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## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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**Wednesday, April 20, 2016**



**Chair**

**The Honourable Denis Paradis**



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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the mandate of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and conducting a mid-term evaluation of the ongoing official languages roadmap.

I want to address our problem today. You can hear the bells. I therefore suggest that we hear from the minister, go vote, and then come back to our meeting. I require the unanimous consent of the committee members to proceed in this fashion.

Mr. Choquette.

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** I agree, Mr. Chair, but I simply want to know whether the minister's appearance will be televised, as planned.

**The Chair:** The meeting is televised.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Do I have unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, who will be responsible for keeping track of the time we have available?

**The Chair:** I'll ask the clerk to do so. I don't know exactly how long the bells are ringing for, but we'll check. We aren't very far from the House, so we can suspend the sitting for five minutes before the vote.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** It's five or 10 minutes. Okay.

**The Chair:** As soon as the minister is in the room, she'll give a presentation for about ten minutes. We can listen to her speech and then immediately suspend the meeting to go vote. Does that work?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Can someone tell us where the minister is?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** While we wait, I'd like to welcome my friends from Château Bromont. I invite anyone who may one day visit the beautiful riding of Brome—Missisquoi to visit Château Bromont. Just a little advertisement.

Ms. Lapointe agrees that it's a beautiful spot.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.):** Yes.

**The Chair:** Minister, welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We came to an agreement on the following procedure. We will hear your speech and then interrupt our work to go vote.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Okay.

**The Chair:** If you agree, Minister, after the vote, we can continue the meeting.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I agree, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Without further ado, Minister, you have the floor.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dear colleagues, it's a real pleasure to be here today.

I'd like to introduce my team. I'm accompanied by Hubert Lussier, the Assistant Deputy Minister for Citizenship, Heritage and the Regions; and Jean-Pierre Gauthier, the Director-General for Official Languages.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for your invitation. This is our first meeting, and I'd like to commend you, Mr. Chair, on your leadership and your work here.

This committee carries out tasks and studies of great importance, not only to our life as a democracy, but also to the lives of Canadians who contribute every day, in English and in French, to our society.

Some of you may know that last Monday, I appeared before the Senate Committee on Official Languages, and I concluded my presentation by emphasizing the importance of collaboration. This is, in fact, a major element in the mandate letters that the Prime Minister sent to all the ministers, and that are, as you know, accessible to all Canadians.

I am therefore very happy to establish a collaborative working relationship with you. At the beginning of my mandate, I had the opportunity to quickly give access to all of my briefing books. I hope that the committee members had the opportunity to take a look at them. They are available online, on the Heritage Canada website.

As Minister, I want to contribute to the development of both French and English in all provinces and territories. I can count on my parliamentary secretary, Randy Boissonnault, a proud franco-Albertan, to support me in this area.

Since I took on this role, I've had some very interesting conversations with francophones and Acadians from Nova Scotia, Yukon, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario during my travels. I had the opportunity to meet with them during my visits to Whitehorse, Vancouver, Halifax, Calgary, and Toronto. I discovered talented and passionate people who are committed to the vitality of their community. They inspired me quite a bit.

● (1540)

[English]

Today, I would like to explain how I intend to fulfill my responsibilities in regard to our official languages.

I will ensure that the English and French languages are promoted in the activities and programs within my department that are dedicated to linguistic duality and to the development of official language minority communities.

[Translation]

Now, let's talk about the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

In March, I presented to Canadians the Government of Canada's vision for the celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Naturally, this is a very important anniversary for our country. It will be a time to celebrate in our communities everything that makes our country rich and strong: our languages, our culture, our diversity, our openness, and our desire to build a bright future together.

We will be focusing these celebrations on four themes: youth, reconciliation with our aboriginal peoples, the environment, and, I wish to emphasize this, our diversity. The diversity that our Canadian society is known for, and which is based on, among other things, our two official languages.

My department is already ensuring that the celebrations will respect, and promote, our official languages. We want to see the contributions of official language minority communities presented in Canada 150 projects and celebrations.

We also want to see linguistic duality reflected in the activities related to the 150th anniversary, and I assure you that it will be. Therefore, our contribution agreements contain linguistic provisions that set out the requirements related to our official languages.

We will also send recipients of the Canada 150 Fund some useful information and a guide to holding a successful bilingual event. These documents have been produced by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages especially for promoters of Canada 150 projects. By sharing this information with them, we hope to equip them with appropriate skills, so that they will think of the two official languages when organizing and implementing their projects.

These projects include SESQUI, an interactive multimedia experience using digital technology, which will tour communities across the country. There is also Experiences Canada's "Canada 150 and Me" project, which will offer young Canadians inspiring cultural exchanges.

In 2017, the 150th anniversary of Confederation will be the ideal moment to promote and celebrate the linguistic duality of Canada.

Now, let us talk about my mandate letter.

The Prime Minister gave me several specific responsibilities in regard to our official languages, which are set out in my mandate letter. In particular, I will concentrate on developing a new multi-year official languages plan by 2018.

I'd like to focus on this last statement, since I like to talk about an action plan, a real game plan, instead of simply a roadmap. I intend to consult with Canadians on this subject very soon. It is important to always remember that official languages are a concern for more than just one department. It is a responsibility that is important to me and all of my fellow ministers.

The issues related to official languages touch all the federal institutions. To treat them seriously, we need to mobilize a great many federal departments and organizations, as such a plan allows us to do.

● (1545)

[English]

As we work towards a new plan, I will consult with Canadians on the best ways, in today's world, to develop promote the development of official languages in minority settings. During these consultations, I will have the opportunity to discuss key issues connected with the vitality of minority communities, such as immigration.

[Translation]

Minister John McCallum and I recently announced a new international mobility program stream, called the francophone significant benefit, which favours the settlement of francophone newcomers outside Quebec.

[English]

As set out in my mandate letter, I'll also supervise the establishment of a free online service for learning and maintaining proficiency in English and French as second languages. To make sure I'm well assisted in that task, I will have the opportunity of working in close collaboration with my parliamentary secretary on that project. Canadians from coast to coast to coast will benefit from this service.

[Translation]

With my colleague Scott Brison, the President of the Treasury Board, I will ensure that all federal services are delivered in full compliance with the Official Languages Act.

I'll also work with Carolyn Bennett, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, to provide new funding to first nations. Our goal will be to promote, preserve, and protect first nations' languages and cultures, which hold a central place in our heritage.

Finally, our government committed in budget 2016 to reinstate the court challenges program. I am working with Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould to update this program.

These goals are ambitious, and I'm enthusiastic about the idea of working with my colleagues to achieve them.

Before I conclude, I'd like to mention that the 2014-15 Canadian Heritage Annual Report on Official Languages is being prepared. I will be happy to discuss it with you soon.

However, I would like to highlight right now the accomplishments resulting from our support for official languages. For example, there are French-language schools everywhere in the country. Enrolment in immersion schools has increased by 39% in 10 years. Our partnerships with the provinces and territories have enabled us, over more than 40 years, to support education in minority situations, learning of a second language, and service delivery in the minority language.

Our agreements with minority communities have made us efficient partners.

[English]

We can count on national institutions such as the Canada Council for the Arts, the National Arts Centre, the National Film Board, Telefilm Canada and CBC/Radio-Canada to promote Canadian anglophone and francophone artists, artisans, and creators.

We support the creation and distribution of works produced in minority settings through our funding programs for arts and culture. We also provide grant programs, language assistant programs, and linguistic exchange programs to help our young people speak both official languages.

Finally, we co-operate with the non-governmental sector to promote the use of our two official languages everywhere in Canada.

[Translation]

In conclusion, I want to remind you that our government is sincerely committed to promoting the vitality of minority language communities. I'm an ally and a staunch defender of official languages and the vitality of minority language communities.

We recognize that official languages present challenges. To meet them, collaboration will be essential. I intend to fulfill my mandate and to work with you in this spirit of collaboration.

Thank you for your invitation. I'm now ready to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Since we are running out of time, we will suspend to go vote in the House. If you agree, Minister, we'll come back immediately after the vote.

The meeting is suspended.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
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- (1625)

**The Chair:** The meeting will resume with the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Earlier, I mentioned that a motion was on the floor and you have a copy. It states:

That the clerk of the Committee take the necessary steps to make reservations at the Parliamentary Restaurant, for a working Lunch between Committee Members and the Chief Justice of the Quebec Superior Court, on Tuesday, May 3, 2016 at noon, and that the cost of this activity be covered by the Committee's Budget.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Minister, we will resume. Members will have six minutes during the first round of questions. I know that there is currently 30 minutes of debate in the House, and my understanding is that it will be followed by a 30-minute bell. That gives us approximately 45 minutes with you.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Perfect. I'm happy to be here.

**The Chair:** Is that okay?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Yes.

**The Chair:** We'll start right now. Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

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

Welcome, Minister.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Good afternoon.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I'll start with a brief question before I move on to the others.

You recently gave an interview on TV5. You were asked why the words "official languages" had been removed from the name of your department. I must admit that I had a hard time understanding the answer.

Very simply, can you tell us whether there a particular reason for this?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I'm happy to have an opportunity to explain. We take a government-wide, interdepartmental approach to official languages.

What does this mean? It's similar to the approach taken with indigenous peoples, in which several departments have responsibilities. Official languages are the same. As Minister of Canadian Heritage, I'm responsible for coordinating the work of all of the departments and ministers involved in these issues.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay, but I still don't understand why this decision was made.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I can continue to explain. I'd be happy to, but

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I'm talking about the name of the department.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I think my answer is very clear.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** An interdepartmental approach was already in place before the words "official languages" were removed from the name of the department. It has always been interdepartmental. Official languages have always been interdepartmental.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We have a much more comprehensive approach than the previous government. It involves a number of departments and ministers, and I am pleased to have the responsibility of coordinating this effort.

What is more, in the context of an open and transparent government and in our mandate letters, the Prime Minister clearly set out our responsibilities with regard to official languages. I invite you to consult the various mandate letters, that of my department and those of my colleagues' departments as well.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Thank you.

Madam Minister, back in the day, the Liberal opposition strongly criticized the Conservative ministers regarding bilingualism on social networks. If I remember correctly, last December, the *Journal de Montréal* reported that many of the current Liberal cabinet ministers are unilingual anglophones and that one minister is unilingual francophone. As a result, there was a problem regarding the use of social networks. The Prime Minister said that he would not require all ministers to learn the second official language.

Last week, *Impératif français* reported that 23 of the 31 ministers in your cabinet are still not communicating with Canadians in both official languages.

You said that transparency and the use of official languages are priorities for your government. How then can you justify the fact that, five months later, significant action has still not been taken in this regard?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Bilingualism, social media management, and respect for official languages are priorities for us. It goes without saying that my official website and those of all of my colleagues must be bilingual and must provide information in both official languages.

That being said, we need to and will do better when it comes to bilingualism on social media. That is why I will be pleased to clarify this issue with the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, when I meet with him on this subject in the near future.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Have you set a deadline by which the situation will be resolved?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I am already working on that issue.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I have another question for you.

French is a language that is in high demand elsewhere in Canada, particularly in areas where French is the minority language.

Some parents have to wait up to 36 hours to register their children in French immersion schools. That might seem like excellent news because, if the wait time is long, it must mean that a lot of people are interested in enrolling their children in this sort of program.

However, I do not think that it is good that parents who want to register their children in French schools or at least in French immersion programs cannot do so because there are not enough spaces available.

Do you have a specific plan in that regard? I know you spoke a little bit about it earlier when you gave your speech. Do you have a specific plan to improve access to French education?

• (1630)

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We are going to work on that issue in 2017 as we prepare the next official languages action plan. The plan will be launched in 2018, when the current roadmap expires.

In the meantime, since we know that we can do more to support minority linguistic communities, I launched a number of initiatives within the department to address some of the problems that were, unfortunately, created by the previous government because it did not provide enough support for official languages.

That is why I mentioned it in my speech. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, John McCallum, and I launched a new support program for francophone minority communities in order to improve francophone immigration and integration.

By way of information, the new program is called the francophone significant benefit program.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome, Madam Minister.

Before I ask my question, I would like to thank you for standing up for minority linguistic communities.

Under part VII of the Official Languages Act, you have the responsibility to promote linguistic communities and linguistic duality across the country.

What are you doing to ensure that linguistic communities across the country not only survive but also thrive?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** As I mentioned in response to Mr. Généreux's questions, we are going to initiate public consultations that will help in the development of a new action plan, which will be launched in 2018.

Under the circumstances, it goes without saying that all of the programs will be reviewed and that all needs will be identified in order to provide better support to minority linguistic communities and enhance their vitality.

I had the opportunity to meet many people on the ground. I can already see a difference between Mr. Dion's former plan and the roadmap developed by the previous government. I can also see that new needs are emerging in the areas of immigration and communications, particularly in a digital age.

I look forward to continuing the conversations that will contribute to the plan that will be developed in 2017 and launched in 2018.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** When do you plan to begin these public consultations?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I will work with my parliamentary secretary, Randy Boissonnault, on this issue in order to meet with all of the organizations, identify needs, and respond to urgent issues.

The immigration issue came up rather suddenly. I was very involved in working with my colleague, John McCallum, on the Syrian refugee file. When it came time to integrate the various Syrian refugee populations into Canada, linguistic minority communities indicated that they should be able to integrate some of the refugees in French.

We therefore asked ourselves how we could facilitate the integration of immigrant communities into linguistic minority communities. That is when my colleague, Mr. McCallum, and I started working on launching a new pilot project called the francophone significant benefit program, a program that was abolished by the previous Conservative government.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Thank you.

•(1635)

**The Chair:** Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

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

I would like to thank the minister and her colleagues from the Department of Canadian Heritage for being here with us today.

Madam Minister, I really appreciated the fact that you mentioned how passionate Nova Scotians are about education. You also mentioned the rest of the country, but it seemed to me that you talked about Nova Scotians with a bit more emotion, particularly when you used the word “talented”.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I spoke from the heart.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I really appreciated that.

We talked about it briefly already, but I would like to come back to a key point about francophone immigration.

The strategy that you are currently implementing must target those communities and help them. If a community welcomes 1,000 immigrants but nothing is done to maintain the percentage at 5% or 6%, then that percentage is going to drop. The region then may not be able to get French-language services since it does not meet the required percentage.

With that in mind, I would simply like you to give us more details on the strategy to stimulate francophone immigration.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** You are alluding here to the Official Languages Regulations, which determine whether a community can receive services in the second official language. You are talking about the famous 5%.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** That is exactly what I wanted to talk about.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** That is an issue that I am taking a very close look at. It is about finding a way to comply with the Official Languages Act, while ensuring the vitality of minority linguistic communities. I look forward to working with the committee on assessing all of that.

We are aware of the fact that the regulations were developed over two decades ago and that it may be time to consider the merits and the more detrimental aspects of those regulations. We need to determine how we can strike a healthy balance to ensure the vitality of our communities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

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

Thank you, Madam Minister, for taking the time to meet with us.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** It is a pleasure.

**Mr. François Choquette:** In spite of everything, there is something that I do not understand.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I would be happy to explain it to you.

**Mr. François Choquette:** You say that you are responsible for coordinating and defending official languages.

How is it that you did not fight to keep the words “official languages” in the name of your department?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I will tell you how important official languages are.

Official languages are so important that every department is responsible for them. That is why it is my duty to coordinate efforts in this regard, to really play a leadership role. However, our relationship with indigenous people, which seeks—

**Mr. François Choquette:** Yes, but we have a Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** If I may, I will finish my answer.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage, I also need to promote and protect indigenous languages and cultures as part of reconciliation efforts. The same goes for linguistic duality.

That is why I am working closely with my colleagues, the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Justice, to relaunch the court challenges program, which was unfortunately abolished by the previous government.

**Mr. François Choquette:** That is good news.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** It is a very important program for linguistic communities and for the defence of language rights.

Basically, the bottom line is that bilingualism is a priority, but it is also a shared responsibility. I am taking the lead on that shared responsibility.

•(1640)

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

I apologize for interrupting you. It is just that we do not have much time to ask questions.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** No problem. I understand.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Recently, you met with representatives of the FCFA. I hope that you will also be able to meet with people from the QCGN.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Actually, my team is meeting with them on Monday morning.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Yes, but I hope that you will also have the opportunity to meet with them.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I will be happy to do so. I used to sit on the Conseil supérieur de la langue française with the president of the QCGN.

**Mr. François Choquette:** When the president of the FCFA appeared before the committee, she said:

In recent years, the implementation of the act has been significantly eroded. In the absence of a single authority mandated to ensure consistent government-wide application of the act, a number of institutions have been content to do the bare minimum, and sometimes even less than that.

Even the president of the FCFA is wondering who will monitor compliance with the act if there is no single authority. That is why I believe that this single authority is necessary and that is why I am concerned about the fact that the words “official languages” are no longer part of the department's name.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** As it indicates in my mandate letter, the Official Languages Act is a responsibility that I share with my colleague Scott Brison, President of the Treasury Board. I believe he will have the opportunity to appear before the committee a little later this year.

I would like to reassure Ms. Lanthier and all stakeholders that official languages are a priority for me and for our government. Under our government, progress will definitely be made when it comes to official languages.

**Mr. François Choquette:** I was happy to hear that you will soon be meeting with the Commissioner of Official Languages. That is what you said earlier. I hope that you will have time to talk about his office's plans and priorities. In those plans and priorities, the Commissioner of Official Languages indicated that, because his budget is frozen, he would have a hard time fulfilling his official languages mandate. Unfortunately, his budget will remain frozen in the coming years, since the Liberals did not provide for additional funding for his office in budget 2016.

What do you think about that? What are you going to do to improve the situation?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Obviously, I am well aware of that situation. I have already had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Fraser. We know that his mandate is coming to an end. Eventually, I will have the opportunity to meet with his successor. I am very aware of this issue and I look forward to discussing it with the team at the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Generally speaking, very important decisions have been made, which have a direct impact on the organizations that provide services to official language minority communities across the country. I made major decisions concerning the delegation of authority, and I would be pleased to tell you about them.

**Mr. François Choquette:** You know that the Translation Bureau is currently being eroded by cuts to staff. There is uncertainty regarding the implementation of a new automatic translation tool. When are you going to intervene in this matter? Right now, we do not know what is happening. No new staff is being hired, employees are still being lost to attrition, and cuts are still being made. What is happening and when are you going to take action?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I would like to set the record straight. No cuts have been made at the Translation Bureau since we took office.

**Mr. François Choquette:** But there is still attrition.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Obviously, we believe that it is important for the Translation Bureau to be able to offer services that ensure that quality of English and French for internal communication within the public service. With regard to external communication, if the Translation Bureau fails to comply with the Official Languages Act, we will obviously remedy the situation to ensure that we are always in compliance with the act.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

We will continue with Mr. Samson.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Choquette, before making any decisions about the Translation Bureau, I would like the committee to have the opportunity to write

and table its report so that we can see how the situation is going to play out. That is an example of how the new Government of Canada is working with the committees.

Madam Minister, you mentioned two things. I want to talk about the roadmap, but first I would like to commend you and your department for the work you have done in making two major changes that are essential for the communities.

The first change has to do with a request from communities, organizations, and associations to obtain funding more quickly and for projects that allocate new money to be approved more quickly. I understand that a process is already in place so that applications for \$75,000 or less will be processed much more quickly. That is a huge change that will be a big help to the communities.

The second change has to do with the decision to spread the funding over two or three years so that organizations no longer have trouble keeping good employees because of a lack of funding. That has been a problem for many years. This change will be very helpful for the communities and I thank you very much for that.

Could you tell us when the consultations regarding the new action plan or roadmap will begin? This is not just about a name change. Can you tell us what the schedule for this will look like?

• (1645)

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I would like to point out two things.

First, every time I travel within the country and visit a city, I make sure to hold a round table with various official languages organizations. In Halifax, you and I had the opportunity to participate in a round table together.

I would like to tell the committee members that I will continue to do that throughout 2016. What is more, in 2017, the parliamentary secretary and I will organize consultations so that our plan is ready in 2018.

Second, I would like to come back to what you said. As heritage minister, I have to sign 8,000 grants and contributions a year. That is approximately 30 per day. As you all know, MPs are very busy people. At the end of the week, I may have nearly 200 grants and contributions that still have not been signed. I finally understood that the complaints of arts and culture and official languages organizations are well founded because there is a bottleneck in Ottawa.

In the past, the department made recommendations regarding grants and contributions and they were usually approved by cabinet later. A total of 98% of the department's recommendations were ultimately approved, but because everything had to go through cabinet, approvals sometimes took a very long time. I therefore delegated some authority. Regional authorities can now approve any project valued at \$75,000 or less. As a result, organizations are receiving grants and contributions four to six months earlier than before. We are therefore providing financial support more quickly. We can now get funding to organizations sooner, which means that they do not have to borrow money to cover their expenses. Often, they would not get a cheque from Canadian Heritage until after the event was already over and they had already had to pay for everything.

This delegation of authority also makes it possible for us to allocate multi-year funding. For example, about a month and a half ago, an organization in the Yukon called Les EssentiElles, which helps francophone women in Whitehorse, was given funding over three years. That is the first time in the organization's history that this has happened.

As a result of the delegation of authority, funding is more customized. It is allocated more efficiently and in a less partisan manner. This delegation of authority also improves the process and makes the funding more visible.

This is the first time in the history of the Department of Canadian Heritage that authority has been delegated in this way.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your questions, Mr. Samson.

Since the bells are ringing to call in the members for the vote, I need your consent to continue the discussion.

**Hon. members:** Agreed.

•(1650)

**The Chair:** It is unanimous.

Mr. Vandal, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.):** Thank you very much for your wonderful presentation, Madam Minister.

In Saint-Boniface, we are very proud of budget 2016 for many reasons, one of which is the fact that funding for CBC/Radio-Canada has been increased to \$675 million, if I am not mistaken.

I am wondering what impact this budget increase will have on the content presented to Canadians in both official languages.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We have allocated \$675 million in new funding to CBC/Radio-Canada over five years. We came to an agreement with the public broadcaster on three criteria that it must meet in order to obtain this new funding, while of course respecting its independence. Under one of those criteria, CBC/Radio-Canada must truly be in a position to fulfill its role as a public broadcaster and thus ensure that it offers more local content in both official languages. This will allow us to negate some of the harmful effects of the budget cuts that were made to CBC/Radio-Canada over the past 10 years, particularly with regard to support for regions with linguistic minority communities.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Very good.

I was interested in another point you made. We all want to support indigenous languages. People in Saint-Boniface, the birthplace of the father of Manitoba and the leader of the Métis Nation, Louis Riel, used to speak Michif.

What plans do we have to preserve and promote indigenous languages across the country?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I am glad that you mentioned Louis Riel and the important legacy that he left as the leader of the Métis Nation. In 2017, we are going to develop a strategy to support various indigenous cultures and languages. I will be working with my colleague Carolyn Bennett, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, on this.

Three of the recommendations set out in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had to do with indigenous languages and cultures. We will address those three recommendations in our comprehensive response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report. I will be working on that with my team—the people who are here today and others at the Department of Canadian Heritage.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Saint-Boniface is home to all sorts of francophone cultural and artistic groups, for example, the Maison des artistes visuels francophone, the Centre culturel franco-manitobain, and the Musée de Saint-Boniface. There are between eight and 10 such organizations.

Are there subsidies or other financial resources available within the official languages portfolio to support the artistic activities of these groups?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We gave—

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** There is also Le Cercle Molière.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We increased funding for the Canada Council for the Arts to \$550 million over five years. Many organizations will benefit from that new funding. Simon Brault, director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts, and his team will be called upon to present a plan for this reinvestment.

We already know that the Canada Council for the Arts has undertaken a major reform. In the past, it funded 148 programs, but now it will fund only six. These programs will be bigger and more worthwhile. Various artists, artisans, and arts organizations will be supported by the council, particularly those that promote the vitality of official language minority communities.

What is more, in terms of indigenous languages and cultures, the Council for the Arts has made it a priority to provide better support to artists and artisans who work in various indigenous communities.

•(1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Trost, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to try to use my second official language.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** I commend you for that.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Madam Minister, your mandate letter includes a number of directives from the Prime Minister, including the following:

Establish a free, online service for learning and retaining English and French as second languages.

I have two questions for you. First, I would like to know how much money you are planning to allocate to this project, and second, I would like to know if this is the best way to use that money.

There are already a number of free services like this available. I used them when I was taking French classes. I believe that is also the case in English.

[*English*]

Are you not reinventing the wheel? The civil service has services like this and, as I said in French, there are plenty of free services.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you for your question.

I'll be working on that specific project with my parliamentary secretary. The idea is to increase access to online tools that help to develop a knowledge of the second language.

It was our idea not only to promote bilingualism but also to do more than that: to help Canadians really become bilingual. By having a modern way of developing the skills of Canadians, we will be able to better achieve that goal.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** But shouldn't the government do a survey to see what is out there? As someone who has studied for several years on and off, I know there are an awful lot of free language tools out there in both English and French. They are two of the world's most popular languages. Isn't there a survey we could use to see what's needed?

What was the budget? Do you have a budget for this, or is this going to be another expenditure that's eventually added to the deficit?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** My colleague Mr. Boissonnault has already done that survey, and we are already working on the project. This was a clear commitment as part of our electoral platform, and this is also why it's in my mandate letter. It was also a project that our colleague Mauril Bélanger had worked on in the past. In the context of looking at all different scenarios to increase access, we will eventually be able to establish a budget.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** I'd like to follow up on Mr. Trost's question.

Is there any risk that establishing an online tool will eventually be a way of reducing live, in-person French language training across the government? Is there a risk of our relying too much on an online tool rather than in-person learning?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** This is complementary to what was already being done under the existing programs. This is clearly not a way to reduce language training that is already being given. It is just a better way to empower Canadians to learn the second language and to do it in an easier way at home or at work. It is for all Canadians, not just those in our public service or those who have recently come into the country.

● (1700)

**Mr. John Nater:** We talked a little bit about Portage, the new translation tool. Have you personally had an opportunity to review the Portage tool? What are your thoughts on it?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** The idea behind the Portage tool was to contribute to the range of tools that was already available in order to improve internal communication in the public service. We wanted public servants to feel really comfortable sending internal emails in the language of their choice and for their colleagues to be able to respond in their language of choice.

The goal was certainly not to reduce the Translation Bureau's resources and it was certainly not to avoid our official languages obligations.

**The Chair:** We will now move on to Ms. Lapointe and Mr. Anandasangaree, who will be sharing their time.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here with us today, Madam Minister.

I would like to say hello to Mauril Bélanger, who is reading all of the minutes of our meetings. I know how much he cares about official languages. I suppose he will be able to read all of this.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** We send him our regards.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Official languages are very important to us.

What are your plans to make sure that the 150th anniversary celebrations are held in both official languages so that people recognize Canada's proud anglophone and francophone heritage? In my riding, north of Montreal, there are anglophone minorities in Deux-Montagnes and Rosemère. What impact will this have on linguistic minority communities?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you for the question.

For the 150th anniversary celebrations, funding will be allocated based on a pan-Canadian approach and initiatives will be presented by organizations and partners. As I mentioned in the speech I gave at the beginning of the meeting, we have very clear criteria to ensure that all of the projects proposed by the various proponents comply with the Official Languages Act. What is more, some projects are specifically designed to celebrate linguistic duality. That is what is happening with the pan-Canadian projects.

There will also be funding allocated for community projects. Our goal is to have community projects in every riding of the country. We also want to celebrate our country's unique linguistic duality in many ridings. Some of the project will be presented by various proponents and partners. That is why I mentioned in my speech that we added four themes, which until recently, were not a primary focus of the 150th anniversary celebrations. One of those themes is inclusion and diversity, which of course includes our linguistic duality.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you very much.

I will leave some time for my colleague, Gary Anandasangaree.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Madam Minister, I heard you mention some changes that you have made to your department's standards and services, mainly with regard to the delegation of authority, which allows public servants to approve applications for a certain amount of funding.

Can you give us more information about the cost of this decision? What impact will this decision have, particularly on minority linguistic communities?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you for your question.

I had the opportunity to answer part of that question earlier, when I spoke about the delegation of authority for all funding applications under \$75,000. The reaction across the country has been very positive. Of course, people across Canada welcomed our historic reinvestment of \$1.9 billion in arts and culture. Right now, people are very pleased with the the internal reform, which addresses the fact that the allocation of grants and contributions was becoming too political and, to a lesser extent, mitigates bureaucracy. There was a real bottleneck in Ottawa. This change meets a real need and organizations have been asking for this in recent years.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Mr. Choquette, you have the floor and you have one minute.

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

Once again, Madam Minister, I thank you for being here to answer our questions.

The Commissioner of Official Languages issued a very important report about access to justice in both official languages. Unfortunately, that report has been gathering dust. I hope that you are going to dust it off and take a good look at it because it makes some really good recommendations. I am talking about the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages on access to justice.

As you know, I introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-203, to require judges who are appointed to the Supreme Court to be bilingual and to be able to express themselves in both languages. I think that is extremely important. This issue has been under debate for a long time, nearly 10 years now. Yvon Godin, former member for Acadie-Bathurst, fought for years to try to make this happen. I hope that you will support my bill. That is the first thing that I wanted to say.

I have another question for you.

The Translation Bureau has already said that the automatic translation tool would be used only for internal communication and to write emails. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** To answer your first question, it goes without saying that we are in favour of appointing bilingual justices to the Supreme Court. The Prime Minister has said that many times. I want to reiterate to you how important that is.

As for the translation tool—of course my colleague, Judy Foote could speak to that subject more because it falls under her responsibility—it was meant for internal communications. It could help a francophone, for example, write an email in French and send it to an Anglophone colleague, who would then be able to read it and understand the information. It was just an extra tool. It was not linked to future cuts at the Translation Bureau. That was really not the objective. The goal was to find new ways to communicate. Your Conservative colleague mentioned earlier that he was able to improve his knowledge of French by using digital tools. It is somewhat the same idea here.

We must explore every avenue when it comes to learning a second language. Computers offer a great deal of possibilities.

**The Chair:** Time is up and so ends our meeting.

Thank you very much, minister.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** It was my pleasure.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your excellent presentation.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lussier and Mr. Gauthier, for being here with us today.

In closing, I want to remind the members of the committee that when we return on Monday, we will be hearing from the Commissioner of Official Languages. We still do not know who we will be welcoming next Wednesday.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** If I may, Mr. Chair, I want to remind the committee that I would be pleased to work with you. If you have any questions or want to have information sessions on specific issues, my colleagues at Canadian Heritage and I would be pleased to share aspects of the files in order to improve debate in Parliament, and to protect and promote our official languages.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, minister.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The committee is adjourned.

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