



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 002 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, February 22, 2016

—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

Monday, February 22, 2016

• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the second meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This is actually our first meeting, apart from the one where we elected the chair.

The agenda is simple. We are only dealing with committee business. At the last meeting, we said we would try to establish a timetable and priorities. We will try to be succinct.

I asked you to think about the topics we should discuss. I will first hear your topic suggestions for future committee business. Afterwards, we will try to set priorities, and we will be able to establish a series of work we will have to undertake on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. I would like us to discuss work to carry out by the summer adjournment and to set a complete timetable.

Would anyone like to start?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): I would like to start, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Paul.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I saw that there are already motions on the table and that we could begin discussing concrete topics immediately. A number of those motions are laudable, and we should discuss them.

However, I would like to suggest that we start at the beginning, since the committee has several new members. I would like to hear from people on the ground, such as the representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. I would also like to hear from the Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage, as well as from Graham Fraser. I know that my colleague had also proposed a motion on that issue.

All those people who work on the ground could elaborate further on issues they are facing. When the time comes for us to set the order of business for next year or beyond, we will be better equipped thanks to those individuals' testimony. That will be better than establishing a list now and confining ourselves to it, when there may be other issues we are not familiar with and could obtain insight on. We could start with more general topics, over the next few meetings. I wouldn't want that to take up a whole month. From there, we could discuss more specific issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

Who else would like to take the floor?

Go ahead, Bernard.

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

I would like to begin by thanking Chloé Forget, the committee analyst working at the Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs Section, for preparing the document that gives an overview of the roadmap for official languages that has been in effect for several years.

I realized something important when I read that document. Across the country, a tremendous amount of money is being spent on official languages, on various actions that are probably all just as important. I am not denying their importance. However, the report shows in a fairly concrete manner that it is difficult to establish a direct connection between the money spent and the results.

It is important to try to quickly determine how we could implement an effective system. I understand that the lack of a horizontal evaluation system prevents us from quantifying the results.

I agree with Mr. Lefebvre. We could obtain those kinds of results or learn more by hearing from people working on the ground. They could provide concrete testimony on the money spent in their area of activity and tell us about the concrete results those investments have yielded.

When \$1.124 billion is spent, it is important to know where the money is spent and what is being done with it.

Mr. Lefebvre is right to point out that the committee has several new members. It is important for us to know about that. We have to see what actions could be undertaken by the committee to ensure that we have appropriate financial reporting.

• (1540)

The Chair: Would you be in favour of having a department representative, for example, coming to shed light on those expenditures? I have taken note of the fact that we will look at the roadmap.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Certainly. Once again, I want to thank Ms. Forget for her document. However, I would like officials to come explain exactly what has been done, what justifies the decisions that have been made and what can be done to improve the monitoring of the money spent. I think that would be important.

The Chair: Thank you, Bernard.

Would anyone else like to speak?

Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have heard some good suggestions, be it in terms of motions or other things. There are some very interesting topics. I have noted several that may certainly interest me, but may also interest our team and the entire committee. In particular, services in French and access to justice are always very important issues. I am very interested in the census and the questions it will contain. Anything involving immigrants in minority francophone communities is also extremely important, and the list goes on. The Official Languages Act has not been reviewed in more than 30 years. There are so many topics to discuss.

Moreover, as my colleagues Mr. Lefebvre and Mr. Généreux said, I believe we should lay the groundwork. To do so, we have to obtain information from the department. We should first invite Hubert Lussier, who is the Assistant Deputy Minister at the Department of Canadian Heritage. He could invite his team to accompany him.

I would also like to hear comments from people on the ground, such as the representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, which has been dealing with all those issues for a number of years. They could also bring us up to speed on their outlook. That would be very important.

Finally, we should invite the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, to present his report, his update and the issues covered there.

I would also like to have indicators that will help us determine where we should focus our efforts to improve the situation.

We are a team. I am convinced this committee's objective is to make sure that the issues are advancing. This is an opportunity to begin the process.

Mr. Chair, if the committee will allow it, I could present a motion to invite the three groups to meet with us, so that we can have a solid understanding of the entire situation. Afterwards, the committee could decide what other witnesses could help us and provide us with information to enable us to make the best decisions.

I am ready to present the motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before I can receive your motion, François has asked to take the floor.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the colleagues who have spoken before me. Their comments were very relevant and hit the nail on the head.

I agree with Mr. Samson and I support his idea for a motion.

I think we should also invite representatives of anglophone minority associations from Quebec. We want to invite the representatives of the FCFA, which is an association of francophones from around the country. Therefore, we should also invite the representatives of an association of Quebec anglophone minorities.

The idea of hearing from Graham Fraser and department representatives during the first meetings is very worthwhile.

Although I support Mr. Samson's idea, I would also like to bring up a short-term priority that is very important for me. A number of people have already mentioned it. This issue is currently in the media, and it is very worrisome. Two members of this committee have prepared motions on the issue—Mauril Bélanger and myself. It has to do with the Translation Bureau. I am glad Mr. Fergus is here, especially since the Translation Bureau is in his riding.

So I support Mr. Samson's motion. Afterwards, once we have debated his motion and it's my turn, I will move mine.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to come back to Mr. Samson's proposal. As far as I understand, we could hear from the representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada on Wednesday, at our next meeting, as they are here, in the city.

If this is convenient for the committee members, we could meet with them on Wednesday. They are already here, in Ottawa. We could hear from them for an hour and spend another hour with someone from the department. You mentioned a deputy minister.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I was talking about Assistant Deputy Minister Hubert Lussier.

The Chair: He could go over...

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: He could talk to us about the roadmap and the funding.

The Chair: Do the committee members agree?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I agree.

Next week, we could welcome two other individuals we have mentioned—the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, and a representative of the anglophone association. I don't know the association's name.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What is its acronym?

Mr. François Choquette: I will do the necessary research and let you know what the association's name is. I wouldn't want to rename it.

The Chair: I think the association in my region, the Eastern Townships, is called Townshippers.

Mr. François Choquette: There is an association that brings together all anglophones from Quebec.

The Chair: It brings together all Quebec anglophones?

Mr. François Choquette: Exactly.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I think the name contains the words Community Network.

The Chair: Are you talking about the Quebec Community Network?

Mr. Greg Fergus: It's something like Quebec General Community Network.

The Chair: We could hear from them.

You also talked about inviting the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser. Were you thinking of next Monday?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

The Chair: So next Monday in the afternoon.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The representatives of the association that brings together Quebec anglophones could appear afterwards.

The Chair: Would that be the second group to appear on Monday?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

The Chair: So we need to get in touch with those individuals. We could hear from them on Monday.

Will that make it possible for us to go over the entire issue?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, we may then realize that we want to meet with other stakeholders and discuss with them. Otherwise, that would be the end, and we could then come back and debate all this, establish our priorities and begin the committee's work.

The Chair: Go ahead, François.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I totally agree that this will give us an overview of the situation. However, and the same is probably true for several of you, I have already begun to meet with several groups and stakeholders in order to get a good grasp of the priorities. For that reason, I am tabling the following motion. You have the text before you; it is the first motion in the document. It reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite Treasury Board President Scott Brison to appear before a televised meeting of the committee, no later than March 23, to clarify the government's intentions regarding the Translation Bureau and the introduction of an automated translation tool on the workstations of all public servants.

As you know, Mr. Chair, there have been staff cuts of approximately 50 % over the last 10 years, and others are being announced for the coming years. Like Mauril Bélanger, I am concerned by the mandate and future of the Translation Bureau. I am worried too about our capacity to maintain a quality, effective and professional Translation Bureau. And may I add that it has an international reputation at this time. That is why I am tabling this motion. However, I am quite open to the amendments some members, such as Mr. Fergus, would like to make.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, François.

I think you are both heading in the same direction.

I am going to give the floor to Greg Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, François.

Today I represent Mauril Bélanger, who was unable to attend the meeting.

As you will already have read, Mauril submitted a draft motion. If I may amend it slightly, we could consider not only the translation tool, but also the Translation Bureau staff. We could do that in a more in-depth study. There could be three or five meetings on this, for instance. In that way, rather than focusing on one person, we could gain a better understanding of the situation as a whole.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I'm going to move a slightly different version of the motion:

That the committee invite Ms. Donna Achimov, Chief Executive Officer of the Translation Bureau, to appear as part of a study on the mandate and the delivery of services of this public institution;

That three (3) to five (5) meetings of the committee be devoted to that study, and that it also consider the new automated translation tool;

That the date for the start of that study be selected by the committee on a subsequent date, at a time deemed appropriate.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, had a motion not already been submitted?

The Chair: Let's clarify this a bit.

Mr. Samson already submitted a motion on Wednesday's and Monday's meetings.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. However, we did not vote on that motion. We should do that first, if possible.

The Chair: Fine.

We are going to vote on Mr. Samson's motion, regarding our next two meetings.

Is everyone in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We are now going to deal with Mr. Choquette and Mr. Fergus' combined motion.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: I withdraw my motion and will support Mr. Fergus' motion.

Mr. Greg Fergus: We should say that it is Mr. Bélanger's motion, in fact.

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, but it was moved by Mr. Fergus.

I support the motion.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

The Chair: Fine.

So we have dealt with the Wednesday of this week and the Monday of the week of our return. Now we are talking about the Wednesday of that week. Correct?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Yes, it is up to the committee to choose the most appropriate dates, but we would like to proceed with this study as soon as possible.

The Chair: Fine.

So, we are agreed...

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I would like to discuss this motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Darrell.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have no objection to the motion, and I am willing to support it.

However, I would like to point out that it is risky to immediately propose topics or motions when we have not had the opportunity of hearing the information people in the field are going to provide to us during the next two meetings.

I do not object to this motion, but if we intend to adopt several, I am not going to be comfortable. As I mentioned, there are still six important topics I would like us to discuss. Linda may have 15 or 16, I have no idea. I would not like to see us jump from one topic to another this early in the process.

I really liked that my colleague Mr. Fergus' motion asked the committee to choose the best dates for this discussion. It could well be the following Wednesday, since there will be two or three meetings. That could be interesting.

I am afraid that we will start to toss out topics without having developed a work plan for the next three or four years.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Darrell.

I now yield the floor to François.

Mr. François Choquette: I understand Mr. Samson's concerns. However, as I said, this study has been proposed by two members of the committee from two different parties. This shows that there is an interest in it, all the more so since the automated translation tool will be introduced April 1. Consequently, it is urgent that we turn our attention to the Translation Bureau. In addition, there will be other staff cuts in the months to come. This also points to the urgency of acting on this.

The government's mandate is to ensure that we offer a space where people can work in both official languages and communicate in their official language in a proper way, in a way that is correct and respectful toward francophones and anglophones. At this time, there seem to be some concerns. Because of this tool and other issues at the Translation Bureau, respect for that right could be beginning to deteriorate. If someone uses the automated translation tool to communicate, even for a brief text, the communication would not be done in correct and respectful French.

That is why I believe we should begin this study. Mr. Fergus has proposed that we hold a first meeting on this topic, and then three other ones. That would allow us to conduct a relatively brief study, without preventing us from subsequently studying other topics which Mr. Samson, Mr. Lefebvre, Ms. Lapointe or the other members of the committee may propose.

I want to repeat that I support Mr. Fergus' motion. I would like us to proceed with this study immediately after the one mentioned in Mr. Samson's motion, which I was very happy to support.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now yield the floor to Bernard Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Everyone seems to have a lot of topics to suggest. To follow up on what Mr. Samson was saying, I would add that we have to lay some groundwork, so that we can have a good understanding of the issues we will be dealing with.

Also, I think that the government is going to want to specify, through its minister, what directions it intends to give to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, or, in fact, what work it might like it to do. I think it would be appropriate to consider that and to move a motion inviting the minister to appear.

I understand the feeling of urgency that has been expressed about the Translation Bureau. This is an important issue. Given this implementation date of April 1, certain steps could be taken. However, the government could change this orientation subsequently. As the expression has it, "we should not put the cart before the horse".

It is important that the minister come and meet the committee quickly. If we begin various studies now, we run the risk of not being able to meet the minister before June. You are all going to realize that time flies by very quickly in Ottawa. In addition, committees do not necessarily sit every week. In the month of March, we will not be meeting often.

It has already been mentioned, but I move that we meet with the minister, Ms. Mélanie Joly, as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Could you hold off on your motion for the moment? The committee is already considering a motion. If I'm not mistaken, we were dealing with Greg Fergus' motion.

Yes, Mr. Vandal?

• (1600)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): I would like to clarify one point. It is about Mr. Bélanger's motion. Mr. Choquette supports that motion, but has he withdrawn his?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That is clear, thank you.

The Chair: Greg added the notion of dates to the motion. I think that the steering committee should choose the dates for this. We should, however, remember in our interventions the fact that April 1 is an important date.

If someone wants to move the motion, I am ready. We can ask the steering committee to choose the dates.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I move that we vote on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: If some of you would like to discuss topics they consider priorities, we can make a note of them, and we could revise that list in light of what the Commissioner of Official Languages, the deputy minister and the other stakeholders will have to say. We can revise that list or choose among the topics that will be proposed.

I heard recommendations concerning justice. As the former president of the Bar of Quebec, I am very responsive to that issue.

Yes, Mr. Choquette?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I want to say that I am interested in the issue of access to justice in both official languages. That is very interesting. We will soon have the opportunity to meet with the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Graham Fraser. He produced a report in 2013 on access to justice in both official languages. May I suggest that everyone read it, it is most interesting. The report concerns access to justice in the superior courts of Canada, in all of the provinces and territories.

The report follows up on recommendations that, to my knowledge, were not implemented subsequently. This could be an interesting topic of study. I understand that we are first of all going to meet with these stakeholders to prioritize our topics. However, we could examine the status of these recommendations on access to justice.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I would like to add something else regarding the Commissioner of Official Languages. Mr. Fraser tabled recommendations with regard to his successor. As you know, he is coming to the end of his mandate and someone is going to have to take over. Of course, we do not know how the next Commissioner of Official Languages will be chosen. The commissioner tabled some recommendations himself. Last I heard, he had not received any response to those.

Mr. Fraser is the first Commissioner of Official Languages to have obtained this position following the posting of a vacancy. He was chosen among the various candidates. When Mr. Fraser comes before the committee, perhaps we could ask him about those recommendations. Perhaps they could be used in the selection of the next Commissioner of Official Languages.

The Chair: That is an excellent suggestion.

When Mr. Fraser is here, we can discuss it and see how he sees things.

Thank you.

Darrell, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I believe we are discussing interesting potential topics of study for our work.

The Chair: That is correct. We are listing them all together.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In that case I would like to propose certain topics.

First, I would like to propose a study on collecting data on minority official language communities through the federal census. The committee could study that matter and produce a report recommending changes to be made to the census form so as to fill in some gaps. This is an extremely important topic. The data we will collect will tell us what the situation is on the ground, what the problems are, and what possible solutions we might consider.

My colleague Mr. Choquette mentioned access to justice in French. That is a topic that interests me as well. And so I want to join him in supporting that particular topic.

My third suggestion would be a study on francophone immigration outside Quebec. That is an extremely important topic. We really have to make sure that we have a strategy in place for locations such as Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario. There are also the anglophones in Quebec, but what is of interest to me today is studying francophone immigrants outside Quebec.

My fourth suggestion concerns a study on the use of both official languages within the federal public service. This is related to the point Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Choquette just raised. I would propose that we study the possibility of increasing the bilingualism bonus, which has not been increased in decades. That might be one possible strategy we could examine.

In fifth place, may I propose a study on the Official Languages Act. As I mentioned earlier, it has not been reviewed in over thirty years. It is like any other project or any other initiative; at a certain point, we have to review everything, discard certain things, adopt certain orientations, adapt and keep an eye on the future. That is certainly an important element.

I would conclude by proposing the adoption of a French version of unilingual constitutional texts. We might even go and see what the situation is on the ground and let those observations inform our work.

Those are the six topics I propose, Mr. Chair. Two of them had already been raised by my colleagues on the committee.

We won't be lacking for work. We are going to have to make certain choices and I am sure you will be able to guide us in that task, Mr. Chair.

• (1605)

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

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Over the past few months, there has been a massive arrival of Syrian immigrants in Canada. I think I can use the word "massive", given their large numbers: 25,000. There were also other immigrants, of course. Those who are coming to our country currently are not all Syrian, but the majority of them are. I think it would be important to focus on the issue of immigration and official languages, in that context. From what I understand, many of them are neither francophone nor anglophone. According to the location they will settle in, in whatever province, they will be able to join the new cohorts of immigrants in official language minority communities. I think that we could study this matter. I don't mean that we need to do this in the short term, necessarily. We are proposing topics in bulk, if I understood correctly.

There is also the matter of immersion schools everywhere in Canada, that are overcrowded and have trouble integrating new students. These schools face all sorts of constraints. A lot of Canadians want to learn French, particularly in the rest of Canada, outside Quebec. Many parents want to register their children in immersion schools, but there are no available spaces. That is something we could examine, unless it has already been done. It is possible that that topic has already been examined. As I said, I have not sat on this committee for four years.

I know I am insisting a bit, but I'd like to raise the matter of the roadmap and its funding again. I hope we will learn a bit more about all of these topics next week, perhaps at the Wednesday meeting—I don't know what order we will follow. Perhaps the deputy minister will be able to provide some guidance on that.

Mr. Chair, you mentioned last week that the committee might travel to different places in the country to meet with people who are in official language minority communities. I am not against the idea of travelling, on the contrary. I think it would be beneficial for us to discover more of Canada and go and meet people in their milieux so as to gain a better understanding of the issues they face. Since I have been here before, I know that time passes very quickly in Ottawa. Consequently, it would be important to determine the schedule for these potential trips so as to coordinate them with all of our parliamentary activities and our obligations in our ridings.

• (1610)

The Chair: Those who would like us to study certain issues in a given region should mention it to me as quickly as possible so that we can draw up a list of priorities in committee, as well as the budgets.

Paul, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We are throwing out various topics pell mell. All of the topics raised are important, but I would like to go back to the point I made earlier, which was that I would first like to hear the stakeholders. The list is very long. We could combine our suggestions and produce a very long list.

As a francophone lawyer in a minority environment, I think that access to justice in French in Ontario is already an issue. There are not enough bilingual judges. In short, access to justice in French outside of Quebec is another topic we could study.

I would like to mention something as an aside, Mr. Chair. Today the Government of Ontario offered a formal apology to Franco-Ontarians for Regulation 17. I thought it important to mention this in the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I am happy to thank this government for having apologized for this decision taken in the 1910s and 1920s, as well as for its consequences on the francophones of Ontario, on my family, among others, in Northern Ontario. It was very difficult to obtain schooling in French. Today we are very fortunate, but there is still work to be done. I simply wanted to highlight the fact that the Government of Ontario had apologized to Franco-Ontarians today.

The Chair: Are you moving a motion, Paul?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I'm not sure that this can be expressed as a motion. I don't know how to formulate it.

The Chair: The intent is to congratulate the Government of Ontario.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Would it be possible for the committee to send a letter to the government thanking it?

The Chair: I think that if we adopt a motion of congratulations, we could issue a press release about it rather quickly.

I wonder if Ms. Forget could look into that.

Are we equipped to distribute such a message quickly?

Ms. Chloé Forget (Committee Researcher): I can check, but I can also draft a letter.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I think it would be appropriate to draft a motion to acknowledge the Ontario government's apology to Franco-Ontarians for the effects of Regulation 17 on Ontario francophones.

The Chair: That's good.

Could you write something up?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, we are going to work on it together.

The Chair: I am told that if everyone is in agreement, we can issue this as a press release.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Excellent.

Some hon. members: Fine.

The Chair: So, we are agreed.

Does that suit you, Paul?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, thank you very much.

The Chair: I'd like to raise another topic. I realize that if we consider our mandate in a somewhat broader way it could also be our role to promote a bilingual Canada. Let me explain.

In the past, I was the Secretary of State responsible for the Francophonie. At the time, I remember being struck by something. I realized that a lot of Americans speak French or define themselves as francophiles.

A few years ago I asked someone to do a study or prepare a report on the number of francophones or francophiles on the other side of the border, in the United States. I was told that there were almost 10 million francophones or francophiles in the United States. So there are more than in Canada. Often, these people feel isolated.

If we wanted at a certain point to play a somewhat broader role, we could extend this recognition of a bilingual Canada to the other side of the border. Perhaps it could help the francophone communities that are a bit lost over there. I am just mentioning this in passing.

The same is true at the UN. Canada is bilingual. We can only hope that our delegation at the UN uses both of Canada's official languages. I think that this would be well received by the new ambassador, who is of francophone extraction.

It may be important to promote the value of Canadian linguistic duality both here and elsewhere. That was simply an aside.

Bernard, you have the floor.

• (1615)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'd simply like to inject a note of humour. My mother would often say: "Do not bite off more than you can chew". Our mandate should not be too broad.

I don't disagree with you, but we have a lot of work to do here, in Canada, regarding official languages.

Of course we are ambassadors for Canada's two official languages. It is important to promote them at all times, every day. However, the committee has to make sure it works effectively. Inevitably, if we have too many irons in the fire, we run the risk of dissipating our energies.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

We have all expressed our thoughts, but we will see during the next meetings where we want to intervene and at what speed we should do that. This will help us to chart our course.

I would like to specify that things remain open; this is not a closed list. At a given point situations may arise that you had not thought about and that you would like to submit to the committee's attention. I like the fact that our committee can be open in that way.

François, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: I'd like to point out two things.

First of all, I found the exact name of the group that represents anglophones in Quebec: the Quebec Community Groups Network, or the QCGN. Mr. Fergus put us on the right track. We could invite the group to appear, of course.

Second, I was wondering whether the subcommittee on agenda and procedure was scheduled to meet anytime soon.

The Chair: I'll check with the clerk and let you know.

My preference would be for us to identify our key issues or future business, rather than have the subcommittee do it. It may be necessary for them to meet, however. I'll discuss it with the clerk and see whether, in the short term, the subcommittee should hold a meeting.

Go ahead, Darrell.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like to comment on Mr. Généreux's point. I simply cannot let the opportunity pass without saying something. He mentioned doing a study on the shortage of spots in schools offering immersion programs.

I was the superintendent of Nova Scotia's only Acadian and francophone school board for 11 years, as well as the national president of all French-language school boards outside Quebec. And I can certainly confirm that many francophone schools all around the country lack enough spots.

If we were to undertake such a study, we could examine French both as a first language and as a second language in immersion programs, hand in hand. Nova Scotia has a major shortage in that regard. Over the last 10 years, the student population in our school board rose by 22%. In the same region, the student population in all seven English-language school boards combined dropped by 15%. That's a difference of 37%. There is no question about the lack of spots in these schools in Acadian and francophone regions all over the country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Darrell.

Greg, you may go ahead.

•(1620)

Mr. Greg Fergus: When I was young, I had the opportunity to meet people from francophone communities outside Quebec. As an English speaker who grew up in Quebec, I found it quite something to meet French speakers outside my province.

Like you, I agree it would be important that, during its mandate and as required by the studies it undertakes, of course, the committee

visit francophone communities outside the country in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face. That would be wonderful. I think it would certainly give us a lot to talk about and enrich our work.

The Chair: Thank you, Greg.

If we do travel, we'll have a decision to make. Will we go during the periods when we are in our ridings or when the House is sitting?

If we go when the House is sitting, we'll have to make sure that the number of members is the same on both sides, for voting purposes.

We'll provide you with that information when the time comes.

Would anyone else like to say something?

Go ahead, Dan.

Mr. Dan Vandal: On Friday, I had the pleasure of meeting the president of the Université de Saint-Boniface. We had a lovely conversation. He was concerned about the wave of students who had graduated from immersion schools and were now heading to college or university, where the standards are not necessarily the same. The Université de Saint-Boniface often has to provide some students with extra help.

That's one university's experience, but it may be a national issue. That's something we could discuss with the appropriate stakeholders, in order to determine whether it's a nation-wide problem that we should examine.

I agree with Mr. Lefebvre about needing a good foundation of information. There are countless topics we could study, but what we'll be short on is time, I think.

The Chair: Thank you, Dan.

Would anyone else like to speak?

Go ahead, Linda.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd like to add something, if I may.

I agree with my colleague. Fundamentally, I am much more concerned about the issue of receiving services in French and English all over the country, as well throughout the public service. The whole translation tool issue is also very important, in my view. But we need to start by building a foundation before we can get into identifying what the challenges are. I get the sense that there will be a lot more to deal with than we'll be able to handle.

Those are my priorities, if you were wondering.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Anyone else?

Go ahead, Paul.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It's about how the motion is worded. Do we want to deal with that right now or work on it later?

The Chair: Are you referring to the Ontario motion?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes. Are we going to end with that? Okay, then. Here we go.

The Chair: I think the purpose of the motion was to commend the Government of Ontario.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I propose that the motion read as follows:

That the committee commend the Government of Ontario for apologizing to the Franco-Ontarian community regarding Regulation 17, which prohibited the instruction and use of French in Ontario schools, and that it recognize the harmful effects of the legislation on generations of Franco-Ontarians.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I'd like to comment quickly on what Ms. Lapointe just said about the foundation of our work. It's also important that we meet with the minister responsible for official languages. This is part of her portfolio. Ideally, she wouldn't appear in June, but much sooner. She shouldn't be too far down our list of priorities.

•(1625)

The Chair: I fully agree. I was thinking that we would lay out a plan, see what's what and where things stand, and then ask the minister what her plans are. That was more or less what I was

thinking in terms of next steps. I don't think that would put off our meeting with the minister for too long.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Should I propose a motion formally at our next meeting, or is that not necessary?

The Chair: I don't think it's necessary. We'll make adjustments as we go. We'll start by hearing from the representatives we decided to invite for the next two or three meetings.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Very well.

The Chair: My feeling is that, as things go along, the more pressing issues that we are looking to focus on will emerge. As per Greg and François's proposal, we do indeed need a deadline.

Of course, it's very important to know what the minister's agenda is. The committee members will certainly want that information.

On that note, the meeting is adjourned. We meet again Wednesday afternoon.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>