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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This is Tuesday, October 28, 2014, this is our 31st hearing, and it is televised.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are here to discuss the 2013-2014 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Fraser. His report was referred to the committee on Tuesday, October 7, 2014.

Before hearing Mr. Fraser, I am going to give the floor to Mr. Godin, who wishes to table some notices of motions.

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

I would like to table four notices of motion.

Here is the first:

That the committee invite the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to appear before the end of December 2014 to discuss francophone immigration and all the initiatives taken by his department to respect part VII of the Official Languages Act, during a two-hour televised session.

The second notice of motion reads as follows:

That the committee invite the Minister of Defence before the end of December 2014 to discuss respect for official languages in the Canadian Forces, during a two-hour televised session.

The third notice of motion reads as follows:

[English]

That the Committee invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages before the end of December 2014 to discuss the implementation of the Roadmap and to answer concerns expressed by stakeholders over the management of the Roadmap during a two-hour televised meeting.

And the fourth one is:

That the committee invite the minister of Public Works before December 2014 to discuss all initiatives taken by Public Works to respect the Official Languages Act in the context of minority media during a two-hour televised session.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

[English]

Before I give the floor to Mr. Fraser, I just want to pass along our committee's best wishes to Monsieur Giguère, who I understand has retired. If you could pass along our best wishes to him on whatever

he goes forward with, on behalf of the committee, that would be appreciated.

[Translation]

Mr. Fraser, you have the floor.

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

Before I begin reading my text, I would like to say how moved I am to be in Parliament after last week's events. I am very happy to see all of you here again.

[English]

It was a terrible event, and you've gone through a traumatic experience. I think all Canadians are particularly appreciative of the courage that was displayed by all the security forces during this terrible event.

Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, good afternoon.

I'm accompanied today by Johane Tremblay, general counsel; Ghislaine Saikaley, assistant commissioner, compliance assurance; and Mary Donaghy, assistant commissioner of policy and communications.

[Translation]

Thank you for having come to the presentation of my 2013-2014 report. This is my eighth annual report.

This year, the report focuses on my role as language rights ombudsman. It describes some of the conclusions my office has drawn, using the tools at our disposal, in order to bring about changes in federal institutions. These tools include investigations and the analysis of admissible complaints; audits, including one that focused on accountability and official languages; report cards; and legal proceedings.

[English]

It discusses complaints that we received following the federal government's deficit reduction action plan. The annual report describes some of the 23 complaints that were directly related to the government's 2012 deficit reduction action plan. Most of these complaints were deemed founded.

While the issues involved were very different, I was able to reach a general conclusion: success requires planning, and planning requires leadership. When we see failure in an institution, it's often due to a lack of planning, and that is frequently due to a lack of leadership.

[*Translation*]

I continue to use the example of the federal government's decision to close the Marine Rescue Sub-Centre in Quebec City, which was discussed in last year's annual report. Following a thorough investigation, it became clear — to my office as well as to the Canadian Coast Guard and National Defence — that ships in distress on the St. Lawrence River and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence would not be able to obtain immediate service in French from search and rescue centres in Trenton and Halifax.

• (1105)

[*English*]

The closing was first delayed until emergency service could be guaranteed at all times. Then in January 2014, the government announced that the marine rescue sub-centre would not be closed.

The findings of this investigation are representative of the lack of adequate planning that we often notice amongst the hundreds of complaints that we process each year. Year in and year out, three out of four complaints we receive are worthy of investigation. Before they act, federal institutions need to think carefully about the possible negative consequences of their actions on official-language communities, the service they provide to the public, and their employees' ability to work in the official language of their choice.

[*Translation*]

This annual report shows how our investigations often lead to positive results. After receiving our investigation reports, many institutions are willing to consider other solutions and sometimes even reverse their decisions.

Sometimes institutions do not follow my recommendations, either because they are unwilling to do so or because they are misinterpreting their language obligations. This is the case with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, which recently confirmed that it was closing its library in Mont-Joli, Quebec, despite the fact that in my investigation report, I recommended that it reconsider its decision in light of its obligations under part VII of the act.

[*English*]

My office is currently reviewing the response that we received last week about my recommendation, and I've requested a meeting with the deputy minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Mr. Matthew King.

The compliance function is an extremely useful tool for achieving change and ensuring that institutions meet their obligations.

[*Translation*]

I act in a proactive manner when it comes to audits and dealings with institutions subject to the act. But the 476 complaints received last year are also one of many ways for citizens to draw attention to an issue that touches them personally. It is important for Canadians to see that filing a complaint often leads to concrete results that serve the public interest.

[*English*]

For example, this was the case with a complaint about the Canada Media Fund, whose programs were biased unfairly against Quebec's English-speaking communities. A new program was put in place in response to my recommendation.

My annual report gives other examples of complaints that are getting results. Following an investigation, I recommended the Public Health Agency of Canada put measures in place so that Nova Scotia's francophone community could receive services in French from organizations that provide services as part of the community action program for children.

[*Translation*]

Success in discharging language obligations is linked to planning. Investigations, audits and report cards are all important tools that encourage institutions to make changes and respect their official languages obligations.

Investigations can have a significant impact. The investigation that followed numerous complaints about the opening ceremony of the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games is a good example. It prompted my office to publish a practical guide for organizers of major sporting events in order to help them address official languages issues.

[*English*]

The guide helped organizers of the 2013 Canada Summer Games in Sherbrooke, Quebec deliver an exemplary event with respect to official languages. By taking English and French into consideration at every stage of the process, the Sherbrooke games became a model for other host communities.

The guide also served as a template in the development of a similar publication, this time geared toward organizers of events that will commemorate the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017. Using the new guide, organizers will be able to ensure that linguistic duality is an integral part of the 150th anniversary celebrations.

[*Translation*]

This year, one of my two recommendations concerns the preparations for the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The festivities in 2017 will provide a unique opportunity to show Canadians and the rest of the world that, a century and a half after Confederation, linguistic duality continues to be one of the pillars of Canada's identity.

I therefore recommend that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages provide leadership by encouraging federal institutions to take linguistic duality into account when planning their activities for Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations.

[English]

When it comes to respecting official languages, success is no accident. Successful institutions plan their actions, consult with communities, and evaluate their progress. This is possible only if managers, new employees, and human resources specialists fully understand their institution's official languages obligations, particularly with respect to establishing the linguistic profiles of positions.

Official languages training would be more effective if it were routinely provided to all federal public servants early in their careers. As soon as they enter the public service, federal employees need to be made aware of the importance of official languages in providing services to Canadians and for the internal functioning of the government.

• (1110)

[Translation]

My other recommendation is addressed to the President of Treasury Board. I recommend that he ensure that the Treasury Board of Canada's Secretariat and the Canada School of Public Service review and enhance any training on responsibilities related to official languages for new public servants and for new managers and the human resources specialists who advise them.

[English]

The 2013-2014 annual report is available on the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages' website. I encourage everyone to join the online discussion through our Facebook page and our Twitter feed in both our official languages, of course.

Thank you for your attention. I'd now like to take the remaining time to answer any questions you may have.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We have one hour and forty-five minutes for questions and comments. We will have a five-minute break at noon.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

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

Greetings to the commissioner and the officials who are with him today.

Mr. Fraser, thank you for your good words about last week's incident. I would not want anyone else to go through that, ever, in a country of democracy and freedom such as our own. However, now the work must go on. As someone was saying on television, when you fall off your bicycle, you get back on and you keep going. So today, we are going to continue to do our work.

A few weeks ago, at a press conference about your report, you said that the preliminary investigation was final, but that you had nevertheless recommended to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans that they reverse their decision to close the Maurice-Lamontagne Institute. You said so openly and publicly.

What follow-up measures do you intend to take on that? Do you intend to take legal action?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I must first of all say that I was disappointed by that decision, which I found premature. A meeting had been scheduled with the deputy minister to discuss the decision. I received a letter after the decision was announced. I continue to think that the department's position shows a lack of understanding of the obligations set out in part VII of the Act. According to that department, services will continue to be offered in both languages.

When two institutions that serve the scientific French-speaking community are closed, while English language institutions and libraries remain open, it is obvious that the equal status of both official languages is not being respected. These are not actions that are in compliance with part VII of the Act.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Commissioner, let's get to the heart of the issue, since we don't have much time. Minutes count, here.

You are telling us that you met with representatives of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I did not meet with representatives of that department. I had an appointment with them and I expected to discuss what I considered a lack of understanding on their part. In fact, they announced their decision before they even met with me.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Very well, that's clear. You had an appointment with them, but they had already made their decision.

Does that not show a lack of respect toward official languages and the commissioner of official languages, especially since they knew you were investigating?

Air Canada also shows a great lack of respect for official languages. You have said that Air Canada is the body that breaches the Official Languages Act the most. We learned this morning of the Supreme Court ruling, wherein the court says that there have been too many excuses and that it is beginning to be concerned by the fact that the government or the institutions subject to the Official Languages Act only seem to have to say "I'm sorry, I don't speak French". That is almost the situation.

You are the right person to talk to us about this "I'm sorry". The Conservative government is showing a lack of respect toward you, Mr. Commissioner, who are an officer of Parliament and the watchdog of official languages in Canada. Under the law, you report to Parliament, and not to the government. There is a blatant lack of respect at this time.

• (1115)

Mr. Graham Fraser: As I already said, I was very disappointed. I have an appointment with the deputy minister, even though the decision has already been announced.

To your first question on legal recourse or other reactions, we are in the process of evaluating the position expressed by the department in the letter we received last week. We will do the same following the meeting scheduled with the deputy minister.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Commissioner, with all due respect, I must again ask you the following question, which was put to you at the press conference.

You were asked whether the government's cuts had meant a loss of ground for bilingualism, and you answered "not necessarily".

Is your answer the same today? Is that what you are telling us?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No, not at all. What I am saying is that I am not ready to share with you the measures I am willing to take in the Fisheries and Oceans file.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Commissioner, that is not my question.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Closing down the only two Fisheries and Oceans institutions that were serving the French-speaking scientific community is a step backwards, that is clear.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, the commissioner was asked whether the government cuts translated into a loss of ground for bilingualism. That is the question that was put to him. His reply was “not necessarily”.

However, the Maurice-Lamontagne Institute in Mont-Joli is now closed. As you yourself specified, the Moncton institute has also closed its doors. These were the only two institutes in a francophone area. The Cooperative Development Program was also eliminated; the H.J. Michaud Research Farm was also closed, in New Brunswick; that was another francophone undertaking; then there was the closure of the French-language Moncton scientific library, and that of Mont-Joli; and the cut to the Destination Canada budget, and the list goes on.

Let's not forget the first question. I want to know whether the government cuts in those cases caused some backsliding.

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

Mr. Graham Fraser: In all of the cases you mentioned, of course we lost ground.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Fraser, thank you for your kind remarks. We are also happy to see you again.

There are two or three paragraphs on the 2017 festivities in your brief. You also mentioned the guide you prepared following the Vancouver Olympic Games. You spoke as well about the Canada Games in Sherbrooke.

Did people draw inspiration from the guide, or did you prepare it in cooperation with them? That part was not clear for me.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Excuse me, but I did not hear the last part of your question.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Did the organizers of the Sherbrooke games have the guide prepared by the office of the commissioner in their possession, or did these things happen simultaneously?

Mr. Graham Fraser: They had the guide prepared by the office of the commissioner for those who organize sports events. They said that they found the guide extremely helpful. Some Sport Canada representatives I met very recently in the context of the lead-up to the Prince George Winter Games in British Columbia said that they had integrated our suggestions into the preparation of those games. I also met with organizers from the host city, Prince George, and was

impressed to see to what extent they had integrated the content of the guide into their proceedings.

• (1120)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What are the strong points of that guide?

What are the points that any event organizer should focus on carefully, either for the 2017 celebrations or any other Canadian event?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Planning is very important. Indeed, it is important to not realize that you need hosts on the very evening before an event. You have to ensure that services can be offered, and that the signage, ads, fliers and athletes' biographies have been planned, and that you have established a rapport with the minority community. This was done unofficially in Sherbrooke. In Prince George, the organizers established an official partnership with the local francophone community. They also made sure that they had a sufficient number of bilingual volunteers.

The Sport Canada recommendation was that 10% of volunteers be bilingual. In Prince George, the organizers set that figure at 22%; 22% of volunteers needed to be sufficiently bilingual to offer services. They also established links with the Prince George French-language high school, as well as with immersion schools. Finally, they planned things so that the school holiday coincided with the Winter Games.

All of that shows that the linguistic planning principles were integrated into the planning of the games.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You have just raised an important point, i. e. seeking the assistance of educational institutions. For the Sherbrooke games, for instance, it was easier to recruit bilingual volunteers from the University of Sherbrooke rather than looking for them in the population as a whole. In your opinion, is it an advantage to be able to look for people in our educational institutions?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Indeed it is.

In fact, one of my former colleagues in the office, who now works for another department, was made aware of the importance of official languages 10 or 15 years ago while he was working as a volunteer for the Canada Games in Winnipeg. It is important to offer service, and it is just as important to demonstrate to students the importance of doing so in both official languages. We can also hope that this will promote the rapport between francophiles and francophones, as well as between immersion schools and French-language schools.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Do you have any advice to give young Canadians who have spent a lot of time learning both official languages, and who, after two or three years on the labour market, unfortunately find themselves in a situation where they lose their French skills because they have fewer opportunities to hear or practise that language? That is true also for English.

What can they do to keep up their language skills? Would you advise that they take a few hours a week to listen to programs in French, or to spend time with friends who speak the other language? Unfortunately, you can lose the results of 10 years' training relatively quickly.

Do you have any advice to give to those young people?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I hope that in preparing for the 2017 celebrations, the government is considering increasing the number of exchanges, grants and learning or travel opportunities, work or study opportunities in communities where the other official language is the majority language. Those who, for one reason or another, cannot take advantage of such opportunities are nevertheless quite fortunate in that they have access to radio and television in both official languages everywhere in Canada.

Last week, I took the opportunity to attend a training session for provincially-appointed judges in New Brunswick. One of the chief justices from an anglophone province told me that she always listens to radio in French in her car so as to maintain the level of French she acquired in her training courses as a judge.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. St-Denis, you have the floor.

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

My questions will be about work.

Given the massive job cuts in the public service, and the loss of jobs in many government agencies where bilingualism is promoted, do you not think that measures to further bilingualism in our country are becoming cosmetic, if not superfluous? The facts are that in the federal public service, jobs are being cut, and there is no requirement that French be spoken in the workplace. What is your opinion on that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: There are two issues: language of work and hiring.

A whole generation of public servants will be retiring, so we are continuing to hire, even if the total number of positions has decreased. It is extremely important that the federal departments, which make up the largest employer in Canada, send a clear message to universities: the federal government needs bilingual employees, and universities need to provide students with learning opportunities.

Language of work is always a challenge. I admit that I was extremely disappointed that during last week's crisis, the warning message from the Government Operations Centre was entirely in English. I was shocked. It is during crises that we see to what extent the systems operate. In my opinion, this was a dismal failure of the system.

In addition, this institution announced a few months ago that announcements would no longer be made in both official languages because of a lack of resources. We admonished the institution, and its position changed. However, in a crisis situation, this was a failure. I was very concerned by the reflex that was shown under fire, so to speak.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: It's good to promote bilingualism during celebrations, and it is important to do so, but shouldn't the commissioner push things a little further in terms of requirements within our institution? Here, at least half the people don't speak French. However, the government says that it promotes bilingualism. In reality, this isn't being done. There is a lack of willingness. I don't know where this requirement could come from, but it seems to me

that it should come from your office, Mr. Fraser. We don't require people to answer us in French. As you said so well, many people answer only in English.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I remain convinced that the evaluation of language capacity and the training of public servants are difficult and complex problems.

The government de-centralized this responsibility by delegating it to the departments. The departments passed this responsibility on to the managers, who must ensure that language training is part of each employee's training. I'm not against that in principle, but there are always opportunities to put off this language training.

I continue to be convinced as well that, despite all the efforts for professional and fair evaluations, some people who pass the tests are not able to communicate, while others are, even though they fail the test. Aligning the abilities to communicate and the evaluation of these language skills is always a challenge. If French was not used in the government, all of this would become an artificial phenomenon.

• (1130)

Ms. Lise St-Denis: I'm going to change the subject and ask a quick question about the complaints you receive.

Outside of the National Capital Region, you receive very few complaints from Canadians. Can this low percentage be attributed to the public's misunderstanding of your role?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We are currently looking into the phenomenon of complaints and this decreasing trend over time. Although there were more complaints this year than last year, there has been a decline over time.

Is it because, as you say, people are not familiar with the role of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages? Is it because people are disillusioned and think that filing a complaint doesn't do anything? Is it because services in some areas have improved? Is it because there has been a decrease in the number of in-person contacts between public servants and Canadians?

You can now apply for a passport online. There are other contacts where there are fewer of these interpersonal interactions. Nevertheless, some of them are still necessary: at borders, in airports, in security checkpoints, and others.

Even at airports, you can automatically get a ticket from a machine and not have contact with an agent. This is one element, I believe, but we have no conclusions.

There is also the generation issue. We analyze the satisfaction rates of our complainants with regard to our institutions. We are seeing that the average age of complainants is fairly old. We sometimes ask other ombudspersons whether young people tend to file fewer complaints to all the ombudspersons than older individuals.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

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

Commissioner Fraser, it's good to see you and your team here this morning. Thank you so much for coming.

Could you just relate the incident with respect to the security notice last week? I wasn't aware of that. You said the alert went out. What alert was that and where did it go?

Mr. Graham Fraser: This was an alert that went out from the government operations centre warning that there was an armed shooter at loose and that there was a lockdown for federal employees and government buildings in a defined area in downtown Ottawa and that people should stay away from the windows and stay in their offices until they heard otherwise. This was later followed by messages that came from Treasury Board Secretariat that were in both languages, but the initial emergency announcement was in English only.

Mr. John Williamson: That announcement would have gone to federal employees in the area.

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's certainly my understanding.

• (1135)

Mr. John Williamson: Yes.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think it was government-wide.

Mr. John Williamson: Yes, I think you—

Mr. Graham Fraser: I mean, I got to tell you, frankly—

Mr. John Williamson: —point's taken.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I didn't quite believe it. My first reaction when I saw the e-mail was to.... I was out of town, in New Brunswick, at the time and I immediately e-mailed my colleagues saying, is this really true, did they really put out this message in English only? It was then confirmed that it was the case.

Mr. John Williamson: Well, no, and your point's very well taken and I know there will be a review of some of the measures that took place. You might also be aware the RCMP, for example, use a different radio frequency than Hill security, which is another example of a failure to communicate. But your point is very well received that the notice should have gone out in both official languages to all employees in the area. I wasn't aware of that, so—

Mr. Graham Fraser: It particularly struck me because a few months ago we had received an announcement from the government that because of a reduction in their resources, henceforth they were not going to be able to put out the announcements in both languages. We immediately got in touch with them and said "Excuse me, what if there is a violent incident and you need to warn people? Are you suggesting that it is only anglophones that are going to be threatened by somebody if there is an immediate threat?" They reconsidered this and changed their position, but they did not clearly take the measures necessary to change the capacity to be able to respond in an emergency situation.

Mr. John Williamson: No. Excellent point.

How many minutes do I have?

The Chair: You have three more minutes.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, thank you.

Getting back to something you had mentioned earlier about the public sector employees, I think you said that universities have to do more to send a message that both languages are required. I think you would agree, though, that it has to begin long before then. If you were learning a second language only in university, you've got a lot

of ground to cover. It really is something that has to come through elementary school and following that, but, of course, reinforced, perhaps, in university, that two languages greatly improves the chances of getting employment. You would agree?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Absolutely. I see this as a series of, if you like, cascading incentives. I think that as an employer, the federal government should be sending that message to universities, and universities should be sending that message to secondary schools. Often students are making key decisions about the courses they're going to take when they're in grade 9. Sometimes they will be told by academic counsellors, no, that's not one of your stronger subjects. I've had immersion students say to me they've been told by their teachers in their last year of high school not to take the immersion exam but to take the core French exam because it's much easier, and they'll ace it, that all the universities care about is the marks. Well, that is a set of incentives for mediocrity. I think there should instead be a set of incentives for excellence. As an employer, the federal government has a series of rights and obligations, if you like, to convey to universities what it needs. Universities should be sending a message to students that they value those students who have gone to the effort of persisting in going through immersion and taking a more demanding program, and that they will take that into account when they evaluate their applications.

Mr. John Williamson: Right. I agree.

But let me ask you this, just to probe your thinking on it. I would hope that you would not believe—and perhaps you do, but tell me if so—that bilingualism in this country doesn't depend on a large government or an ever-expanding government. We don't measure the strength of the French or English communities, or our ability to communicate, solely through the barrel of the federal government. Our communities are strong because the communities are strong. The government can spend what it can spend. When decisions are made to rein in spending, it is going to have an impact throughout the government. But that doesn't necessarily represent a weakening of one's commitment to bilingualism or even minority language communities across the country. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I wouldn't disagree, and I certainly don't measure the strength of bilingualism by the total number of federal employees. But I think that what is also clear is that when a federal institution goes through dramatic cuts, it becomes harder to maintain the same level of service.

I had a conversation with the head of one federal agency that had gone from 450 employees to 150. He said it's just harder for them to do what they were doing before with that dramatic loss in the number of employees. So it's not a question of blind identification. It's a question of to what extent is the service available and to what extent are those institutions being considered in terms of the promotion of the equal status of both languages? I always like coming back to the elimination of the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean in 1995. It was seen as a gesture of equal cuts because Royal Roads had been eliminated. But over the last 20 years it has become increasingly difficult for the armed forces to maintain the same level of bilingualism for its officers because they simply don't have that resource. It's harder for them to recruit. It's harder for them to train officers who previously had gone to and spent several semesters in Saint-Jean.

So those kinds of reductions have to take into account the need to promote and protect both official languages and the equal status of both languages.

•(1140)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner, for being here again.

According to your report on plans and priorities, you were aiming for 270 promotional activities, including requests for general information and promotional tools. How do you measure the impact and the success of your promotional activities? That's the first question. Second, what is the breakdown of your promotional activities by age group? Third, how many promotional activities do you offer to new Canadians?

Mr. Graham Fraser: One of the difficulties in evaluating the results of promotion is that it's difficult to know what impact one has had. One of the things that I've often felt, from my interventions with ministers or government departments, is that you're never sure which finger on the button made the elevator come. Was it my intervention that led to the...? I'm referring to the complaint process rather than the promotional process, but was it my investigation that led to the government's decision to keep the maritime rescue sub-centre open in Quebec City? Was it MPs who mobilized, was it the community that mobilized, was it the minister who decided this is what needed to be in? Ultimately, it was a decision by the... Did the Prime Minister's Office intervene? I don't know.

I know that we did our investigation and I had conversations with the fisheries department and the coast guard, but it's very difficult to... If I've given a number of speeches, or if we've given promotional material to school children, it's difficult to know what kind of effect that's going to have. I mentioned the example of a colleague of mine who became convinced of the importance of both official languages when he was a volunteer at the Canada Games in Winnipeg as a teenager. Who knows whether the volunteers for the Canada Winter Games in Prince George, or the Canada Games in Sherbrooke, may have their minds opened to the presence and importance of both official languages? I find it very difficult.

In terms of breaking down our promotional activities, one thing that we are doing in respect to immigration, though I wouldn't say this is a promotional activity that is directed specifically at immigrants, is that we're doing a study on immigration in conjunction with the Commissioner of French Language Services in Ontario. It's one of the themes that we will be discussing in next year's annual report. I've spoken to the minister, I've met with immigrant groups across the country, both English-speaking immigrants in Quebec City and French-speaking immigrants in Toronto, Winnipeg, and Regina. It's hard to measure precisely what the impact is of those interventions, but certainly it's one of our priorities.

•(1145)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you.

How do interprovincial barriers affect minority linguistic communities? Would more consistent standards across the provinces make it easier for minority communities to attract and retain newcomers? What's your opinion?

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's a very good question.

I think the one thing that at least one provincial premier has raised with me is the fact that when an immigrant is received in Quebec and then decides to move to another province, the money that is dedicated per capita for settlement services does not follow that immigrant if they move to another province. We have a fair amount of mobility among immigrants. When they come to Canada they do not necessarily sink their roots in the province they first arrive in, particularly with the economic engines that we're seeing in western Canada. There is a fair amount of mobility from eastern Canada to western Canada that includes immigrants. Provinces feel that they are getting the immigrants but not getting the money that was accorded for settlement services.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nicholls.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Fraser, I would like to thank you for appearing before the committee today.

I have some questions about the CBC. Many people have criticized the Conservative and Liberal cuts to the CBC over the past two decades.

You have added your voice to the discussion, and the legislation is clear: the public broadcaster must contribute to the development of French-speaking communities across Canada. Yet, the minister seems to want to wash her hands of it.

You told a journalist with *Le Devoir* "The government can't wash its hands by saying that this is not its problem. ... Intervening before the courts is an option under the act."

So, my question is this: Are you preparing any recourse?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We are thinking about it. We haven't made a decision.

There is already a case before the courts concerning CBC/Radio-Canada and CBEF Windsor. The Federal Court of Canada rendered a decision that we greatly appreciated because it clarified the scope of Part VII of the Official Languages Act. I believe Judge Martineau's ruling just adds to what I sometimes call linguistic jurisprudence in Canada. CBC decided to appeal this ruling, which will come before the Federal Court of Appeal.

In terms of the recent announcements about cuts, we are looking at the situation. We are thinking seriously about the possibility of legal proceedings, but we haven't decided.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: May I make a suggestion, Mr. Commissioner? Could you hold a meeting with the deputy ministers involved? You could call Graham Flack, Hubert Lussier, Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Guylaine F. Roy, and the deputy ministers responsible at Finance Canada, Paul Rochon, Jean-Michel Catta and Benoit Robidoux, to inform them of their responsibilities in this respect as deputy ministers. Could the Commissioner of Official Languages do that?

• (1150)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I would have to think about it, but it is certainly something that the Standing Committee on Official Languages could do.

Following the recommendations that we have made after evaluating the departments, the committee has often decided to ask deputy ministers to appear before them, and we have seen results. You have an important tool in your hands. There is nothing like appearing before a committee to refresh people's memories and clarify the thoughts of senior officials

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I think that the offices and the deputy ministers of Canadian Heritage are aware of their obligations. However, the fact remains that this would lead to something, if we put them with deputy ministers of Finance so that they could have a dialogue. I think it would be worthwhile if you, an expert on this, gave a briefing to these people so that they could understand their obligations thoroughly.

I will move on to a question that has to do with English speakers in Quebec.

[*English*]

As you know, presently many anglophone groups in Quebec are worried about the implications Bill C-10 and, further down the road, the possible moves toward changing the school board system.

Have you been contacted by any of these groups? What is your responsibility, if any, in these matters?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I have heard those concerns. I had a number of conversations with people from the English community at the QCGN banquet, where the Goldbloom awards were given out last week. There were a number of passionate interventions, including one by my predecessor, Victor Goldbloom, on the subject of Bill 10.

We're following the situation closely. I have already had meetings with three ministers and a member of the National Assembly, and have shared some of the concerns I've heard. It's not directly within my jurisdiction.

In terms of the changes to school boards, it's my belief that there is a constitutional guarantee of school boards that was clarified by the Supreme Court in the Mahé decision, which guaranteed the right to school governance. When I raised that with someone, they said, yes, that's true, but it doesn't necessarily guarantee nine school boards; they might reduce it to one single school board for the entire English community. I think if they tried to do that, a court case would result.

In terms of those initiatives by the Quebec government, I have to say that I do not have the same kind of powers to investigate that I do with federal jurisdictions, but I follow them closely and try to represent the concerns of the minority communities as I hear them.

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

Madam Crockatt.

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

Bonjour, monsieur Fraser. It's nice to see you—a former journalist too. Thank you very much for this report.

I want to ask a little bit more about the area of Canadian acceptance of bilingualism. This follows on some of the questions from my colleagues as well. In recent days, as you've alluded to, we went through quite a traumatic experience here on Parliament Hill. We've all been touched by that. One of the places where there was a great show of emotion about this was in our hockey rinks. We saw the national anthem sung in those hockey rinks as one of the more overt displays of Canadianism, and it was the bilingual anthem we heard. I think it involved some 60,000 people in three of our major cities.

You've been official languages commissioner for eight years now. You've had an opportunity to see the trajectory of bilingualism and its acceptance in Canada. I'm wondering if you see that kind of overt public display, where it has actually gone beyond.... There was no government bureaucrat there, mandating that people should be singing the national anthem in both languages. Do you see a change, or how do you see that the public attitudes toward bilingualism have changed?

I might just add that I was at a memorial service for Corporal Cirillo in Calgary on the weekend, and the anthem was also sung in both languages, the bilingual version.

• (1155)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think that's a very positive sign, and I think it does reflect what I have seen over the years. If you go further back than the eight years that I've been commissioner, there was a period in the 1970s when the use of the bilingual anthem, or the French-language version of the anthem, at hockey games provoked boos. I can remember an incident at Maple Leaf Gardens back in the seventies.

I think it is an indication of the ever-increasing acceptance of the idea that this is the public face of the country. One thing that I hope we can achieve universally—unfortunately, it often takes tragic events to bring people together around these kinds of symbols—is a state where people, all Canadians, feel a sense of ownership of both languages; where, whether they speak both languages or not, there is a sense that this is who we are as a nation; and where the presence of both languages is a marker for any kind of national celebration or national event.

Ms. Joan Crockatt: How do we measure Canadian acceptance of bilingualism?

Mr. Graham Fraser: Well, one of the ways we measure it is by periodically polling. I can't cite you the precise poll, but there was a poll recently that showed that over half of Canadians thought their province should be officially bilingual.

The problem that emerges with those kinds of polls is that it's never really clear exactly what people mean. When they are asked in a polling question if they support Canada's language policy or official bilingualism, it's never quite clear exactly what people understand that to mean.

I think the polls are a useful indication, but they are not sufficient to really give an indication. I think there's much more positive support for Canada's language policy now than there has been in the past.

Ms. Joan Crockatt: I wonder if you could talk about what the situation is in Quebec. I think it's an important component of Canadian acceptance of bilingualism that they see both languages are also being given attention. Also, it says that you've probably been more active in Quebec than in any other province. Would you explain to us why that is?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think there's often a misunderstanding about the challenges the English minority in Quebec faces. When people think of the English minority, they tend to think primarily of the people in Montreal. There are 600,000 anglophones in Montreal. If you have a critical mass of 600,000, it is possible to have employment and social institutions, and there's no problem in maintaining your educational institutions.

The other 380,000 anglophones are scattered around the vast territory of Quebec. Those communities face much greater challenges and the challenges are very similar. They're challenges that are faced by francophone minorities in western Canada.

It's an aging population. It's a population that is particular, in that the anglophone seniors in Quebec are people who made their living when it was not as necessary to speak French as it is now. They now find themselves needing to deal with social services, the hospitals, and the state, and they often don't have the language skills to be able to do that. So there's a particular kind of vulnerability that seniors in Quebec have, which is one of the reasons why we produced a document that pulled together all the federal services available for anglophone seniors in Quebec.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser. Thank you, Madam Crockatt. [Translation]

We will now take a five-minute break.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1205)

The Chair: We are continuing the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Ms. Turmel, you have the floor.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fraser, thank you for your presentation.

I would like to begin by speaking to your comments on cuts in transfers to the departments for training. Those cuts were a disaster. That is the point to be made because it happened at the same time as cuts to departmental budgets. That's what happens when training budgets are cut, be it for language training or any other training. That was, in all respects, a monumental mistake.

I would like to speak about third-party services. With respect to the question that was asked on surveys, we know that there was another problem in relation to cuts to Statistics Canada and to the fact that official statistics are no longer collected to determine the situation across Canada, whether it has to do with language training or not.

There were also other problems related to the services provided by third parties. In fact, third parties are currently not necessarily subject to all the policies. Departments automatically say it isn't their problem, but someone else's. That also happens in other cases, whether it involves harassment or something else.

You made some recommendations in 2009-2010. We are seeing that the improvement you'd hoped for hasn't happened. Could you expand on that?

What recommendation could be made or what action could be taken to ensure that third parties meet their linguistic obligations?

• (1210)

Mr. Graham Fraser: The federal departments and institutions that are responsible need to be more vigilant. For example, the port authorities or rental agencies in airports have certain responsibilities. For the airport authorities to be able to apply the policy, they must receive a very clear message from Treasury Board.

Treasury Board has often been slow, particularly in sending a message to airport authorities when the threshold of one million passengers annually has been exceeded. They then have language obligations. It is more difficult when a third party is accountable to an institution that has some amount of autonomy from a department—as is the case for the airport authority, which has an important connection with Transport Canada, but remains independent. However, there needs to a commitment.

Service at the Macdonald-Cartier International Airport in Ottawa has greatly improved after some intervention, which I mentioned. For example, restaurants post their menus in both official languages. You can even find books in French there. Television screens alternate between French and English. So institutions that have a responsibility toward a third party need to make an extra effort.

Some airports say that they are doing renovations and that it will have to wait until the renovations are done. However, others have difficulty acknowledging their responsibilities or making announcements to passengers. We would have hoped that there would have been an information campaign for passengers on the language rights of travellers, but the airports refused our announcements. So we had to use the Internet to inform travellers of their language rights.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Don't you think that fines or penalties should be imposed on third parties that don't meet their language requirements or who are found over and over again to be in breach of their obligations? I don't necessarily think that it should be the Office of the Commissioner that imposes fines or penalties, but rather the department would include in the contract that, unless the third party meets the obligations set out in the contract, fines will be imposed or the contract will be terminated.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I know that the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, CATSA, introduced in its contracts evaluation measures for the use of both official languages by security companies that do airline passenger security screening. CATSA made it clear to the company that this evaluation will be used in the decision about whether to renew the contract. However, I don't know if the contract sets out penalties. In third-party leases or contracts, it is important to include a language clause and a process for evaluating whether that obligation is met.

• (1215)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Norlock, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you I thank the witnesses for attending today.

I had a couple of questions written down, but I feel I must ask the question that's first on my mind as a result of some of the questions you received regarding Radio-Canada and the CBC.

Mr. Fraser, you are aware that the president of the CBC said that one of the reasons there were employee job losses was declining revenues, specifically because of a reduction in viewership related to such things as losing the contract for *Hockey Night in Canada*. Having some knowledge, if we're talking about newspapers or anything in the media, that there are huge losses on newspapers because of changes of ownership and reduction in readership, we know that when there's a reduction in viewership, advertisers are less likely to pay as much for their minute on television or to decide whether to advertise.

Does the language commissioner take into account the economic realities of a crown corporation that has a substantial number of taxpayer dollars going to it, but also an obligation to raise revenues commercially.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Of some twenty-odd public broadcasters in the western world, Canada is 17th in terms of its funding for public broadcasters. I think the key question is, do we consider CBC/Radio-Canada to be a public service, or do we consider that it has to play by the rules of the private market?

CBC was created as a public service and created to serve Canadians as citizens rather than as consumers. You've introduced a consumer and a market logic concerning how a public service should operate.

My conception of public broadcasting is that this is a public asset that should be considered as such, that it is now a public asset that is in deep financial problems because of a loss of what was a revenue source, and that the government refuses to acknowledge that this is damaging a public asset.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you. Using that logic, you would therefore say that it doesn't matter whether there are one million viewers or 100,000 viewers; you must continue to have the same revenue stream from the taxpayer for that service.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I think there is a concern, but in the same way that the nature of democracy and the legitimacy of public representatives are not affected by turnout, whether you were elected in a by-election in which there was a very small turnout or whether you were elected with an overwhelming turnout, there is a public legitimacy of public assets. If you view Canadians as citizens rather than consumers and public broadcasting as being a public asset, that is an entirely different frame for evaluating the importance of CBC/Radio-Canada.

• (1220)

Mr. Rick Norlock: So reducing that rhetoric to the simplest terms, you would say, yes, it really doesn't matter. Or would you agree with me that perhaps various governments, whether they be Liberal or Conservative, over the years have demanded to a certain extent that some of the revenue should be gleaned through the commercial sector? That's not something new to this government; it has happened in other governments of a different political stripe.

Would you not agree that, because of the historical nature of funding for CBC, governments should always.... I don't think anyone is saying that there should be no government contribution towards CBC, but it needs to be balanced with regard to viewership, and we need to continue to maintain that service. But it doesn't make much sense to continue to treat CBC as a sacred cow vis-à-vis reductions in the numbers of other departments within the federal government. Every single political party in the last election promised to balance the budget by about the same date, so is there not a responsibility for government to live up to their promise, to treat all services that they provide, whether they be CBC, the military, or delivery of service in other ways, and look for ways in which to balance the budget?

Because in the end a healthy economic climate would therefore very well go towards making sure that we have sufficient funds to ensure that bilingualism, over which you are the overseer, and to continue to provide those services. An impoverished country cannot do that, would you not agree?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chairman, my responsibility in particular is the vitality and the needs of minority language communities, whether they be anglophones in the Îles de la Madeleine, Trois-Rivières, or scattered around Quebec, or franco-phone minorities in western Canada. One of the extraordinary achievements of CBC and Radio-Canada is not only in terms of the official language communities, but also broadcasting in the Arctic in a variety of aboriginal languages. This is not to use a market rationale for how the vitality of those communities is sustained by broadcasting to those communities, whether it's the francophones in Saskatchewan or the anglophones in Quebec.

If you start getting into the criteria of evaluating, it is similar to the use of statistics or percentages to decide whether a community has language rights or not. I think that approach undermines the vitality and the sustainability of minority language communities in which CBC and Radio-Canada both play critical roles.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank Mr. Norlock for beginning the discussion on CBC.

I agree with the hon. member when he says that the two other political parties who governed previously made cuts to CBC. If I remember correctly, the Liberal government made \$250 million in cuts to CBC. And the current Conservative government made \$115 million in cuts to CBC's budget.

All these cuts can do nothing but affect CBC's services in official language minority communities. When CBC is working to get money from private-sector sponsors, it has to do so based on audience ratings. However, the programs that will be broadcast will come from Montreal rather than Moncton, Caraquet or Shippagan.

That's one of the problems with our public broadcaster, which is a Crown corporation. In our democratic country, I think that we are moving away from CBC's mandate. Any good democracy anywhere in the world has public radio and television, which does not get funding from large companies supported by certain governments.

The federal government is not ashamed of giving large companies tax cuts to the tune of \$40 billion. Nor is it ashamed of giving tax cuts to banks, when their profits in recent years have been over \$22 billion and their presidents have received bonuses of \$11 billion.

However, the government is cutting \$105 million from a public agency. It scares me to see what the government wants to do to our public broadcaster. I would like to hear what you have to say about that, because I believe that you are passionate about CBC. You even addressed the courts to have the power to investigate CBC.

My question is this: Are you going to go forward and force the government to invest in CBC so that the corporation is better able to serve all Canadians across the country, and not just the people in big cities like Toronto and Montreal?

• (1225)

Mr. Graham Fraser: Mr. Chair, we have before us the Federal Court ruling on CBC/Radio-Canada that confirms our shared jurisdiction with the CRTC. CBC/Radio-Canada will appeal this ruling.

There have also been recent cuts that are the other side of the coin. Can we expect CBC/Radio-Canada to maintain the same level of service after these drastic cuts and the loss of revenue that the hon. member mentioned? We are considering it. What is the best way to proceed? Personally, I am trying to use all the tools available to me.

We are already before the courts with CBC/Radio-Canada about one aspect of the act. We are considering the best way to move forward with this other aspect, which is fundamentally tied to CBC/Radio-Canada's ability to maintain equitable services to official language minority communities. We are still thinking about this, but I will take note of the member's comments.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Furthermore, the Supreme Court ruled today that Air Canada does not have to pay any fines or damages.

I tip my hat to Mr. Thibodeau, who flew Air Canada between Montreal and Ottawa. When he asked for a can of 7UP, he was told "I don't speak French". He was then arrested by police. This is the same man who was not served in his official language, which is in contravention of the act. He won his case in the Federal Court, but the Court of Appeal reversed the result of the first proceeding.

Aren't you concerned? Shouldn't the government amend the act to ensure that a violation results in compensation or a fine? Otherwise, it's just an "I'm sorry". This can't go on. Otherwise, we'll be sending the message that people can continue to violate the act as long as they apologize afterwards.

Mr. Graham Fraser: I'm reluctant to say too much about the implications of this ruling, which I haven't had time to read yet. It was made this morning at 10:00 a.m., so an hour before I appeared before the committee.

If I understand correctly, the court did recognize the quasi-constitutional nature of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Indeed, Mr. Chair, the court recognized the quasi-constitutional nature of the act, but it's enough to say that you are sorry and then continue in the same way.

Mr. Commissioner, it's the same as for your reports. You present reports like the one on co-operatives, you say there has been a breach of the act and that they are ready for later.

What do we need to do to solve the problem, go back and tell these institutions that they have to make the changes, and not just later on? I'm concerned about this.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: I would like the commissioner to answer, not the answer that Mr. Godin wants him to give.

• (1230)

The Chair: Mr. Williamson, thank you for your intervention, but the chair is ruling that is not a point of order. Mr. Godin can use his time as he wishes, whether for questions or commentary.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Fraser to briefly respond before I give the floor to Monsieur Gourde.

Mr. Fraser.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Graham Fraser: If I've understood correctly, the ruling is fairly specific about damages during international flights. It's the convergence or contradiction between the Official Languages Act and the Montreal Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules Relating to International Carriages By Air.

If I've understood correctly, the 120-page ruling is based on international jurisprudence. It was decided that, in the case of international flights, the court does not have the authority to award damages because of the Montreal convention, which is an international convention.

I do not want to invent a capacity for my office, the government or the court to legislate in a context of international jurisprudence. It would be an inappropriate improvisation on my part.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

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

Given its nature and the fact it receives complaints, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is called on to consider what could be done to improve the situation. Certainly, there are departments that have been very successful. Their way of doing things could be used as an example. Why do these departments succeed perhaps better than the others? How do they do that? Examples can often be motivating.

There were two teachers at the little school I attended. One always tended to criticize the students who had difficulty. I heard a discussion between the two teachers where one stated that you had to praise the students who did well and ask them to explain to the class why they had done well while others were having difficulty. The difference often lay in the work, involvement and all of that.

Might that inspire a new perspective and way of thinking? Perhaps you could give examples of successes in your reports. For example, you could mention that these departments obtained better results than the others for this or that reason.

Mr. Graham Fraser: We have dedicated almost an entire annual report on success stories. In this annual report, we have presented performance report cards for seven institutions, and identified Statistics Canada and VIA Rail as examples of exemplary institutions. I think that the success of these two institutions can be attributed to the leadership, planning and a long-term commitment to that institution. At Statistics Canada, Ivan Fellegi, who has been the chief statistician for many years, has always been deeply

committed to official bilingualism within his institution, and his legacy continues with Statistics Canada's exemplary behaviour.

The same is true for VIA Rail. At the very beginning of my mandate, after the Official Languages Act was amended, the CEO of VIA Rail realized that, under Part VII of the act, there would now be an obligation of contributing to the vitality of official language minority communities. He looked at VIA Rail's role and found that no official language minority community was receiving any particular treatment from VIA Rail. He then contacted the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne to let them know that he had this new responsibility, but that he had no specific clientele in an official language minority community and that he would like the Fédération's opinion on what he could do to meet this obligation. The FCFA suggested that VIA Rail sponsor its Canadian francophonie summit.

So there is an example of the CEO of a company who took the initiative to approach the community to discuss his new responsibilities. We dedicated almost an entire annual report to recognizing the success of institutions like the National Arts Centre, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and others. In all these cases, the same factors emerged: commitment, leadership and planning that was apparent in staff training, in the way the organization functions where both official languages become a reflex. It isn't even considered anymore; they are just used. We have seen this in one success after another.

As I sometimes tell public servants, failures are obvious and success stories are invisible. You can work very hard at achieving exemplary behaviour without anyone noticing because it becomes natural. However, it's the failures that we notice and that get pointed out.

• (1235)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Commissioner, what you just said is true. In fact, out of 100 cases, if there is a single failure, the 99 successes are forgotten.

A lot of effort is made, but often that effort is not rewarded. We only hear about failures in the media, and that's unfortunate. The entire population and all the institutions make an effort to promote bilingualism, but we never hear about the success stories.

Over time, when people never hear about the successes resulting from the efforts made, they make less of an effort. That is something worth thinking about.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Every time our assessment of an institution is positive, when I meet someone from that institution, they tell me that it was greatly appreciated. For example, I met someone from VIA Rail who told me just how much our evaluation of their performance was appreciated.

As for the media. I was a reporter long enough to know that bad news often has a greater impact than good news. The official languages issue is no exception. That is human nature, and that is the nature of the media.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Nicholls.

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

Commissioner, you note in your report cards that outside of the national capital region, English-speaking Quebecers are still not fairly represented within the federal institutions' workforce.

What explains this persistent problem, and in light of this review, will you intervene with the institutions that received Ds or Es in your report card?

Mr. Graham Fraser: We always do follow-ups on the evaluations that we do, and it's one of those constant themes, which I am not the first Commissioner of Official Languages to observe. I don't have a full explanation as to why there's an under-representation of anglophones in federal institutions. It's partly a reflection of the.... No, I won't speculate.

I know that some federal institutions have told me that they have worked at it and found it hard to attract people, to which I ask whether they have done job fairs at McGill, at Concordia, and at Bishop's universities, to try to hire people.

There has been a greater effort on the part of a number of federal institutions to do that, but I can't speculate. I don't have an explanation.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: In your annual report last year, you recommended several measures to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages and to the President of Treasury Board to better manage the roadmap.

Have Treasury Board and Canadian Heritage responded to that recommendation?

Have they committed to implementing it?

• (1240)

Mr. Graham Fraser: I did discuss this recommendation several times, fairly intensely, with the minister last year. I would say that we are continuing to have productive discussions with senior officials from Canadian Heritage.

I recently put the question to the people in the office who follow the roadmap closely. There were two complaints, I believe, but they were closed because between the filing of the the complaint and the start of the investigation, the matter was resolved, which put an end to the delay.

There was another case of a five-year program that expired. We heard about some concerns, and we share them with Canadian Heritage, but there are some snags here and there. Since this is a horizontal exercise involving 15 institutions and 30 initiatives, we are following this closely. As for complaints, we cannot launch an investigation based on rumours. An official complaint must be made before we investigate. The complaints that we have received have been abandoned because the problem at the root of the complaint was resolved.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I have one last quick question.

When will we have access to your follow-up report on the recommendation made in last year's annual report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It might be in the annual report.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Do you mean next year's annual report?

Mr. Graham Fraser: I hope so.

I would like to mention that the timeline is going to be a little different next year. My team and I realized that since the election is scheduled for next fall, we will have to change our production schedule and appear before the committee with an annual report in the spring. I don't know if that will give us enough time to do the necessary follow-up. In general, we have a two-year timeline for recommendations. With a shortened schedule, I can't guarantee it, but we will certainly follow-up as closely as possible.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Williamson, you have the floor.

[English]

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

Following up on what Monsieur Gourde was saying, could you talk a little bit about some of the departments where you haven't seen great success, or good success, or solid success, from the federal government with respect to improvements over the years?

Mr. Graham Fraser: One example that really confirmed to me the importance of executive leadership was when I first became commissioner. The evaluation that had been done of the Department of Public Works gave it a rating of "poor". The minister at the time was shocked at this, and there was a change of senior executives in the department. The next evaluation that was done was "fair", and then the evaluation that followed that was "good". It was because, first, the minister and then successive deputies since have taken the issue seriously and taken the measures necessary to ensure that they lived up to their responsibilities.

The other example that always impresses me is the National Arts Centre. When you go to the National Arts Centre wicket to buy a ticket, you are greeted with active offer, with somebody saying hello, bonjour. When you go to a concert, the person who takes your ticket greets you in both languages. Usually, even the parking attendant downstairs will greet you in both languages.

What I think this is testament to is that the use of both languages became understood as a value of the organization and something that people were expected to do. It shaped their hiring process and their training process. In the same way that certain private sector organizations say, "This is how we greet customers", this became very much a part of the culture of the organization. When the use of both languages is part of the culture of the organization, it becomes ingrained.

• (1245)

Mr. John Williamson: It really is a question, then, of leadership and prioritizing—

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's right.

Mr. John Williamson: —the bilingual focus, or the bilingual nature of it.

Mr. Graham Fraser: That's right. And once that's done, I suspect that it simply becomes second nature, that they probably don't even talk about it any more. It's just the way they do business.

Mr. John Williamson: Yes, I think you're absolutely right about that.

Changing gears, I'm curious to know, in your day-to-day operations or your operations in general, how much overlap, coordination, or just discussion do you have with your counterparts in New Brunswick and in Ontario?

Mr. Graham Fraser: It's not systematic. We have worked together on a number of initiatives. We have signed protocol agreements separately with Ontario and New Brunswick, so if somebody files a complaint with one of us that should go to the other, it gets transferred automatically. We don't say to a complainant, you're wrong, that's in provincial jurisdiction. We have taken on the responsibility of ensuring that any complaint goes to the right office.

We had ongoing discussions among the three of us about the study we're doing on immigration. Katherine d'Entremont, my colleague in New Brunswick, felt that the nature of New Brunswick's situation was sufficiently different from the communities outside Quebec and the rest of the country that she was in an urgent situation. New Brunswick has 32% francophones, 12% francophone immigration, and she is arguing quite vigorously with the provincial government that they've got to go from 12% to as close to 30% as they can. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has announced that they are moving the target from 4% to 5% for immigration. That's not a useful conversation for New Brunswick to embark on. It was not from a lack of desire to collaborate that she decided not to be engaged in this particular study. I saw her last week when I was at this judges training program for provincially appointed judges in Caraquet and Shippagan, and we made a joint presentation on our roles to the judges in this training program.

I similarly have periodic conversations with François Boileau in Ontario. It's not as though we have monthly meetings or anything of that kind, but when issues come up if I'm visiting the province I try to make sure that I'm in touch with them. If they're coming to Ottawa they get in touch with me, our staffs are in contact.

• (1250)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. St-Denis, you have the floor.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: I would like to address the issue of accountability, which we haven't yet discussed.

Your report indicates that Citizenship and Immigration Canada asked British Columbia to be more specific in their report.

Let's talk about the notion of precision in accountability. Shouldn't we insist that all departments be clearer and that they verify the quality of services provided in each region, rather than just having a general report that makes no distinction between the regions? Is work being done on this?

Mr. Graham Fraser: The issue of accountability is a tricky one for us because we don't have jurisdiction to investigate or make observations about service delivery or use of funds by the provinces.

At an MP's request, we audited an accountability process. All we were able to do was look at the mechanisms in the federal departments. That doesn't necessarily mean that the system reveals everything that is going on, since the federal-provincial borders are sometimes a bit impenetrable.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Do you have the jurisdiction to audit those mechanisms?

Mr. Graham Fraser: No. We audited an accountability system in one department, but it is not always easy to see what is going on on the ground, in a school board for example.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: That would be more effective.

Mr. Graham Fraser: Funds are transferred to the provinces, and they report to the department in question, but there are limits to what we can learn or draw from these reports.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: In the promotional campaigns you do, of any kind, would it not be interesting to include the socio-historical realities of relations between francophones and anglophones? In an ad, you could describe how francophones and anglophones experience bilingualism. We never talk about that. We never talk about what is going on between the two communities. There is a whole lot there.

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

In our preparations for the celebrations in 2017, I hope that, as an organization or with others, we will be able to create a document telling the story of these contacts between anglophones and francophones, without ignoring or trying to hide the negative aspects of the story. The negative story is a fairly easy one to tell, but we tend to forget that there are also examples of mutual accommodation and cooperation.

An example that comes to mind is Lord Elgin, who followed Lord Durham, and who established French as an official language in the legislature. There is also La Fontaine and Baldwin, the language policy supported by John A. Macdonald, the Bonne Entente movement, which contested regulation 17. There is a positive story that is often forgotten.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. St-Denis.

We will stop there. I would like to thank all of you for your questions, answers and comments.

After discussion with the committee members, we have decided to meet for two hours to discuss the report and future committee business.

The committee will not be sitting next week because three members will be travelling on parliamentary business.

• (1255)

[English]

Without further ado, this meeting stands adjourned.

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