. Chairman, I don't have the time to go through the whole history of section 23, but I'm astonished to hear that your child was not allowed to go to an immersion school.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That makes sense. I can understand that a fully French school would not want parents who didn't understand the materials that come home and so on. I have a feeling that the school boards in Ontario don't operate, or don't seem to operate in practice, according to the law. They seem to have subtleties in policy based on the region.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Again, this is part of the difficulty I have in following the consistency of federal funding and provincial policy, because different school boards will do different evaluations of what is the significant demand that they need to respond to in terms of funding, expanding, or supporting immersion schools.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: It's clearly not a funding issue, but I understand what you're saying.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

It is exactly 10:45 a.m. So we are out of time.

Thanks to all our witnesses. Mr. Fraser, Mr. Giguère and Ms. Charlebois, Ms. Tremblay and Ms. Cloutier, thank you for your testimony.

This meeting is adjourned.

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