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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the sixth meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages on Wednesday, November 27, 2013. We are meeting today pursuant to Standing Order 108 and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, November 18, 2013.

[English]

We're here to discuss the annual report for 2012-13 of the Commissioner of Official Languages, referred to the committee on Thursday, November 7, 2013.

We have in front of us this afternoon Madame Tremblay, Monsieur Giguère, Madam Saikaley and, most importantly, the commissioner himself, Mr. Fraser.

You may begin with an opening statement, Mr. Fraser.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, good afternoon. Bonjour.

I'm particularly pleased to be here today to share a few of my thoughts on my 2012-13 annual report, which I tabled in Parliament on November 7.

First, I'd like to recognize the recently re-elected chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, the Honourable Michael Chong. Mr. Chair, I'm confident your knowledge of our official languages and your invaluable leadership on key issues such as bilingual education will serve the committee well in its deliberations during this current session of Parliament.

[Translation]

This past February, Prime Minister Stephen Harper asked me to stay on as Commissioner of Official Languages for an additional three years. I was honoured to accept. Over the course of my first mandate as commissioner, one of the questions that I have often received is the most general and difficult one: how are we doing in terms of official bilingualism? The answer is often unsatisfying—it depends.

My seventh and latest annual report will attempt to explain that answer in some detail. The report was conceived as a summary of

my seven years as the Commissioner of Official Languages. Even though my mandate has been extended for another three years, I feel this has been a useful exercise to examine the progress—or lack of progress—made during these past seven years.

[English]

As I begin my second term, I can look back on the successful outcomes that have resulted from our investigations and proactive interventions. Seven years ago my investigation into complaints by official language minority communities following the abolition of the court challenges program of Canada, and my subsequent seeking of intervenor status before the Federal Court, showed that the government had not respected its obligations under part VII of the Official Languages Act. Mobilization by these communities resulted in an out-of-court settlement that established the language rights support program.

Last year my investigation of the appointment of a unilingual Auditor General added credence to a private member's bill that was passed unanimously by Parliament and now requires all agents of Parliament to be bilingual at the moment of their appointment.

In addition, my office's collaborative work with federal institutions and the organizing committee of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games led to a very successful event presented in both official languages, with the unfortunate exception of the cultural component of the opening ceremonies. The invaluable lessons learned from this experience resulted in the production of a practical guide to promoting official languages for any organization hosting a major sporting event in Canada.

This past summer Canada Games organizers in Sherbrooke used the guide and were clearly successful in promoting both official languages during this national event, proof that we have made great strides.

[Translation]

I can also point to our investigation into the decision to move the Quebec City Marine Rescue Sub-Centre to Trenton and Halifax, which led to the postponement of the move until emergency services on the St. Lawrence could be guaranteed in French.

As well, when CBC/Radio-Canada's decision to eliminate virtually all local programming at French language radio station CBEF, in Windsor, generated 876 complaints in 2009-2010, I asked the Federal Court whether I have the jurisdiction to investigate such complaints. This was confirmed by the court in a preliminary decision.

There have also been a few outcomes during my ten years that I would characterize as conspicuous failures. For example, the government failed to see the importance of having bilingual Supreme Court judges. I have given my support to Bill C-232, which sought to amend the Supreme Court of Canada Act, as I firmly believe that any litigant appearing before the Supreme Court should have the right to be heard and understood by all the judges in either official language without the aid of an interpreter.

This year, my office completed a study on the bilingual capacity of the superior court judiciary, which I presented at the Canadian Bar Association's legal conference in August. This marked the first time I worked on a joint project with my provincial counterparts in New Brunswick and Ontario. The impact of this study and its recommendations are crucial for Canadians who would use the court system. This is why we are urging the Minister of Justice to act quickly on the recommendations in the study, in close collaboration with his provincial and territorial counterparts as well as with the chief justices of the superior court.

• (1535)

[English]

When I first came aboard in 2006 there were some pleasant surprises. I found that there was much less resistance to the Official Languages Act inside federal institutions than I had expected, but from time to time there are incidents that indicate that officials simply don't understand what it means to have two official languages with equal status.

Last month, there was an incident here on the Hill that I must admit I found completely unacceptable. A briefing for parliamentarians on Bill C-4, the omnibus bill, was made available only in English. An MP complained, officials objected, and another MP complained that he didn't understand the conversation. The briefing was delayed for a day.

Frankly, I thought that unilingual briefings had gone the way of typewriters and that "French to follow" was a thing of the past. I thought that Parliament's unanimous decision to ensure that agents of Parliament were bilingual was recognition that Canadians, not to mention parliamentarians, have an absolute right to equal quality of service in the official language of their choice. The fact that a member of Parliament even had to ask for a briefing in French in 2013, 55 years after simultaneous interpretation was introduced into the House of Commons and 50 years after the launch of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, is deeply disappointing.

Despite these embarrassing lapses, most federal institutions and most public servants want to do the right thing. Sometimes they simply have trouble getting the tools they need and developing the reflexes to use them. To do our part, my office developed online tools for federal institutions and employees, including a self-assessment tool for managers to evaluate whether their behaviour supports the use of both languages in the workplace and, more recently, a tool to develop effective language training practices.

There have also been some disappointments. The complaints I've received, coupled with the findings of our various studies and audits, tell me that much remains to be done in order to meet the obligations and the spirit of the act fully. When federal employees provide

services to Canadians, active offer is still the exception, not the rule. It also remains difficult for air travellers to be served in the official language of their choice in Canadian airports. Too often, people have to ask, and, too often when they do, they face incomprehension or delays.

In the public sector, it's quite common for leaders to say a few words in French and then continue uninterrupted in English, as if the use of French at a public event were merely a symbolic gesture rather than the natural expression of a Canadian language. Even here in Ottawa, I get the feeling that speakers, even if they are bilingual, are hesitant to speak French in public.

As well, federal institutions have been uncertain about how to take positive measures for the growth and development of official language minority communities, as required by the 2005 amendment to the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

Five years ago, the government issued its *Roadmap for Linguistic Duality*, which expired this year and was replaced with the *Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages*, which runs through to 2018. During this time, we have experienced a period of financial instability, heavy federal investment in infrastructure projects, the Strategic and Operating Review and the Deficit Reduction Action Plan.

Generally speaking, official languages have not been targeted, but there has been collateral damage and unintended consequences for official languages stemming from closures and cutbacks. The result has been a subtle erosion of bilingualism through the transfer of federal offices from bilingual to unilingual regions, the reduction of language skill levels required for bilingual positions, the pressure on public servants to produce documents in English only, and the regular failure to offer a sufficient number of training programs in French.

We also see the posting of senior management positions where both official languages are described as an asset rather than a requirement, or described as a requirement and then not considered as such. The consequence of all this is a quiet undermining of the use of both languages in the workplace, and of the ability to offer services in English and French.

My work over the past seven years has shown me how much leadership matters in federal institutions. As commissioner, I will continue to stress the importance of second language learning, whether in our universities or in the public service, and I will continue to position the use of both official languages as a key leadership competency.

What lies ahead in the field of official languages? What challenges will need to be addressed over the next three years of my mandate?

Immigration and the demographic change it brings are critical issues for minority-language communities and for the country.

Social media will continue to transform the way that government deals with citizens. Essentially, the public expectation for an immediate response in either official language is greater than ever. Social media represent both significant challenges and tremendous opportunities in terms of language policy.

We know the Pan American Games will take place in Toronto in the summer of 2015, as well as a series of major anniversary events leading up to the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017. This is an opportunity for renewed engagement and leadership from the federal government. Throughout the planning stages and delivery of these events, it will be critical to respect the needs of both official language communities.

● (1540)

[English]

As reflected in my annual report, I've made recommendations in the following six areas: language training in federal institutions; the "Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018", specifically the need for a new management and accountability framework; immigration policies and their impact on francophone minority communities; initiatives to raise the level of bilingualism among Canadians and reverse the decline in bilingualism among anglophones; the bilingual capacity of our superior court judiciary; and the impact of budget cuts on federal institutions' abilities to respect their obligations.

I believe we're now past the point where Canadians are shocked to hear the other language. This became quite evident to me this summer at the Canada Games in Sherbrooke. Both languages were used interchangeably during the opening ceremonies and elicited similar responses from those in attendance. Our official languages are a defining characteristic of our Canadian identity. We need to feel that both languages belong to us and are part of our sense of national identity, even if we don't speak one of them.

One challenge that remains, I feel, is for all of us to embrace fully linguistic duality as a core Canadian value, no matter what language we speak. As the committee begins a new session, it will no doubt be considering where to focus its work. I have raised a number of issues, including those areas where I made recommendations. I hope the committee finds this useful in determining which topics are deserving of its attention.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I will conclude my remarks and be pleased to answer any questions you and your colleagues may have.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Before we move to questions and comments, Mr. Godin will give notice of three motions.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

I would like to give notice of the following motions.

The first motion reads as follows:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to update the Committee on the government's intentions concerning the Quebec City Marine Rescue Sub-Centre before Wednesday, December 11, 2013.

This motion has been tabled in both official languages.

The second motion, Mr. Chair, reads as follows:

That the Committee invite the President and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Hubert T. Lacroix, to appear before the Committee before mid-February 2014, for a televised meeting lasting 2 hours.

The third motion reads as follows:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Justice to appear before the Committee and explain his department's strategy to implement the recommendations made by the Commissioner of Official Languages in his report on access to justice in both official languages before mid-February 2014.

The Chair: Thank you for your notice of motion, Mr. Godin.

You now have the floor to ask questions or make comments.

● (1545)

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

I would like to welcome our commissioner, Mr. Graham Fraser, and his team.

I will start right off with my questions.

One thing concerns me, Mr. Commissioner. First of all, your report is fairly harsh toward the government. You said that things are not going all that well. I travel all across Canada, I meet people in minority communities and I see, as you do, that things are not going all that well. I will mention a few examples.

Let's talk about the issue of search and rescue. As you heard, we tabled a motion because the government has always refused that this committee do a study and bring experts. We are talking about people's lives at sea. You did a report on the subject, you made recommendations. For the last two years or so, the subject has been under discussion. You had to ensure there was a follow-up. The government tossed you a hot potato, it said that it would wait for the commissioner to say when things would be okay over there. If something happens, they will say it is the commissioner's fault because he said that things were okay. I would not want to be in your shoes.

I would like to know what your preliminary conclusions were. When will you make the full findings of this report available? You know what concerns me. It has been two years and the government has still not found people who are competent in both official languages to go work in Trenton or Halifax. I don't know if you are concerned, but I would be in your place. You must wonder if you will be held responsible if you ever give your approval, if three people quit their jobs at the same time and someone facing problems at sea hears the phrase: "I don't speak French." All of the transfers from Moncton to Halifax and all of the government offices in Halifax are already having problems. It has been two years and they still have not found replacements for those people.

I would like to hear your opinion on the subject, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As far as our follow-up is concerned, the report from the study is under way. I thought it was interesting that the government said it would not make the change before receiving my approval. I don't give my approval that way, I don't approve any action. If the government had a structure in place, I would see how it worked afterwards. If the government waits for my approval for the move, it will have to wait a long time. That is not how the commissioner's office works.

Did they ask for our approval before moving the Canadian Tourism Commission to Vancouver? They did not ask us at all. If they had, we would have answered that that is not our way of doing things. We would have told the government to do what it had decided to do, and if it was determined to make that structural change, something which could happen to any institution, we would have examined the situation afterwards. If we receive complaints, we will look into it and check how things are working.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Commissioner, are you not concerned? It has been two years and they have not been able to replace these people. Are you not afraid that, when these people are replaced, the new people in the job will say "I don't speak French", causing someone to die at sea? Are you not concerned about that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: The transfer hasn't been done. The Quebec marine centre is still running, as far as I know.

I've been very clear: it is absolutely imperative to ensure at all times the safety at sea of sailors, passengers vessels, and sailboats on the seaway. The bar is fairly high, but it has to be if we want to ensure the health and safety of those who use the St. Lawrence River and Gulf.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Very well, Mr. Fraser, but incidents occurred in Neguac, in New Brunswick. Three people lost their lives. Six calls were made to the Halifax Centre, but no one spoke French. You're aware of this. Six calls were made before a francophone could be reached. We can see that it's not working in Halifax, and it's not working any better in Trenton.

The other issue is that of the changes made by the federal government to how public services are offered. In British Columbia, you did a study. You made recommendations and you asked the government to respond to them by October 31. You wanted to know what was going to be done. Service Canada sent it to a third party, and the law was not obeyed in that province. What do you intend to do? It's now November 27, and members of British Columbia's minority community were forced to drag the government to court in order to be served in their language of choice. Are you going to send a representative to the court?

● (1550)

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's an option we're considering. I don't believe that a final decision has yet been made in this case.

I will ask Ms. Tremblay to answer this question.

Ms. Johane Tremblay (Director and General Counsel, Legal Affairs Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Right now, we're following up on the recommendations. After that follow-up is done, conclusions and findings will be made, and the decision will be made to get involved or not in this legal recourse. Currently, the commissioner is following up the implementation of the final report recommendations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Were recommendations made? Did the government respond to your recommendations? You gave it until October 31 to respond. If the response is positive, why are British Columbian citizens being forced to go to court?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I haven't heard them. We're doing a follow-up now. I can't comment until the follow-up is done. We need to know the government's response to our recommendations.

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

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here with us.

I would also like to thank the commissioner for being in Quebec during the Vanier Cup, last Saturday. I believe that you gave an award. I was in attendance. I noticed that the commentator spoke in both official languages, English and French. When the referees made their decisions, we heard them in both languages.

Have you noticed other efforts that have been made? Quebec City is French-speaking, but a great deal of effort was made, in my opinion, so that all of the English-speaking visitors could understand what was going on that very splendid day.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed, I found that the Vanier Cup's presentation was impressive in many respects.

First of all, people attended the game, even though there was practically a snow storm going on. It was quite cold indeed. There were a strong wind coming directly out of Labrador. The presentation and organization of this interuniversity sport was done in order to carefully respect bilingualism. That impressed me as well.

I also had the opportunity to give the Promotion of Linguistic Duality Award of Excellence to Justin Morrow, a former player for the Rouge et Or team, who comes from a small town in southeastern Ontario. When he came to Laval University, he was a unilingual anglophone, spoke only English, but he learned French. He earned his degree in administration and started an NGO called Canadian Youth for French. It is because of his example, of his experience, and the creation of this organization that he was given this award, which I was able to give to him at halftime.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Every Canada-wide university initiative, be it in sports or education, is really a source of hope for the future. Are there other ways to support them and help them promote both of our national languages?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am constantly impressed by the commitment of the rector of Laval University, Denis Brière, and the support that the university gives to learning French. For years, there have been programs that teach French. There's also the Molson Foundation's Francophone Immersion Bursaries for anglophone students who want to study French at Laval University. I've been involved in awarding this bursary over the last five years, I think. It's a sign of the commitment of both the universities and the Molson Foundation, who are working together actively to support linguistic duality.

•(1555)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: If you will allow it, I'd like to come back to your report, and I will ask you a more technical question.

You pointed out that the roadmap no longer includes any funding for the coordination functions lead by the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Department of Canadian Heritage. However, the department responsible for official languages indicated to you that the funding had not changed. Why did you not subsequently change your report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: The roadmap makes no mention of the funding aspect. However, I believe that it is important to have that coordination component.

Mr. Giguère will probably be able to give you more details on that part of our recommendation.

Mr. Sylvain Giguère (Assistant Commissioner, Policy and Communications Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Indeed, as Mr. Fraser said, there was no clear indication that money was included in the roadmap. We were told afterwards that money had been earmarked for it by the departments. However, we don't have access to those numbers.

And so, we see a roadmap that doesn't give any more money for that purpose, and we want the money to continue to be made available, that's all.

Mr. Graham Fraser: The fact that it's not indicated means that it's harder for us to follow the flow of those expenditures. When it disappears into a department's administration, it becomes harder to track the expenditure.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Are you satisfied with the answer provided?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We would still like to see how that is working. It is one element among others. The structural changes and the integration of certain functions within the department make it more difficult to follow up.

For example, if we look at language training, in the past, that was done by the Canada School of Public Service. More recently, that responsibility has been transferred to the departments, and within the departments, to managers.

Personally, I have been careful to not criticize this move, but it's much harder to follow up on the results of language training when it is spread out within the departments. By the same token, it is more difficult to follow up on how this is being coordinated when the numbers cannot be found in the documents within the roadmap.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Ms. St-Denis, you have the floor.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question will be on your recommendation concerning initiatives to raise the level of bilingualism within the Canadian population.

This afternoon, during the last part of question period, six questions were asked in French. Three ministers responded only in

English, while two anglophone ministers answered in French. In another instance, a minister started to answer in French and, even though he is a francophone, he finished his answer in English. That's the situation.

In your opinion, does the limited use of French as a working language in the House, among other places, contravene the Official Languages Act? Could this have a negative effect on the promotion of linguistic duality in Canada?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We made that recommendation based on statistics provided by Statistics Canada concerning the drop in the percentage of Canadians who are bilingual, Canadians who speak both official languages. We have also seen that over a 10-year period there has been a 24% drop in the number of anglophone students who are studying French as a second language.

As for the use of English and French in the House, any MP or minister has the right to use the official language of his or her choice. The act does not apply. There are no rules that say that a minister must answer a question in the language in which it was asked. That is why, in 1958, simultaneous interpretation was introduced in the House.

•(1600)

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Fine, but would you not be able to make some proposals? This situation does not really promote bilingualism. Obviously, no minister will answer in French when the question has been asked in English. I'm not talking about questions that have been asked in English.

Is there something that you could do here? A recommendation, an incentive?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It is something I could discuss but I think that this is an MP's right, just as voters have the right to elect the representative of their choice without concern as to whether or not that person is bilingual. I should also note that it is up to the Prime Minister to choose ministers from among his or her MP's. This is a difficult question, in my opinion.

There is another factor that I noticed when I was a journalist. Often, the language of the answer is chosen according to how the speaker wants the answer to be shown on television. That's a political reality.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: That is true.

Mr. Graham Fraser: My role does not allow me to criticize a politician concerning their right to speak in the language of their choice. A minister who is answering a question on a delicate issue or a hot political topic will often need to use the language in which he or she is the most eloquent. I would be very reluctant to make a recommendation concerning the use of one language or another in the House.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: I would like to discuss a second problem that you mention in your report. Specifically, it is what you call active offer. There are a lot of signs in French and in English in airports or in federal institutions, which is good, but the active offer is declining just about everywhere. A press release from the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador indicates that, in one year, the active offer had dropped by 12%.

Do you plan to make any suggestions in this area? Can you intervene concerning the active offer?

Mr. Graham Fraser: You have brought up a point that we find troubling. Commissioner after commissioner has found, from one report to another, that active offer is not part of the culture of the federal government and of the institutions subject to the act. We have made recommendations in this area in previous reports. Right now, my office is looking at how we should tackle this issue. It is clear that, to date, my recommendations and my observations, as well as those of my predecessors, have not had an impact.

The only positive example that I can give you of an institution that has made an effort to integrate the active offer into what I would call its culture, is Parks Canada. Before the Olympic Games, this organization prepared a video to explain to its unilingual employees what they should do if someone asks them for service in the other official language. Parks Canada created an entire system to explain to their employees how to act in such instances.

We subsequently audited the program, and it was clear that it had worked well. However, for programs like this to work, there must be culture change. In the private sector, certain coffee companies identify their coffee in a third language. This is part of the way those businesses present themselves, part of their culture. I believe that it is possible. In any case, you have brought up a sensitive issue that my office is currently looking at.

• (1605)

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Do I have the time to make a suggestion?

The Chair: No.

There will be another round of questions and you will have the opportunity to ask the commissioner another question.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: All right.

The Chair: Ms. Bateman, over to you.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all of the witnesses for joining us today. Your presence is very helpful to us.

Mr. Fraser, I have two questions to ask you, and maybe a third, if I have the time.

First of all, what procedures have you put in place to ensure that the departments, when they react to your recommendations, base their actions on the observed facts?

Mr. Graham Fraser: To make sure that our observations are factual?

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Or what was reported to you.

Mr. Graham Fraser: All right.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: What is the verification process?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I will explain the process that we follow when we receive a complaint. First of all, I send a letter to the deputy minister or to the president of the institution that is the subject of the complaint. This letter indicates that we have received a complaint alleging that an incident has taken place, that we will investigate according to a section of the act, and that, if there are questions, they can be addressed to the analyst responsible for the investigation.

The analyst then contacts someone at the department, an official languages coordinator or an official languages champion. We try to establish the facts, whether or not the allegations are true, and if the complaint is well founded.

I should have explained that first we evaluate whether or not the complaint is admissible, whether or not it deals with part of the act, whether or not the institution in question is subject to the act, and whether or not the incident took place at a specific time. If someone sends me a letter saying that one institution or another hates francophones, well, that's unfortunate, but that is not an admissible complaint. However, if the person says that they were unable to receive service in French on flight 871, on July 25, 2013, that is an admissible complaint.

After we have determined if the complaint is admissible, we begin an investigation and we send a preliminary report to the institution. We indicate that they have 30 days, I think, to answer and to give us their version of the facts. If we have made any mistakes, or if we have misunderstood how the department works, we take the necessary corrective measures.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: That is good. I feel reassured.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We then decide whether or not the complaint has merit. Sometimes, determining whether a complaint is without merit requires just as much work as determining that it has merit. Some complainants who are unsatisfied with our decision ask for time to appeal it. The complainants also can turn to the Federal Court if they believe we have made an error.

• (1610)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you.

You made several mentions of horizontal coordination initiatives currently under way across the federal government. I wonder whether Heritage Canada, which is responsible for official languages, has responded to your enquiries on that subject.

Mr. Graham Fraser: When we verified the responsibilities with respect to federal-provincial agreements, we did indeed receive very good collaboration.

Sylvain, could you please provide more details on that subject?

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: If I am not mistaken, you mean the horizontal coordination done by Heritage Canada pursuant to part VII of the act which covers all federal institutions.

We had very good discussions with Heritage Canada and we know the department is doing some good core work.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: And so, Mr. Giguère, each department is responsible and there is no horizontal coordination. Is that correct?

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: There is horizontal coordination, but each department is also responsible for each component. What I mean by that, is that several departments have excellent ideas, wonderful things they wish to accomplish, and they do so in an isolated manner, each on their own. Heritage Canada's role is ensuring the alignment of such things with respect to part VII of the Official Languages Act, which concerns minority-language communities. It is not always easy, because they have limited staff to work on that, never mind the fact that federal institutions already have a tendency to work in isolation. It is sometimes difficult for communities who see so many things being done by various departments, to realize there is no management system or horizontal coordination to ensure such efforts are maximized.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Is that the most efficient way of going about things?

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: Yes. Horizontal management is probably the most efficient way. Indeed, ideally, we would have a group that could work on all the initiatives undertaken by the approximately 200 federal institutions.

The Chair: I see, thank you.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Do I still have a minute?

The Chair: No, your time is up.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: All right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): May I share my time? I could give Ms. Bateman one minute.

The Chair: Yes.

Go ahead, Ms. Bateman.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: How kind of him.

Thank you, dear colleague.

I am curious. You said several times that French was the language of ambition in Canada. Would you please elaborate on that thought?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That is a phrase I stole from a French ambassador who told me that was one of the things about Canada that had impressed him. My decision to reiterate several times that French is the language of ambition in Canada comes from the following thought. In 1969, when the Official Languages Act was debated in the House, MPs claimed it would be the end of all employment for anyone from western Canada, that it would be impossible in the future for Westerners, of whom the vast majority are unilinguals, to obtain good jobs within the federal government.

Our current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who is from Alberta, a clerk, from Saskatchewan, and the person who was Chief of the Canadian Forces until quite recently and is from Manitoba, are all bilingual anglophones. I think it is because they wanted to understand the country in its entirety and further their careers. They understood that speaking both official languages was a leadership skill.

Canada's senior public service is filled with people who speak both official languages, who have advanced their career because they

understood this was a leadership skill and an essential tool for understanding the whole country.

• (1615)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Thank you, Commissioner.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Here is another obvious thing, which I should not have to tell you as it has become an unwritten rule. In order to become a party leader in Canada, one must speak both official languages in order to communicate with all Canadians and be able to understand them. In my opinion, more and more Canadians pursuing other careers also understand this unspoken rule.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Williamson, did you have any questions to ask?

Mr. John Williamson: Yes. How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have four minutes left.

Mr. John Williamson: All right, very well.

[English]

Mr. Fraser, it's good to see you again.

I enjoyed reading your report and hearing from you today. What I found most interesting were the concerns, the cautions, you raised about celebrating some of our historical anniversaries as a nation. In the next couple of years we have many. I mean, the War of 1812 commemoration is ongoing—although I think that's one to celebrate because we as a nation, or before the nation was founded, together repulsed the American invasion. There's World War I, Vimy, and then perhaps for some of you the birth of John A. Macdonald.

Could you elaborate a bit in terms of what your concerns are and how they might be addressed?

Mr. Graham Fraser: First of all, I don't mean to say, by any means, that I am critical of the idea of celebrating these anniversaries. I think that we are now living in a time when we welcome 250,000 newcomers to Canada every year. These are, by definition, people who have not grown up in Canada and who have not gone through our education system.

In too many provinces, Canadian history becomes very localized, so there is not a common history taught. I think that the decision by the government to celebrate anniversaries is a positive thing and represents huge opportunities for public education. My concern is that, if these are done in too simplistic a way, they will lead to resentments rather than to celebrations. There are a whole variety of versions of what World War I and World War II represents for francophones and anglophones in Canada.

One of the things that really impressed me about the War of 1812 commemoration was the exhibit at the Canadian War Museum that quite explicitly presented four very different versions of the War of 1812. There was the British version, the American version, the Canadian version, and the aboriginal version. Each group had a different interpretation and a different outcome. My cautionary note was that, if these celebrations are not seen as occasions for a broader discussion of some of the shadows as well as the light in our historical experience of those events, they can simply result in resistance and disengagement rather than in celebration and engagement in a national project.

• (1620)

Mr. John Williamson: Okay. Can I have a quick follow-up?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. John Williamson: Let's look at what we've done already. Is it fair to say that the 1812 commemoration has been done with respect and that it's been done well to date?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes. As I say, I was very impressed by the War of 1812 commemoration. Take, for example, what I would hope would be part of the John A. MacDonald discussion. John A. MacDonald was a very complex figure. I think that if you read the letter that he wrote to Brown Chamberlin in 1856, you will see a huge understanding of linguistic and cultural duality in this country. I think that it stands as a kind of lesson for political leadership for the following century. I would hope that what John A. MacDonald had to say about French Canada, not only in that letter but also at the end of the Confederation debates, would be part of any discussion of John A. MacDonald—that it's not just all about the railway, and it's not just about his drinking. We also have to remember, as well, that John A. MacDonald made the final decision that Louis Riel should be hanged. I think that Louis Riel, as an historical figure, has been one that has really encouraged complexity of historical discussion.

It is really my hope that, as we focus on these historical events, we not do so in a simple, flag-waving fashion, but in a way that encourages deeper understanding of the complexity of all of these events and of these historical figures.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, commissioner, for bringing up Louis Riel and the complexity of the history involved and its meaning for our country. I'd also like to thank you on behalf of the anglophone community in Quebec. The anglo Québécoise groups like the QCGN, the CHSSN, and the QWF have all told me they're very delighted and satisfied with your work.

Commissioner, I must tell you what you've already heard many times: Anglophones in Quebec have felt abandoned by successive Liberal and Conservative governments in terms of protection of their language, or at the very least for not speaking up for them and their communities. In particular, I'm thinking here of seniors in Quebec, elderly Quebecers.

I know that you've mentioned and looked into the plight of anglophone seniors in Quebec. Currently, as you may be aware,

there's a transfer going on of Ste. Anne's Hospital from the federal government to the Province of Quebec. There's an intention to provide geriatric services at part of that hospital. The catchment area it touches would be my riding and Lac-Saint-Louis, both of which have quite substantial anglophone populations. Can you share with the committee any recommendations to guarantee the provision of anglophone services at this institution? What has the federal government done to ensure that anglophones are served in the official language of their choice at this hospital?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Well, when it was a veterans' hospital, it was a federal institution and we had relatively few complaints about the degree to which veterans were able to get services. One of the things we have done recently is to do a study of elderly anglophones in Quebec, and one of the things we observed was that there are, particularly off the island of Montreal, particular challenges for the elderly in getting health services in English. This is not so much from doctors—some 85% of doctors in Quebec are bilingual—but when the elderly are dealing with health services, they often don't get to deal with a doctor for many of their ailments and complaints. They're dealing with nurses, and nurses are much less likely to be bilingual. It is a challenge for the Quebec health system to have a sufficient number of bilingual health support staff who can serve the anglophone community.

One of the successes of the road map has been the funding of various health networks, including the language training program that was developed at McGill for teaching English to staff of the health provision institutions in Quebec. The last time I looked, I think there were 7,000—and now must be about 10,000—health care workers who have taken this course. There are limitations, nevertheless. When I was speaking to someone in Granby about how effective this had been, she told me that if a 14-year-old falls off his bicycle and breaks his arm, it means that the nurse at the local clinic can put his arm in a cast and serve him in English, but if you have a 55-year-old farmer who is suffering from early signs of Alzheimer's, that kind of service is much harder to find off the island of Montreal.

Part of what we did in our study was simply to identify the statistical services that are available and the various federal institutions that have some dealing with the elderly in Quebec. It was a process that helped lead to the creation of a new organization called Seniors Action Quebec.

In terms of transfer of responsibilities to specific institutions I think the same rules would apply: there has to be a language clause in the transfer and some kind verification mechanism to make sure those language clauses are being respected.

• (1625)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: To this date, do you know if the language clause has been inserted in the negotiations between the federal government and the province?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I can't tell you.

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: If I may, I can give you a partial answer. We tried to discuss this with the regional people, with Veterans Affairs in Montreal. They were not at the discussion table for this transfer. So we are trying to reach people in headquarters in Charlottetown to have more information. But it's clear we need to have this clause as a condition of the transfer.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: The clause would be similar to what happened, say, at Willow Place in Alberta, but obviously not with French. So would it be that type of clause you would recommend be inserted into the transfer?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There would have to be a clause ensuring that the language services that were provided when it was a federal institution would continue to be provided. In the same way that when Air Canada stopped being a crown corporation, there were clear clauses that ensured Air Canada continued to fall under the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Okay, that's somewhat reassuring, because some of my constituents are now going to Ontario for hospital services because we don't have a hospital in our region. So with the creation of this hospital I hope it will respond to the need.

You talked about the Seniors Action Quebec network. Could you paint a picture for us of what this group could do if it received federal funding as opposed to being a non-funded network?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think it is very important as a source of information for anglophone seniors who don't have the same kind of statistical information, which we tried to provide in our study, and which is available to francophones outside Quebec.

One of the things that is often misunderstood about elderly anglophones in Quebec is that they are a generation that spent their working lives in Quebec when it was not essential for them to be bilingual in the workplace, and it was also a period of their lives when they didn't really need social services and they had only marginal contact with the state. Now they are retired, Quebec society has changed and they need health services. They need the social services network, and sometimes with the best will in the world those facilities are simply not available. In some cases this is putting a real burden on a younger generation.

I was visiting a community centre in a remote part of Quebec where a young anglophone woman had left home, got a university education, and had come back home to run this community organization. She kept being interrupted in her work because her mother needed an interpreter to deal with the social worker and the health care worker because they didn't have a common language. When I saw her have to interrupt a meeting with me to take a call from her mother and talk to the social worker, I realized in very concrete terms what this means for many people in the more remote parts, and sometimes not so remote parts, of Quebec. So I think the creation and support for this new organization could be very important in ensuring that seniors get the information they need.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Commissioner, for appearing in front of our committee, together with your staff. I would like to thank you very much for the extremely professional work that you are doing at the commission.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank you in French for the work you have done.

[*English*]

I would like to ask you a question regarding the “Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages”. We all know that supporting Canadian arts and culture in Canada helps support the official language minority linguistic communities. Can you speak about how the funding in the previous road maps from 2008 to 2013 has helped these communities thrive? Also, would you say the road map benefited Canadian linguistic communities?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Unquestionably. I think the road map has been a valuable contribution. One of the areas where the road map was an improvement over the previous plan was that there was a cultural component. I was subsequently told that the reason there had not been a cultural component in the predecessor plan was that the artistic community had simply not been at a level to be able to manage the funding. Seeing how the initial plan worked, they responded by organizing and creating networks that could apply for and handle the funding that was being proposed. It is an extremely important program for supporting linguistic duality in minority language communities.

As I said earlier, I think one of the most important aspects has been the health networks that were created, which is a kind of model for other networks that are being developed. I think the cultural component that was added in 2008 has been significant and played an important role.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Do you have any examples of this that you can share with us?

Mr. Graham Fraser: The example that I am most familiar with is the creation of the health networks, both for francophone health services across Canada and anglophone health services in Quebec. It was the funding that I referred to earlier that led to language training of staff. Various networks linking francophone health services across the country have been introduced so that much better communication takes place. We've seen, due to some road map funding and these health networks, Montfort Hospital developing important support relationships with other health care institutions across the country.

It has been a while since I've looked at the cultural component, so I don't have examples on the tip of my tongue, but I can get back to you later if you like. I will refresh my memory and get back to you.

• (1635)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you very much.

In your annual report you are discussing the new road map.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Yes.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: What are the strengths and weaknesses of this new initiative? At this point are you satisfied with the implementation of the new road map program?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There's one element of the new road map where I have questions, and that is the element of adding \$120 million for language training for immigrants. I'm certainly not opposed to language training for immigrants, but at this point we don't have the information to see whether this language training for immigrants is going to support immigrant communities in minority language communities in Canada. It's a complex issue.

We've seen the expiry of the five-year immigration program that was designed to support immigration to French-speaking minority communities across Canada. We're not yet sure what the implications of that expiry are and what relationship, if any, there is to that \$120 million.

I think that some of the strengths of the previous road map have been sustained. One of the things that I regret is that there have been some cuts for language training, which I think is unfortunate.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Monsieur Dionne Labelle, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Good afternoon, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen.

I will continue discussing the roadmap. We have now had several meetings. The committee has spent a number of sessions speaking with the beneficiaries of the roadmap. Most of the groups who benefited from it were satisfied with what they managed to accomplish, thanks to the roadmap funding. However, throughout the discussion, we kept hearing the same comment about the roadmap's lack of transparency. These organizations did not know whether the money came from the roadmap or other programs, nor how it transitioned through various federal agreements.

The second recommendation has to do with improving the management framework. Earlier, we were told that the amounts allocated for management were not included in the roadmap. Where are we heading? Are we due to repeat the mistakes of the first roadmap? Will the funding allocation be more clear with the new roadmap?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am afraid I share your opinion of the problem you described. Is new funding being allocated for the new roadmap or will it come from existing programs that have been merged? It is often difficult for us to follow the spending of these funds.

I will ask Sylvain to provide you with more detail, since he spent more time discussing this issue with the departments.

•(1640)

Mr. Sylvain Giguère: We had discussions with several departments. Indeed, there are amounts, called A-base budgets, core funding for the departments, for which we have no details. We cannot arrive at an accurate assessment. We do not know what the new funding levels are.

There are some interesting things. With the former roadmap, amounts were allocated for pilot projects or projects that would end. In such cases, it is normal for certain amounts not to be reallocated. They are fairly rare, but we know less about those elements. It is difficult for us to do a complete and comprehensive assessment, since we do not have all the numbers. We cannot ask each department, for example Citizenship and Immigration Canada, how much money from its A-base budget...

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: You have outlined a difficulty that we have as parliamentarians. You follow the roadmap very closely, but as parliamentarians, we have some difficulty doing so. We have often spoken of the need to implement a more transparent management framework, which all parliamentarians could use to track the allocation of funds. We do not seem to be at that point, however.

I continue to be astonished that this government would claim to be a good manager, whereas the facts show that it is a very poor administrator. I will not even mention the F-35s and destroyers, nor the missing \$3 billion from the security fund, but I will raise the \$1.124 billion allocated for this roadmap. We would like to know how this money will be spent. We would like to be able to track the money just as you can on a screen. Evidently, we will not be able to do so.

The Auditor General reviewed the three cases of administrative bungling I mentioned and agreed with us. Should there be an independent review of the roadmap management to find out what is going on, and to provide recommendations on the management?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That is an interesting idea. I had not thought of it. I cannot give you a considered response.

I will carry on with the answer I was giving you. I find it regrettable that certain aspects are no longer found in the new roadmap. Here is an example. The Canada School of Public Service had organized a pilot project during which 11 universities provided language training to people who wished to become public servants. These people could then enter the public service at the appropriate level. That pilot project has now ended and there is no follow-up; there is no more funding. I find that regrettable.

However, other aspects that were successful will continue. But as Mr. Giguère stated, it is often difficult to determine whether certain amounts have already been spent, that were already part of a departmental budget or which...

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: These \$120 million appear in the roadmap, but were they really there before? Is this new funding? Nobody knows.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have wondered the same thing. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we will try to monitor the immigration file over the coming years. We have questions to ask. We will seek answers, in order to better answer this question ourselves.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and my thanks to the commissioner and his staff for being here.

I'm relatively new to this portfolio and this committee, so I may ask you some really innocent-sounding questions. Please forgive me for that.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Those are always the hardest.

Mr. Joe Daniel: One of the things that I understand your role to be is to sustain equality in both French and English in Canada.

Mr. Graham Fraser: What the mandate speaks to is the equality of status. I think some of my staff people would disagree with this, but I am not a grammarian, although I have certain obsessions with split infinitives. Anytime we get a complaint about somebody who does not speak the language well enough, I'm always a little bit hesitant to embark on that discussion.

Mr. Joe Daniel: What is being done in the francophone communities across the country to support their ability to speak English at a reasonable level, so that things like what my colleague said with regard to health care services can actually be conducted in that province?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Quebec is the only province where the learning of the minority language is obligatory to the end of high school. In the minority francophone communities, there is a phrase that is often repeated. In minority language communities it is said, "We don't learn English, we catch it like a cold."

If you look at the statistics, the level of bilingualism in minority language communities, certainly outside Quebec, is very high. In Quebec, 60% of anglophones are bilingual and 80% of anglophones between the ages of 18 and 34 are bilingual.

The challenge that minority communities have had over the years has not as much been about ensuring that the members of that community learn or speak English well; it has been about ensuring that French can thrive in their institutions. I've noticed a significant change over the last few decades with the introduction of French-language minority schools across the country, French-language school boards, French language legal associations, and the health networks that have been developed through the road maps.

There is still a challenge. There are many people in the minority francophone organizations who will say that one of the key learning points should be much more focus on early childhood education in French, to ensure that when children go to child care they learn in that language. In a pilot project in Windsor, they found that children who went to a child care program in French went on to primary and secondary school in French. It becomes a very important element for the vitality of minority communities.

• (1645)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you.

One of the other questions that comes to mind for me is that, when we looked at post-secondary education at the last committee meeting, we saw there are lots of courses at universities covering the arts, covering all sorts of management studies, etc., but in engineering I believe there are only two universities that provide technical courses in electronics, mechanical engineering, aeronautical engineering, and all those sorts of things.

Can you help me understand why engineering is not well supported in the universities, because having spoken earlier today about the expansion in the aeronautical space in Montreal, I see there

is a requirement for huge numbers of engineers and designers, etc., that may not be fulfilled with this.

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

Mr. Fraser, go ahead.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think part of the challenge has been that until the 1960s, really, engineering education in Quebec happened substantially in English, even in the French language universities. It was very difficult to find text books and professors, and because engineering is a sufficiently technical field in areas where multinational companies have adopted English primarily as their language of operation, it has been a challenge.

One of the turning points for engineering education in Quebec was the expansion of Hydro Québec, acquiring the private electricity companies in Quebec in the early 1960s, which gave a huge thrust to French language engineering in Quebec. Hydro Québec, Bombardier, and CGI all continue. There was a report done for the Quebec government back in the early 1980s called *Le Virage technologique*, the technological turning point, which resulted in significant Quebec investment in biotechnology, computer technology, and imaging technology. So we've seen those. We've seen the growth of those areas.

• (1650)

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

We'll go to Mr. Benskin, from Montreal.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Thank you. Yes, and that is the home of ETS, École de technologie supérieure.

[*Translation*]

The École de technologie supérieure was one of the first engineering schools in Quebec. Furthermore, it is located in my riding.

[*English*]

I do want to speak quickly to the question from my honourable friend across the way with regard to learning a second language in order to get services. For me I think that's a dangerous road to travel down, because therein lies the danger of a culture losing itself.

[*Translation*]

The discussion on language is not just about language, but also about culture. Canada is founded on two cultures: the francophone culture and the anglophone culture.

[*English*]

With that I want to just pull something out of your report in regard to the road map and one of the concerns you raised. I'll cite this in English:

Very few funds are allocated specifically to research and the collection of reliable data in support of policy development and decision making in the area of official languages. Little effort was made to guarantee funding for research and language statistics on an ongoing basis, in particular within Statistics Canada. Such funding is crucial, however, in order to obtain a picture of the linguistic trends in the country....

I think that's a very profound statement. It's a very telling statement of the choices we make, the choices government makes, and those that we as parliamentarians make about what we offer to the linguistic minority communities, the anglophone community in Quebec and the francophone community outside of Quebec. If we don't have that information, if we don't put the resources into getting that information, how are we going to be able to get a proper picture of the status of, including the dangers faced by, the francophone community outside of Quebec and the anglophone community inside Quebec?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think you've put your finger on one of the challenges that Statistics Canada has encountered with the end of the obligatory long-form census and its transformation into a voluntary census document. That has created a situation in which there are some communities in which the response rate was too low for there to be valid data.

We had a number of complaints about the abolition of the long-form census. We did an investigation, and it became clear that no federal institution had recommended the end of the long-form census. The nature of the decision was, if you like, protected by cabinet secrecy. Unfortunately, we cannot cross that boundary created by the nature of the secrecy of the cabinet system.

Even though we were not able to find a federal institution that had not met their responsibilities under the Official Languages Act in terms of the decision on the long-form census, I think it was regrettable. It has made it more difficult to have the kind of detailed information that social agencies, government agencies, community groups, and various organizations involved in social welfare of various kinds need. They need to know where those services are the most necessary.

• (1655)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Under the present structure, how could the current road map, or any other resource, help linguistic minorities better understand what's happening in their communities and thus continue to contribute to their survival, not as a language but as a culture?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Part VII of the act was amended in 2005 to ensure that all federal institutions have a binding obligation to take positive measures for the growth and development of minority language communities. For that obligation to be appropriately met, it requires consultation with minority language communities. That process of consultation is all the more important in the face of the statistical tools that have been lost—but I'm not saying that consultation can replace those statistical tools.

The Chair: If you have a brief question, go ahead.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: It's not brief.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Benskin.

[Translation]

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Chair.

You stated earlier that engineering firms have reaped the benefits of good business opportunities in Europe. Does the fact of having

two official languages help Canada penetrate the European market more easily or is it just because Canada's engineering is superior to that of other countries?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I am no expert in international trade. Nonetheless, a free trade agreement with the European Union is now under way. Negotiations have not concluded nor has the agreement been ratified, but in my opinion, this agreement will allow Canadian companies to do business in Europe. In my opinion, Canadian youth and university students have increasingly international prospects.

I have always thought that learning both official languages opened the door for our youth in the international arena. I have noted that more and more young Canadians are moving in that direction and in doing so, had begun by learning the second official language, and that this process had demystified learning other languages, while helping youth acquire an awareness of other cultures. I know that international companies wish to hire Canadians because of their sensitivity to other cultures and their language skills.

• (1700)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: So the future is promising for our youth who speak both official languages. The fact that they add Spanish in their repertoire could contribute to opening the entire North American market to European businesses wishing to integrate themselves into a broader market and seeking candidates to do business at the global level. For a Canadian, choosing Spanish, Italian or German as a third language may be a considerable advantage.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I completely agree. It is undeniable, in my opinion, that learning a third language is easier than learning a second language. Learning a language is almost a physical activity; it becomes easier to learn other languages after having mastered a second one. I have always been struck by the number of young Canadians who first mastered our two official languages and then learned a third one, whether through international business opportunities, or travelling or working abroad.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In Canada, we always talk about our two official languages, whereas other countries talk about their two or three national languages.

Would using the term “national languages” rather than “official languages” not symbolize for us a stronger recognition of these languages?

Mr. Graham Fraser: You raise an interesting question, which has also been discussed at our office. We noticed that the expression “national languages” was used in the Speech from the Throne. I do not have a clear answer for you as to the distinction between an official language and a national language. If we agree that certain languages are official and that others are national, which is to say limited to a certain territory, I think there may be a risk of creating hierarchy. That being said, I am just beginning to reflect upon this issue, which is why I hesitate to provide you with a clear answer.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: One hopes, Commissioner, that you will think fast and refuse, because we are not about to see this become a national language. It has not even been respected as an official language. Let us resolve that issue first.

This is money that should go to the regions. They say they want to teach English to francophones outside Quebec, but I find that worrisome. As Commissioner of Official Languages, that is not your mandate. Your mandate is ensuring that our official languages are being respected. The government has a responsibility to provide services in both official languages. The day they emphasize teaching the other language in regions like mine, will be the day where services will be offered in the other language, English, which is the majority language.

I would like to correct something I said earlier. I mentioned a shipwreck in Neguac, but it did not happen in Neguac, it happened in the Tabusintac channel. I just wanted to make sure that will appear in the “blues”.

It was said that we do not know whether the departments' money had been used for the roadmap. One thing is clear: the roadmap states that \$120 million came from Immigration Canada. That is money that Immigration Canada has already spent and that was transferred there.

The government is patting itself on the back, saying that it has not cut the roadmap's budget and that there is still \$1.2 billion. That is untrue. We can already clearly see, on paper, that these \$120 million come from Immigration Canada's portfolio. I wanted to mention that.

There is something else. Earlier this year, you said you were assessing your options to ensure that Treasury Board respects linguistic obligations, when the time comes to make appointments to the governor in council. That is important, because recently, a job at Library and Archives Canada was posted for which bilingualism was not required. Have you undertaken an objective assessment to find out whether or not it was required?

• (1705)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We received a complaint about that and the matter is currently under investigation. Unfortunately, I cannot talk about it.

However, I can say that it is obvious that bilingualism is essential for certain positions. This fact was recognized in the bill dealing with parliamentary agents, which was unanimously passed by Parliament. The same logic can be applied to other positions.

As far as this particular position is concerned, as it is currently under investigation, I cannot provide you with any details about it.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Let us talk about access to justice. Have the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General reacted to your recommendation with regard to the necessity of collaborating with their provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure the appropriate bilingual capacity within Canada's superior courts? You already gave a presentation at the university, where I saw three other Official Languages Commissioners. There is a problem when these people are nominated for these positions when there is a lack of people. For example, in francophone communities outside of Quebec, be it in Nova Scotia, British Columbia or Alberta, there are not enough people. I would like to know what you think about that, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Graham Fraser: As you know, we did a study on the bilingual capacity of superior courts. I presented this study at the meeting of the Canadian Bar in Saskatoon, which took place in August. The minister was present and somebody asked him a question about that. He received it with interest. I had a telephone conversation with him because he had just been appointed minister. I had told his predecessor that the study would soon be coming out, and I did not want Mr. MacKay to be taken by surprise in Saskatoon. I had a brief conversation with him in July and I presented the report in August.

I met with him with regard to the annual report, and at that meeting, I explained the recommendations in detail. It was a very positive conversation; he received the recommendations with interest. I also had a conversation with the deputy minister in preparing this study. Everything was received with interest and with an apparently positive attitude, but it remains to be seen what the results of these conversations will be.

All I can tell you now is that the study and our explanations about it were received with interest. So I do not have any reason to think that there will be no follow-up, or that it will all be rejected outright, but I cannot assure you that there will be results.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You have been in this position for five years and your mandate was renewed for three more years, so until 2015.

You often present reports and you wait for the government to respond with its position. Your reports denounce the fact that the law has been breached, because the government does not uphold the law.

What do you intend to do over the next three years? I am trying to be respectful. Are you just going to let things take their course or will you take the government to court to make sure that it respects the Official Languages Act?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Fraser, you have the floor.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I personally intend to use every means at my disposal to ensure that the recommendations are implemented and that the law is upheld.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you again, Mr. Chair, and through you I'm going to come back to this question about the funding allocation or the lack thereof. I used to do this. When I was with the Taxpayers Federation I would try to track down how governments were spending money. I know it can be exceptionally frustrating, particularly when a government sometimes changes how it reports a line item in a budget. You assume the worst, but sometimes you realize that it could in fact be done for innocent reasons—not always mind you, but sometimes.

I'm curious to know what process your office uses to ensure that the information you're reporting on or reviewing is adequately researched and is in fact accurate.

•(1710)

Mr. Graham Fraser: We try to be as rigorous as possible. The person who is responsible for our research capacity has a Ph.D. The person who is responsible for our audits also has a Ph.D. We have highly educated researchers who do rigorous work. They try to ensure that there is sufficient consultation with the institutions.

I was explaining to your colleague how through the complaint investigation process a preliminary draft goes to the institution and to the complainant, and we receive their comments.

The same thing happens with the audit process. If we do an audit of an institution, they get a preliminary draft. They will have their comments, which are sometimes quite lengthy. Sometimes we take those into account. Sometimes we agree. Sometimes we disagree.

There have been cases in which we have acknowledged that there was a misunderstanding of the operation of a particular function, and we take into account the correction that's explained and make the change.

Our analysts and our researchers produce high-quality work. We try to ensure that our work is as rigorous as possible

Mr. John Williamson: Are you satisfied with the give and take from the departments? Are you satisfied with the answers you've received to date?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It depends on the department. By and large I would say we have a positive relationship with departments. As I said in my declaration, one of the things that have struck me over the years I've been commissioner is that public servants want to do the right thing. What I didn't say is that deputy ministers, in my experience, are highly successful people who have gotten to where they are by being quite successful and competitive. They don't like it if their department is found to be failing in its responsibilities.

One of the things I have noticed is that when the head of a department or the head of an agency takes this issue seriously, changes happen and improvements are made. If the head of the agency doesn't take it seriously, that message gets sent immediately through the department and these complaints are viewed as part of the price of doing business and are not taken very seriously.

Others say this is unacceptable. We're going to have an action plan. We're going to ensure that we perform better.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you. I have no further questions, but I want to thank you and your team for appearing today to answer my questions.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Madame St-Denis.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise St-Denis: With regard to the roadmap, my colleague said that it was difficult to understand, that it was difficult to know where the money was.

Do you have the necessary latitude to earmark money for the creation of specific programs? For instance, some francophone communities outside of Quebec are in more trouble than others.

I would like to come back to what the gentleman said about culture. Would it not be a good idea to create an education program for these communities? You put out a brochure which was effective, but would it not be possible to create a program which shows how important it is to live in a bicultural country and how beneficial this is?

•(1715)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, I am free to promote linguistic duality, but I do not administer programs. It is important to point out the difference. If, in a minority community, an organization tells us that it needs money, I cannot just write it a cheque. That is not my mandate.

However, as I have already mentioned, we conducted a study on anglophone seniors in Quebec. We held a series of consultations with anglophone organizations and suggested that a study be conducted on a given topic, but those people told us that though that might be interesting for us, it would not be useful for them. However, they told us that a study on federal programs that impact seniors in Quebec would be beneficial for them. We therefore took their suggestion into account and collected statistical data on seniors in Quebec, data that had never been collected before. We drew up a list of all federal institutions that deliver programs or that have an impact on anglophone seniors in Quebec.

We also conducted a series of studies on the vitality of official-language minority communities in several communities across the country. We worked in close collaboration with these communities in order to determine their strength and weaknesses. This collaboration process allow these people to specify their needs.

In short, we can conduct studies or audits that may be useful for minority communities, but we do not administer programs.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Once your study is completed and you have drawn your conclusions, can you suggest that the government create a program aimed at addressing a specific problem?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Absolutely. We often do so.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Now let us talk about airport authorities. That is a question that we have not yet addressed.

There is a major problem here. There is a very low level of bilingualism within these authorities, about 10% to 12%.

When you work with these people, how much do they cooperate with you and how do they perceive your work?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That is a very good question.

I have held meetings. Some airport authorities have obligations that they did not use to have, for example, in the case of airports that now handle one million passengers per year. Sometimes, these people are not aware of the obligations that they have. So first, we have to inform them that they do have these obligations. In such cases, I am listened to politely, and people are interested.

My office had prepared an information campaign for passengers. We wanted to conduct a pilot project at the Winnipeg airport. The project was accepted, but at the last minute, the people from the Canadian Airports Council changed their mind and refused to allow us to inform passengers of their language rights, claiming that this would lead the passengers to believe that these rights would be respected. So now we are trying to think of a way that we can make the travelling public aware that it does have rights and that these rights should be respected.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nicholls, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question, Commissioner, is about leadership.

On page 65 of your report, you state:

When it comes to promoting linguistic duality, the federal government seems to be trailing behind the public instead of leading the way.

Could you tell me what makes you say that and if, in your opinion, the current government is showing leadership in promoting linguistic duality?

[English]

I especially ask when we hear things, like we have from government members here today, that suggest that minority communities should learn the majority language. I think that shows a bit of the problem. Could you elaborate on that point?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I feel very strongly that leadership is the critical element in ensuring that both languages, our linguistic duality, be seen as a value and not a burden. I think we are in a situation now in which the leaders of all political parties use both languages, and do so effectively across the country. I recently was interviewed by a journalist based in Washington for *La Vanguardia*, a Catalan newspaper in Barcelona. He had come to Canada during the last election campaign and had heard the Prime Minister in Vancouver and the then-leader of the opposition in Toronto, and he said they both spoke French during their speeches, even though it was clearly an English-speaking audience. He wondered why that would be. I explained to him that political leaders in this country take linguistic duality seriously, and also that they want to get on television in the other language.

[Translation]

With regard to indicators of public acceptance, since I am fairly old, I clearly remember a time when people booed when the national anthem was sung in both English and French. That does not happen anymore. I have also attended events where there was just as much laughter and response to jokes told in French as to those told in English, in audiences that might have been thought to have been made up of mostly anglophones, even unilingual anglophones and a certain number of francophones. But the crowd's reaction showed that Canada has become more passively bilingual than ever. Instead of feeling that French is a foreign language, Canadians are more and more proud of this language.

Obviously, that is not always the case. Unfortunate incidents and events still often occur with regard to the minority official language

everywhere in Canada, which I disapprove of. However, in my opinion, most of the population has progressed to the point where people no longer hesitate to use the other official language for fear of offending their audience. That is my opinion. It is not necessarily based on statistical data, but it is my impression.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I have one more question, commissioner, just to conclude, and it touches on the road map once again. I've been talking to support organizations in Montreal that help young anglophones integrate into the economy, and their funding ran out in the spring, as you know. Here I noticed that you referred on page 55 of your report to the elimination of funding in the road map programs "for the coordinators of federal institutions' policies and programs relating to the Act". Someone actually working in one of the organizations asked me what was going to happen as a result.

This shows that coordination is not going on. They don't know how to continue providing these quality services without proper funding. How can we remedy this problem?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think there are two problems, and I think there has been some or partial improvement in one of them. This has been in response to some of the crises that occurred for some organizations in the past, where the funding that went to community organizations would take so long to arrive that they would find themselves getting the cheque in October, and it would all have to be spent by March 31.

Sometimes those delays in funding meant that people had to be laid off; people who might otherwise have been hired for the summer were not hired. It meant that there was work that they were intending to do, but rather than being able to hire somebody locally, because the local firm was too small to be able to turn on a dime and produce the work starting in October, they would have to go to a much larger firm in a big city that would have the resources so they could respond quickly. This meant that rather than strengthening the community, it simply further centralized work away from the community.

Accordingly, Canadian Heritage introduced some changes where, for a number of funding programs, part of the money would go out earlier rather than the entire cheque going out at the end of the whole process.

But I think with project funding of any kind, it is always problematic because there is project funding and there is ongoing funding. I've had a number of conversations with people who've said, "We have project funding until the end of the year, but we're not sure if we're going to be able to keep the organization going when this particular project funding expires." So it is a serious challenge for a lot of very important community organizations.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Thank you to all members of the committee for their questions and comments.

I want to thank the commissioner for his annual report. I thought it was quite thorough and detailed, so congratulations on producing that report.

[*Translation*]

Without further ado, this meeting is adjourned.

It is always a pleasure to have you here.

[*English*]

I want to thank everybody.

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