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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 28 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

The committee is meeting to hear witnesses as part of the study on government measures to protect and promote French in Quebec and in Canada.

My thanks to the witnesses for being with us for the duration of the meeting.

We will suspend the meeting at around 5:10 p.m. for a short period in camera.

[*English*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants of this meeting that taking screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

[*Translation*]

Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your own mic. When you are done speaking, please put your mic on mute to minimize any interference. A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

[*English*]

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the use of a headset with a boom microphone is mandatory for everyone participating remotely.

[*Translation*]

However, should any challenges arise, feel free to advise me, so as to foster everyone's full participation in this meeting.

Without further ado, I would like to welcome this afternoon's witnesses. From the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, we welcome director general Alain Dupuis. Jean Johnson, the federation's president, is having technical difficulties. He is attending, but he won't be able to speak.

We also welcome, as an individual, Mariève Forest, sociologist, president and founder of Sociopol, and visiting professor at the University of Ottawa. Also as an individual, we welcome Jack Jedwab, president and chief executive officer, immigration and identities, Association for Canadian Studies and Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration.

Each witness will have seven and a half minutes for their presentation. I will advise them when they have one minute left and when their time has run out. Then we will move on to the question period.

Without further ado, we will start with Mr. Dupuis, who has seven and a half minutes to give his speech.

Mr. Dupuis, turn on your mic. You have the floor.

Mr. Alain Dupuis (Director General, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Let me say that the president, Jean Johnson, would really have preferred to be here. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, I will be making the presentation, but he most certainly sends his regards.

Thank you for inviting the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, to appear today as part of your study on protecting and promoting French across the country. In September, we warmly welcomed the government's commitment in this regard in the Speech from the Throne. For us, this commitment is not only welcome, but necessary, given the vulnerability of French.

Soon after the Speech from the Throne, the Office of the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages asked the FCFA to propose principles and measures the government could adopt to protect and promote French across the country. As a result, the FCFA produced a discussion paper with several proposals. The paper was submitted to this committee as part of this study.

In the paper, we first confirmed that French is the official language that needs specific support measures to achieve genuine equality with English. We recommended that a council be created to report periodically on the status of French in Canada and to recommend appropriate action. The council would specifically include representatives of the francophone and Acadian communities.

I note that this idea is not in Minister Joly's official languages reform document, and it is something we will discuss with her. Our communities must participate in the implementation of Canada's language policy, which we think is essential.

Second, we noted in the paper an issue of social cohesion around the major Canadian values of the 21st century. Over time, the societal choices that have been made have brought Canada to where it is today. These choices include linguistic duality, cultural diversity and reconciliation with indigenous peoples. However, these choices are not well understood by everyone. As Official Languages Commissioner Victor Goldbloom said in 1992, people cannot support what they do not understand. We believe that government has a responsibility for civic education to foster a better common understanding of these great values and why they are fundamental.

Third, we called the government to action on the demographic weight of the francophone communities. This demographic weight has been eroded over the decades due to assimilation and because the francophone community is not renewing itself at the same rate as the English-speaking community. In this action plan for official languages, the government has already set the objective of restoring this demographic weight to 4%. This will require bold action on francophone immigration and on support for the social and cultural vitality of the francophone communities.

Fourth, we recommended that the government work with the provinces and territories to eliminate the many barriers to learning French as a second language, so that it is no longer seen as a privilege for the few, but as a right for all Canadians.

Fifth, francophone communities are stronger when they are united. Closer ties between Quebec and other francophone communities in Canada are to everyone's advantage. The federal government can contribute to this by promoting francophone mobility, particularly at the post-secondary level. It can also clarify Radio-Canada's mandate so that the Crown corporation's role is to foster better mutual knowledge between Quebec and other francophone communities.

Sixth, the vitality of French depends on French-language services that reach Canadians where it matters most: locally. That is why we are advocating for better cooperation between the federal government, the provinces, the territories and the municipalities to move toward a full range of French-language services developed with, by and for francophone communities. In this regard, Minister Joly's reform document proposes to promote the use of accountability tools in federal-provincial-territorial agreements. The FCFA believes that we need to go further and include strong language clauses in the agreements that transfer funds to the provinces and territories.

Finally, for the seventh recommendation, I would refer you to Graham Fraser's book *Sorry, I Don't Speak French: Confronting the Canadian Crisis That Won't Go Away*.

● (1550)

In it, Mr. Fraser notes that the government has historically taken a defensive and justificatory stance on linguistic duality, rather than promoting its benefits. Creating a positive perception of French and francophone communities starts at the top. The Government of

Canada is in the best position to promote the French language and francophone communities across Canada in its official discourse and publications.

In conclusion, let me be direct. The status of French, whether as an official language of Canada or a language in the public space, is losing ground. I'm not just talking about bilingual government communications during a pandemic. I'm also talking about the precarious situation of francophone universities like Laurentian University, and the Campus Saint-Jean in Alberta, for example. I'm also talking about the use of French in the public service.

Those who feel that this is not a big deal are mistaken. The erosion of French is the erosion of part of Canada's DNA. The federal government is absolutely justified in wanting to act strongly and boldly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your speech, Mr. Dupuis.

We now go to Ms. Forest, sociologist, president and founder of Sociopol, and visiting professor at the University of Ottawa.

The next seven and a half minutes are yours, Ms. Forest.

Ms. Mariève Forest (Sociologist, President and Founder of Sociopol, Visiting Professor at the University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Good afternoon, everyone. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the thinking on measures to protect and promote French in Canada.

I would like to point out that I have been working on the issue of official languages for almost 20 years. As such, I have two sets of proposals to share with you related to two of my areas of expertise, namely post-secondary and immigration.

First, I will emphasize the importance of approaching post-secondary education from a distinct strategy that takes a restorative perspective. Please note that the thoughts and data related to this come from a study commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The final report has not been submitted yet. Therefore, the perspectives I'm sharing with you are those of the researchers and are not binding on the department.

The second point I will raise is the importance of systematically viewing immigration from a longitudinal perspective, meaning a perspective that considers the dynamics of language transfer. This point will be shorter, but you should know that, over the past few years, I've conducted several studies on immigration, particularly with regard to workforce integration, temporary residents and governance. Please feel free to ask me questions on those other subjects.

With respect to minority language post-secondary education, education has traditionally been analyzed and funded as a whole. However, I believe that it would be beneficial to employ a strategy for post-secondary education that is separate from that of elementary and secondary education. The strategy should include access to French-language education and limited incentives. Universities and colleges are indeed among the few institutions in a francophone community that play a very central role in both proximity socialization, that is, identity building, and in socialization in the public space. I'm referring here to the representations that francophones have of themselves, but also to those of the majority group in relation to French, to francophones and to francophone communities. I will pick up the conceptual baggage developed and discussed by Mr. Landry last week to emphasize the unique nature of post-secondary when it comes to institutional completeness.

That said, the various databases we consulted show limited access and incentives for French-language post-secondary education in Canada and outside of Quebec. We are close to completing a report of over 120 pages and nearly 80 tables. I will share just a few numbers with you.

In 2018-19, of the students enrolled, about 2% studied in French, if you combine universities and colleges. Let me put that percentage in perspective: In 2016, 3.8% of Canadians spoke French as their first official language. Yet universities and colleges are unique in being able to accept not only francophones, but also francophiles and foreign students. In actual fact, the two systems are not separate, as is the case at the primary and secondary levels. So there are issues in terms of access.

In terms of incentives, we can certainly point to some challenges. For example, student debt is higher for those studying in French. This is especially true at university, but it's also true at college. Programs are less diverse, especially in science, technology and mathematics. That's quite significant, especially if you exclude the University of Ottawa. Of course, an institution's reputation is generally supposed to matter in students' choices, but that factor comes into play much less when they choose to study in French.

In addition to consulting various surveys, we spoke to industry representatives. The issue of funding emerged as important. However, it remains a very complex issue.

I will make three points. One is that the funding environment for post-secondary education has changed significantly over the past 15 years in Canada. Tuition fees are now a greater part of institutional revenue. That makes it more difficult for smaller educational institutions to compete.

In addition, planning for and providing French-language education at francophone or bilingual institutions requires more investment. That's the case in several budget categories, such as educational resources, required travel, or language training.

All post-secondary institutions have a mission to provide services to the community. Yet, when one's community is dispersed, remote, low-profile, and French-speaking, the resulting dynamics are unique.

I will close with the issue of immigration. I will focus on the importance of integrating the longitudinal perspective more strongly by taking language transfers into consideration.

• (1555)

Our current concern is primarily the very low numbers of French-speaking immigrants that are landed and settled each year. And with good reason. Of course, it is important to continue along those lines.

However, language retention among immigrants has received little attention. In a study in which we developed demographic forecasts for francophones in Ontario, the data clearly showed that the number of new French-speaking arrivals does not in itself greatly influence the demographic curve, if the rates of language retention are the same for francophones born in Canada as for those born elsewhere.

We know that English has an assimilating power over francophones born in Canada. Do immigrants assimilate in the same way as francophones born in this country? Do they do so at the same speed? In the long term, which factors contribute to reducing language transfer among immigrants?

Those are questions that have not been looked at closely. It is my view that they would benefit from being among the measures to protect French in Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Forest.

We have Jack Jedwab with us, appearing as an individual.

The floor is yours for seven and a half minutes, Mr. Jedwab.

Mr. Jack Jedwab (President and Chief Executive Officer, Immigration and Identities, Association for Canadian Studies and Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks also to the members of the committee for inviting me to share my thoughts on the status of the debate over official languages and linguistic duality in Canada, especially in Quebec.

I will start with my observations and end with some recommendations on immigration. First, as I mentioned, I want to establish a little of the context for the current debate in Quebec.

Personally, in some respects, I find it unhealthy. My concern is the very basis for the debate, which may well influence policymakers as to the way in which language policies will be developed. The issue is harmonizing the Official Languages Act and the Charter of the French Language. Those were the objectives with which I was presented, or are part of the mandate I was given, for this meeting of the committee.

As I know that time is an issue, I will quickly deal with four points. Language targets or objectives are often vague and the policies and programs are measured by reference points that are badly defined or not defined at all. As an example, the Charter of the French Language stipulates that French is to be the “normal and everyday language.”

As a result, some people wonder what exactly normal and everyday language is. Does it mean that, when people interact in public spaces in Quebec, they have to speak French?

If that is the objective, it is unrealistic, given the demographics in Quebec and the number of speakers of English as a first or second language who live here. A general objective may not be unhealthy, but it can lead to confusion if it is not closely defined. It is simply a matter of better defining the objectives for the official languages.

As Mr. Dupuis mentioned earlier, referring to Victor Goldbloom, if people do not understand an objective because it is not precise, it may well lead to confusion. That is my first point.

The second point I want to raise is about concepts of majority and minority in a given territory. Those concepts are often fluid. For example, the idea that francophones form a minority on the Island of Montreal leads some to believe that non-francophones are the majority. If we follow logic like that, we might get the impression that a person such as myself, with English as my first language even though I consider myself partly francophone, could put myself in the same category as Mr. Dubourg, for example, whose first language is Creole and with Ms. Martinez Ferrada, whose first language is probably Spanish. Are we going to say that we form the majority and then decide to impose who knows what language on the francophone minority on the Island of Montreal?

I understand the way that the relationship between a majority language and a minority language is presented. But I would never imagine that Ms. Martinez Ferrada or Mr. Dubourg would invite me to a meeting to decide how we, as a majority, could come up with a language policy in Quebec. We are not the majority on the Island of Montreal. However, when I meet with my colleagues, I get the impression that they take it for granted that 52% of the people with various first languages that are not French, share English as their first language and want to impose it on the minority. In my view, logic like that is unhealthy and distorts the debate.

The third point I want to bring up is linked to the previous one. Why do we insist on a certain piece of territory, such as the Island of Montreal, instead of the whole Montreal metropolitan area? A choice like that is not justified in demographic terms. When I ask colleagues who are demographers why they choose the Island of Montreal instead of the Montreal metropolitan area to establish the number of francophones, their answer is that they do so because downtown is on the Island of Montreal. Now the South Shore is closer to downtown Montreal than the West Island, which is on the Island of Montreal. A number of questions come up as to the way things are interpreted.

I would like to quickly bring up two other points.

• (1600)

[English]

Let me switch to English, because I'll do this in both languages.

Very rarely is causal evidence provided for certain measures or initiatives that are introduced to deal with either the improvement of the position of the French language, whether it's in Montreal, the rest of Quebec or elsewhere, or supporting the English-speaking community with respect to issues around vitality.

We need to have more causal evidence of measures we adopt, “causal” meaning, if for example the members of my National Assembly in Quebec say that we need to say “*Bonjour*” instead of “*Bonjour, hi*”, it would be important to provide causal evidence of the effectiveness of that type of a proposal, and not just throw it up in the air, we'll vote for it unanimously and it's all good.

Because actually, more people are saying “*Bonjour, hi*”, and “*Au revoir, goodbye*”, and having conversations in both languages since that measure was suggested by legislators in Quebec than was the case before that suggestion was made. I can assure you wherever I go now it's “*Bonjour, hi*”, everywhere I go almost. We're not thinking about the impact of those measures, just their symbolic nature.

I've always found that a bit funny, too, that we in Quebec in the National Assembly will say that we don't want the word “hi”, but we're okay with the N-word. I mean, think about the paradox there, which is striking to me in some instances. Anyway, we'll leave that aside for the time being.

My final point is that it's the view that languages are inevitably in competition.

• (1605)

[Translation]

According to that vision, as soon as you speak a little English, it means you're speaking less French.

The key to the threat to the French language, at least in Quebec, is in the workplace. French is declining in Montreal in customer-service sectors, such as restaurants.

[English]

It isn't because you speak a little more English or a little less French that the two languages can't coexist. In fact, they must coexist in some ways. There is lots of mixing, and there has been lots of mixing in Montreal and elsewhere in Quebec, which is great in terms of some of the change that we're seeing and some of the *fléchissement* that we're seeing. We need to be able to manage that.

I think that's over for me.

I have one minute. That's good.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Dubourg.

[English]

Very quickly, if we're going to try to deal with issues around the percentages of francophones, anglophones and allophones, we need to look at the issue of immigration, obviously. It's immigration and projections around the future numbers of immigrants we will receive and the language composition of immigrants that is creating the perception that French, as a mother tongue or a language spoken at home.... Those aren't my preferred categories for measuring the situation, by the way. I prefer looking at the situation of French in the workplace or first official language spoken, but we need to better consider how we can augment the percentage of francophone immigrants coming to Quebec.

A lot of that is in the hands of the Quebec government. To be fair, over 20 years—and I can show you the data—the Quebec government can't do more in that area than it has done, and the federal government is not the obstacle to that happening.

Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

We now move to the time for questions.

I would also like to advise members of the committee that, pursuant to the routine motion we passed, our first round will be 50 minutes. We will then have about 15 minutes left and, for that second part, I propose to allocate four minutes to each party. You can also separate your time.

Mr. Blaney and Mr. Dalton have the floor for the first six minutes. I assume that Mr. Blaney will be starting.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We are counting on you to divide up the time into equal slices, just as we do with a nice sugar pie.

My thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

Before I share my time with Mr. Dalton, I will ask two questions.

My first question goes to Mariève Forest.

Ms. Forest, you talked about a restorative approach to post-secondary education. We know that our second-language post-secondary education institutions are currently under pressure. Mr. Dupuis specifically referred to the crisis at l'Université Laurentienne. In addition, dark clouds are gathering over flagships like the Université de Moncton and the Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta.

You seem to be talking about restorative measures. Are you implying that some things were not done correctly in the past, in terms of funding or in the approach that was chosen? I would like to hear what you have to say on that in particular.

Ms. Mariève Forest: I can't express an opinion on what was done in the past. As I explained, in terms of funding, the context has also evolved in the last 15 years and goes far beyond the French-language post-secondary institutions. But it has affected them. Fifteen years ago, we could not say that.

However, all kinds of measures could actually be put in place at the moment. The critical state of several institutions is very clear, not only when we talk to their leaders and follow the media, but also when we see the different sets of data, which make it very clear that access is limited. We must also develop a keen understanding of the protection measures that can be put into place and the factors that make those institutions vulnerable.

There are all kinds of governance models at the moment. In the west, they have academic units within large anglophone universities. Ontario has a number of bilingual models. Some places have French-language institutions.

At the moment, we do not know with any accuracy what really allows students to thrive. When they live in French, students can develop in a safe environment in terms of language.

A lot of data needs to be gathered at post-secondary level.

The restorative point of view more specifically applies to what we see today, limited access.

• (1610)

Hon. Steven Blaney: You talked about governance models. Given what we have heard about l'Université Laurentienne, the bilingual model certainly does not give us any appetite to repeat the experiment.

Let me turn to Mr. Dupuis, of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA.

Mr. Dupuis, you started your remarks by referring to the Speech from the Throne and by saying that it was necessary to recognize that French needs particular support. You also provided recommendations.

What is your reaction to the fact that, going forward, we recognize that French, even in Quebec, must receive particular attention from the federal government, at the same time as support is renewed for francophone minorities?

I was talking about the sugar pie earlier, do we have more people sharing the same pie or do we have to have a different approach?

I would like to hear what you have to say on the matter. Let me say, by the way, that I appreciate the FCFA's openness on this issue, which is a concern for us all, wherever we are in the country.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I would say that our communities have to think about promoting and preserving French, and not just in terms of our minority communities and the majority in Quebec. We must put all our heads together in order to promote our language. The new logic that the Speech from the Throne provides is more or less along those lines. This commitment to the uniqueness of French means that, at times, more has to be done. That is justified because unique measures have to be put into place in order to reach real equality.

Going back to the example of the post-secondary network, it is clear that it must be strengthened and consolidated outside Quebec. The need may not be the same for the anglophone minority in Quebec, and that's fine.

Hon. Steven Blaney: No, indeed.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: We could design our post-secondary system like a national network that would include institutions in Quebec and would include the idea of francophone mobility all over the country, in order to identify their services. I feel that this is a new avenue that the vision of recognizing the uniqueness of French opens for us.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much, Mr. Dupuis.

So we have to stop thinking in isolation and separating the francophone communities outside Quebec and inside Quebec. We have to think in terms of French having a special framework, as one of our two national languages and one of the pillars of our identity. Thank you very much.

I will yield the floor to my friend Mr. Dalton, from Vancouver.

The Chair: You have the floor for 45 seconds, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): So, I will get right to the point.

To back up your answer, what mark would you give to the government for its efforts to promote French?

The Chair: Who does that question go to, Mr. Dalton?

Mr. Marc Dalton: It goes to all three.

Mr. Dupuis, you can start.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: For us, the planned reform of the official languages that Minister Joly has published met a number of the communities' demands and priorities.

When we studied the plan, we saw that it contained 80% of our requests.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lefebvre, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would really like to get into this game and ask you to give a mark to the former Harper government. But I will not do so because we are trying to work in a spirit of collaboration and to see how we can promote the Francophonie, given that we are talking about the decline of French.

Mr. Dupuis, thank you very much for your comments. I would have liked to hear Mr. Johnson also, but we will have other oppor-

tunities to talk to him. You talked about promoting French and the importance of being positive with regard to official language minority communities. You know that our government has allocated an additional investment of \$500 million in its action plan. It has also presented a white paper, as you said, not to mention Budget 2021, which was brought down last week and which provides for an additional investment of \$300 million in the communities.

Could you talk a little about the importance of our infrastructure in culture, in communities and, of course, in schools? Then, I would like to hear your comments about the importance of reviving the Court Challenges program with adequate funding. What does that provide for us? What does it represent in terms of the decline of French and of investments in our communities? How important are these investments?

You know that, in Sudbury, where I am at the moment and where you are from, the government has made a major investment in the Place des Arts, which will soon open its doors and will house a number of cultural organizations. This is the first time for decades that we are going to have our own cultural space. It's a great project that the community is very excited about.

In your opinion, how important are cultural and community infrastructures?

● (1615)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: For us, the key is to be able to live in French on a daily basis. We have spent a lot of time in these last 30 years building our network of schools. We have more than 700 francophone schools in the country. That is excellent, but the work must continue. We are going to need daycares in French and post-secondary education in French. We must be able to go out and live in our language and our culture in cultural spaces like that.

In terms of the Francophonie in Canada, the work will never be finished. But the investments in recent years and in the recent budget were needed and have gone to the right places. We still have some catching up to do and we have to think about what we will need to do after the pandemic. Soon, our children will not have been in school for more than a year and a half. We have not been living in our own language on a daily basis in public. So the investments are going to the right place, but we are going to have to continue and maintain the concept of "by and for". In all respects, it is essential to have institutions of all kinds run by the minority.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

I would like to talk about the Court Challenges Program. When governments take rights away from us, we can't claim them if we don't have funds. We saw what happened when the government abolished the Court Challenges Program. We lost institutions because of this inability to claim our rights. However, we have reinstated the Court Challenges Program, and I would like to hear from you about the importance of this program.

What does this do for official language minority communities?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: For us, this program is critical and it always has been, so we're glad it's been reinstated. This is the last card to play, for us. It is always important to work with our provincial, territorial and federal governments, but if our rights are not respected, there are non-partisan avenues for minorities. This has had a structuring impact on school boards and our schools, and will continue to do so in other areas.

So I was pleased to see the government's commitment to making this program permanent, which I think should be anchored in the next version of the Official Languages Act, so that it becomes a permanent program recognized by the act.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I fully agree.

My last question is about the census. It's not easy to do a census of all the rights holders in the country affected by section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We have been talking about this for a long time and it has never been easy to do, but in the next census, we will do it. In my opinion, it will be very interesting and, moreover, it will help us enormously.

I would like to hear from you about the importance of the entitlement count, which will ultimately be done in the next census.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: This is absolutely essential. For the first time, we will have a complete picture of all those whose children are entitled to attend a French-language school. It also means that there will be some pretty significant changes in terms of the government investments needed to support the infrastructure of our schools and the spaces in those schools.

In the west and in the north, there has often been a tug of war over numbers. I think this will be a game changer, but not in adversity.

All governments will now have the data required to meet the needs of francophones, and that is a very good thing. However, this commitment must not be for one census, but for all future censuses.

• (1620)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you very much, Mr. Dupuis.

I am enormously grateful for your responses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

Mr. Beaulieu has the floor for the next six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I would like to thank all our guests.

I will address the FCFA representatives.

In your paper on the federal government's new perspective, you say that "French is the official language that needs support to achieve substantive equality." This is consistent with the Quebec government's request to recognize French as the minority language across Canada. This is a good thing.

You also talked about uniting the Canadian francophonie. Would you agree that, in this new perspective, groups defending the French language in Quebec should be invited to activities aimed at bringing together the entire Canadian francophonie?

This is the first time the Standing Committee on Official Languages has studied the situation of French in Quebec. At other meetings, only anglophones were invited to represent Quebec.

Wouldn't it strengthen solidarity if Quebec's French advocacy groups were also invited?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: The Canadian francophonie wants to work more with Quebec civil society, whether it is francophone or anglophone. We want to work with francophones, of course. In order to promote our common language, French, it is important to work together, but also to have the means to do so.

I don't know if these particular groups want this funding; I assume they do. For my part, the collaboration of Quebec and francophone civil societies is important.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You also said that we should prioritize anything done by and for francophones, in all respects.

Do you agree that we should try to do the same thing for post-secondary education?

Should we make sure that the University of Sudbury is francophone? The Université de l'Ontario français and the Université de Hearst could also go in that direction.

With respect to immersion schools at the elementary and secondary levels, they are not run by or for francophones. School boards often say this creates assimilation of francophones.

Wouldn't it be a good thing if immersion schools were managed by francophone and Acadian communities?

Also, rather than investing heavily in immersion schools, why not ensure that schools for and run by francophones get enough funding in the first place?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: With respect to the immersion issue, French school boards should be asked whether they want to run these programs. They are French-language programs, but in English-language schools. It would take some pretty major reforms to turn over the governance of immersion programs to francophones.

I don't want to get too far ahead of myself on that.

Certainly, we need to ask what the impact of immersion programs in Canada is and we need to ask what percentage of graduates are able to speak both languages at graduation. I think it is very important to strengthen both our schools and French immersion. They are two different but legitimate needs. We also need to guarantee the results so that more Canadians speak our two official languages.

I've forgotten your first question, I'm sorry.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm not sure I remember it.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I believe it was about post-secondary institutions for and run by francophones.

First, institutional funding must take into account the additional costs of French-language post-secondary schools. The federal government funds provincial and territorial French school boards to justify the fact that there are additional costs to having smaller schools with smaller numbers.

This is exactly the same logic in the case of post-secondary institutions. A French program in a minority setting costs more. That's not a problem, it's just the reality of the smaller numbers.

I think that funding needs to be tailored to these additional costs.

Secondly—and this is more of a community issue—we need to have our institutions managed by francophones and have the power not only to create new programs, but to manage an administration. I think this is the logical continuation of institutional completeness. We have had French-language schools, school boards and colleagues. Now we need independent, minority-run French-language universities.

• (1625)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Absolutely. It would be interesting to do a comparison, because almost 40% of federal funding for Quebec universities goes to English universities, and I think it's not at all the same proportion for French universities outside Quebec. So there is an imbalance between funding in Quebec and funding outside Quebec.

My next question is for Ms. Mariève Forest.

You talked about a restorative perspective. Were you referring to the fact that, for a very long time, the teaching of French was prohibited in schools in francophone and Acadian communities outside Quebec? That led to a very significant assimilation.

Even in Ontario, the first French-language public high schools did not appear until 1968.

The Chair: I would ask Ms. Forest to respond in 20 seconds.

Ms. Mariève Forest: I wasn't going back that far in that regard.

As French-language post-secondary institutions have grown in recent years, one cannot think that the strength of an institution that has been around for 20 years is the same as that of one that has been around for 100 or 150 years. Even though French-language institutions existed a long time ago, there has been more development on that front recently.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, you now have the floor for the next six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Forest.

You mentioned it in your statement, but I would like to know your thoughts on the situation of Laurentian University in Sudbury. In order to retain francophone students and workers and to have a vibrant francophone community, we need French-language educational institutions and universities like Laurentian University.

Why should it be a priority to provide French-language post-secondary education to French-language minority communities, particularly in Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Post-secondary institutions play an important role in identity construction. Other studies that have been conducted before ours have shown this as well. When they acquire this sense of linguistic security and competence, students are able to communicate easily in French, offer solutions in French, and develop partnerships when they enter the workforce. French-language post-secondary institutions contribute to this.

It is important to secure spaces within post-secondary institutions where French is fluent, where communications are in French. It is important that bilingual institutions, which operate in bilingual environments, have the opportunity to create those environments.

We have not further explored existing safeguards. However, given the current situation, I suspect that we could have identified gaps in this regard within Laurentian University.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My next question is for Alain Dupuis of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Would you like to highlight any elements that the government should consider in modernizing the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Yes, certainly.

Our response to the reform document that was introduced this winter was very positive. As I said, it addresses many of our concerns.

That said, there are a few things that we're following closely. Obviously, part VII of the Official Languages Act, which affects the development of English and French minority communities, needs to be strengthened and clarified. Currently, when we work with the federal government and the various departments, we do not have a clear definition of what constitutes a positive measure to support our development.

We need to define the concept of “positive measure” and we also need to define what it means to “consult with communities” when developing programs. In the past, some governments have been less likely to consult with communities, and unfortunately this has resulted in programs being created that are parachuted in and do not meet the needs of those communities.

Then I would say that it is very important for the federal government to support the “by” and “for” that I was mentioning, which is the ability of communities to do their own development. Sometimes this is done through transfers to the provinces and territories, but often it can also be done through direct investments in institutions that will manage funds on behalf of the federal government. This is in keeping with the idea that communities are development partners of the federal government, not just groups to be funded. From this perspective, federal assistance to communities should be used to strengthen community ownership.

I have talked about transfers to the provinces and territories. The federal government transfers a great deal of money for health, education and infrastructure to the provinces and territories. However, we often can't follow that money and we can't demonstrate that it has any impact on our communities. We could transfer billions of dollars in infrastructure to the provinces by including a language clause that would require the provinces to consult the minority to find out their infrastructure needs. This would ensure that the provinces and territories take our needs into account when setting their priorities, which directly impact our communities.

One final element of part VII is very important to us, and that is the issue of francophone immigration. In 2003, the federal government set a target of 4% for francophone immigration and this target has never been reached. The demographic weight of francophones continues to fall year after year, and the target of 4.4% for 2023 is therefore no longer sufficient. A new catch-up and repair target must be established to ensure that the demographic weight of our communities will increase in the future, rather than stay the same or decline.

I will stop here. These ideas for supporting community development stand out to us.

• (1630)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Forest, how do you see the modernization of the Official Languages Act? What are your thoughts on this project?

Ms. Mariève Forest: If you look at the different dynamics that exist in post-secondary institutions, this modernization perspective is quite interesting. This is also true for immigration.

There is also the idea of approaching the French issue in a different way, which was promoted in the white paper. We did studies on English-language post-secondary institutions in Quebec. When we looked at the numbers for post-secondary institutions, we found that treating English-speaking minorities in Quebec and French-speaking minorities outside of Quebec equally was a problem.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Thank you, Ms. Forest.

We'll start another round that will last five minutes this time.

Mr. Godin and Mr. Williamson will have the next five minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I have any time left, I'll gladly give it to my colleague, Mr. Williamson. However, when you're passionate, sometimes you don't see the time go by. I hope that I'll be able to give him the floor.

I have a few questions, but I'll start by thanking the representatives of three organizations who came to speak today.

I'll start by asking Mr. Dupuis a question.

Mr. Lefebvre referred earlier to the previous Conservative government for political purposes. I, for one, am very proud of what the Conservatives did for the francophonie. I'll ask you a very simple question, Mr. Dupuis.

A budget was tabled last week. Since the start of this meeting, you have referred more than once to the importance of creating opportunities to use French in everyday life. Of course, these opportunities must be available in post-secondary institutions, but you also talked about the pre-school years.

Have you suggested to the current government that, as part of the child care program, the provinces be required to open French-language daycares in provinces with French-speaking minorities?

Has this been proposed to the government?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Absolutely. We spoke about this with Minister Mélanie Joly last week.

We'll also be submitting arguments to Minister Ahmed Hussen to make sure that a very clear language provision will ensure that the provinces consider the French-speaking minority when setting up these child care programs.

There's a shortage of 5,000 spaces in French-language daycares outside Quebec. There's work to be done. Before money is transferred, this will need to become a federal obligation.

• (1635)

Mr. Joël Godin: This is a great opportunity to support these minorities, Mr. Dupuis.

However, in the budget, I didn't see any mention of support for francophone minorities outside Quebec.

My next question is for Ms. Forest.

Ms. Forest, you identified a recurring issue that gets carried forward from year to year. You spoke about tuition fees, which are playing an increasingly significant role in the management of the operating budgets of institutions. This is one issue, but not the only one. We're seeing this in the case of Laurentian University. It's perfectly legitimate for institutions to try to remain competitive and make ends meet. However, at some point, they stray from their objectives and values.

How can we find a solution to prevent this decline? Being what it is, money is needed to run an institution such as a university.

Ms. Mariève Forest: That's a big question.

In 2018-19, 46% of the revenue for post-secondary institutions came from governments. The federal government's share was around 10%, and just over 25% came from tuition. Those are the main revenues for post-secondary institutions.

If we want institutions to become less dependent on tuition fees, more government investment is needed. In my view, this option is the priority. In addition, it's important to understand the following dynamic. Institutions have been able to increase tuition revenues largely because of international students, which is another issue. This issue goes well beyond official languages. However, it's more difficult to develop strategies to recruit international students. Also, the western academic units have had many financial issues in this area.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I want to thank Ms. Forest for the response.

Since I'm sharing my time with my colleague, Mr. Williamson, I must stop here.

The Chair: Mr. Williamson, you have the floor for 40 seconds.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): I thought that Mr. Godin would make use of all the time. I'll let him speak.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Williamson.

I have a quick question for Mr. Jedwab.

Mr. Jedwab, you spoke about targets being poorly defined. How would you best advise us to define our targets before promoting the protection of the French language?

The Chair: Mr. Jedwab, you have the floor for 15 seconds.

Mr. Jack Jedwab: In the case that Mr. Dupuis referred to, a very specific target was set for immigration.

You must establish the resources and the process to reach this target. Don't create targets that are too vague because they're open to interpretation. The targets must be more specific.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor for the next five minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've had the opportunity to serve on the Standing Committee on Official Languages since 2015. Some witnesses have appeared several times. The FCFA representatives have come often since 2015. They came particularly often in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

I'm thinking of the benefits that linguistic minorities in the country will obtain from the census that my colleague, Mr. Lefebvre, referred to.

In the past, in an effort to help language communities, some governments chose to make cuts in the court challenges program. The current government has chosen to include it in future legislation. This is clearly written in the white paper. Some governments chose to wait before funding universities. This government has chosen to fund them. In the past, other governments chose to stick to the short census form, which included a brief question about where francophones outside Quebec lived.

I want to speak to the FCFA representative.

What was your reaction when you heard that the 2021 census would fully comply with section 23 of the charter, through a long form?

I want you to give a short answer, because I have several questions.

• (1640)

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Finally!

Ha, ha!

This remained unresolved for so long. We've been trying to get this census for years.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

I want to thank all the stakeholders, but the FCFA played a major role in this.

I know that. I've been participating in this committee for a long time. The FCFA has met one-on-one with various members many times since 2018, and more often in 2019 and 2020, in our offices in Ottawa, in the good old days before the pandemic.

I want to hear from Mr. Johnson, but unfortunately that isn't possible.

Mr. Dupuis, when you read the white paper, you saw each item. Can you briefly describe what the FCFA was saying at that time?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Finally, but we need a bill. We look forward to seeing these intentions reflected in the bill very soon.

Mr. René Arseneault: I want to speak to everyone.

I'll come back to this. Get ready, Ms. Forest. I have some questions about the top three priorities in the white paper, in your opinion.

Ms. Forest, first of all, I think that we invited you too early, because a document must be provided later. In any case, you'll send the document to the committee when it's available, whenever that may be.

You said earlier that 2% of people whose first official language spoken, or FOLS, is French, attend university. Is that right?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Not quite, but I understand the confusion, because the figures go by fast.

This figure represents the 2% of people who studied in French in 2018-19 at the post-secondary level, which includes colleges and universities.

Mr. René Arseneault: Two per cent—

Ms. Mariève Forest: We couldn't determine what percentage of these people spoke French as their first language.

That said, we had another statistic, which I'm trying to remember. If I recall correctly, of the 2015 graduates, 37% of people whose first language is French studied in French, outside Quebec, while 97% of people whose first language is English studied in English. This shows a major discrepancy. In Quebec, the issue isn't really the same for anglophones.

Mr. René Arseneault: We can't say that the 2% is made up solely of people whose first language is French. It could be a mix of English-speaking students and bilingual people who come to study in French. Is that right?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Yes. Many of these people are francophiles. I can confirm that there are many francophiles, because colleges and universities provide French programs. However, in general, there aren't any immersion programs, so the student populations are often mixed.

Mr. René Arseneault: Perfect, thank you.

I want to come back to the budget issue, which my colleague Mr. Godin touched on. The budget announced \$121 million for francophone universities outside Quebec. How can we ensure that our francophones are proud to attend these universities?

How can this money in the budget help our post-secondary institutions?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds at most.

Ms. Mariève Forest: Wow!

So many things could be done, such as developing programs. When a university's options are insufficient, people won't necessarily want to go there.

Scholarships are a significant incentive, because English has a very strong pull.

Both of these measures could be implemented.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

The next speakers will have even less time to talk.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's fine.

We're talking about setting specific goals. Mr. Dupuis spoke about increasing the demographic weight of francophones. That's good. The action plan for official languages 2018-23: investing in our future talks about maintaining the demographic weight of people whose first language is French, which I think was about 4%. Wouldn't it be better to look at the language used at home and to take into account language transfers?

My question is for Mr. Dupuis or Ms. Forest.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: For us, what matters isn't the language spoken at home, but rather French-speaking Canadians. Of course, we're talking about 2.7 million people who live part of their daily lives in French. That would be our definition.

Yes, the demographic weight must be increased. We're seeing a decline, so this mustn't only be stabilized, but we also need to talk about a fix. The target after 2023 will need to be much more ambitious, in my opinion.

• (1645)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It seems that about 40% of francophones outside Quebec transfer to English. This should also be a concern.

Ms. Forest, with respect to immigration, you said that we should take into account language transfers. Charles Castonguay, who wrote a brief and who came to speak to us, studied this very specific issue. He found that even Quebecers who move away from Quebec quickly come close to the rate of language transfer to English for francophones in general, which is nearly 40%.

If all we're doing is adding more French-speaking immigrants and the immigrants are transferring to English, that strikes me as an issue. Shouldn't this factor be looked at more, as you said?

Ms. Mariève Forest: If immigrants have the same language behaviour, we'll have ongoing, if not growing, demographic issues. We don't really know what the next census will show us. Are language transfers currently more prevalent? We'll know soon.

This dynamic hasn't been given much consideration. If we welcome only French-speaking immigrants and the next generation speaks English, this won't resolve the issue.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have one last quick question.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Beaulieu, but your time is up.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Dupuis, I know that one of my colleagues has already spoken about this, but I want to follow up on the daycare issue.

It's widely acknowledged that languages are best learned at a young age. For example, my mother is the reason that Greek is my first language and that I was able to learn it at such a young age, even here in Thompson, where there's no Greek community. A day-care program is a historic opportunity for bilingualism in Canada. This is a serious opportunity to train early childhood educators, to fund the opening of French daycares and to meet the demand across the country. The budget cuts at Laurentian University and the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean are coming at the worst possible time.

What would you say to the government, which is standing idly by in the face of these closures and which has overlooked the day-care issue in its agenda?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I hope that this isn't an oversight and that it will be part of the mandate. However, I suggest that the committee ask Minister Hussen to confirm his commitment to the terms of the new program. It won't take much of the billions of dollars to resolve the issue of access to French-language daycare. However, this matter must be considered at the outset.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Forest, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Mariève Forest: No. I'm sorry, but I haven't studied the daycare issue, so I'd rather not comment on it.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Did you want to make any general comments or perhaps raise an issue that has not come up today?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Yes. As far as the range of training programs is concerned, it's reasonable to think that institutions would benefit from introducing early education programs. They have the necessary resources; they just need more support. Cohorts can be small, so institutions have trouble offering these types of programs over the long term.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton and Ms. Forest.

We are now beginning another five-minute round. I assume Mr. Williamson or Mr. Blaney will go first.

Mr. Williamson, you may go ahead.

• (1650)

Mr. John Williamson: Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, I've been lucky enough to be in your position and chair the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I was very proud when Stephen Harper's Conservative government introduced a program to specifically support language communities.

Members will recall Bernard Lord, who helped develop the road map to support communities and, above all, a program to support minority communities in the area of education. Unfortunately, when the Liberals came to power in 2015, it took them a long time to bring back the language rights support program. They later reinstated the court challenges program. Precious years were lost in the meantime.

For members on this side, it's important that the federal government be there when communities need help. That's the case with Laurentian University, which is in need of special support from the

government; for that reason, we will be looking into the issue. Conservative members understand the importance of doing more than just talking a good game. I agree with the FCFA. The white paper contains some great stuff, but what is happening on the ground in the meantime? French is declining and post-secondary institutions offering second-language programs, especially in French, are unravelling. Laurentian University, the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean and Université de Moncton all come to mind.

Mr. Jedwab, you know how important the English-speaking community is to Quebec. This may be more of a provincial concern, but what is the best way to attract French speakers to anglophone CEGEPs and universities?

Can you share your thoughts on that?

Mr. Jack Jedwab: I will comment on French speakers because the bulk of francophones in Quebec, particularly in Montreal, want to learn English.

The problem arises in high school, where English instruction does not seem to be adequate for a certain number of francophones. That is probably one of the reasons why, in the era of globalization, some francophones wish to continue their education in English and become more proficient in English. In Quebec's case, the answer is to enhance the English courses offered in high school.

Nevertheless, that poses a challenge, because as soon as people have better English skills, they have better access to CEGEPs.

It's a complicated issue, but there is another solution, one that the CEGEPs, themselves, would probably have to implement. It requires CEGEPs to strike a better balance in the education they offer in both languages, including for English speakers in Quebec interested in learning French and becoming fluent.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Yes, you are right, Mr. Jedwab. Students already learn English in francophone high schools. In fact, people often say that a French speaker has to be bilingual already in order to get into an anglophone CEGEP, but that has more to do with globalization, as you mentioned. Our teaching institutions are already doing a very good job when it comes to second language instruction.

I have a follow-up question.

The challenge is quite clear in Quebec. Does the federal government have a role to play in supporting institutions that promote French in Quebec and elsewhere? The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste comes to mind. Do you think the federal government could decide that the organization plays an important role in helping French thrive?

Mr. Jack Jedwab: I think it depends on the programs, rather than the actual organization.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Of course. That's a very good answer.

Mr. Jack Jedwab: Programs should determine, on the basis of the terms of reference, which organizations receive funding, be it the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste or another organization.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Yes, it should be based on the programs and services they offer. Thank you.

If I have enough time, I'd like to ask the FCFA representatives one last question. I'd like to hear your take on the role the federal government should play in the Laurentian University matter. Mr. Dupuis, everyone knows the situation is critical.

What do you expect the federal government to do in terms of supporting post-secondary institutions and preserving their vitality, specifically in northern Ontario?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Right now, the community is rallying behind a proposal to establish a French-language university in northern Ontario. I hope the federal government gives the new institution start-up funding so it can offer most of the programs that were cancelled, and keep the teachers and students. There is not much time. The spring semester could be cancelled, but I hope that, come September, students will be able to take French-language programs in Sudbury.

• (1655)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Dupuis, do you think the federal government should take the lead in the Laurentian University matter, to make sure resources are not lost, but transferred to an institution established by and for the francophone community, as you so eloquently put it?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: Certainly, the federal government has a role to play, but it has to work with the province, which also has to decide on the model it will support. I think both levels of government need to work together.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

We now go to Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

It is your turn for five minutes.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for the FCFA representatives and Ms. Forest. If I have enough time after that, I'll ask Mr. Jedwab a question.

Mr. Dupuis, I want to revisit immigration.

Last year, just before the pandemic, the government released its immigration levels plan. The FCFA applauded the government's target for francophone immigration. We built a true francophone immigration corridor, and increased the number of admissions under the express entry program. You have been supportive of actions we have taken, so I want to thank you for acknowledging the government's efforts.

As you know, we have a number of pilot projects under way, including in the Atlantic provinces and in rural areas.

We have a common target of achieving 4% francophone immigration. Perhaps we will beat it; we can always dream.

What other measures or programs could the government put in place to meet the target, if not beat it?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: First, having immigration corridors to address shortages in specific fields is extremely important. The government is planning to create an immigration corridor to recruit francophone and French-language teachers. Health care and early childhood education are also areas in need of francophones. Provincial and territorial governments are on the hunt for bilingual workers. In light of all that, tying immigration to francophone labour needs is a win-win.

Something else I was pleased to see in the white paper was the government's commitment to establish a framework for the first-ever francophone immigration policy. It is essential that the policy be developed jointly with the communities, as co-creators. The policy should pave the way to doing things differently and implementing measures that are not necessarily applicable to anglophones. The government's approach has always been to establish an immigration program first and to add a francophone component afterwards. Going forward, it will be possible to give greater consideration to recruitment, promotion, international students and guidance to help temporary foreign workers become permanent residents.

This is an opportunity for a holistic approach to francophone immigration. The policy announcement and similar new tools make us very hopeful.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: That leads into my question for Ms. Forest.

Ms. Forest, earlier, you spoke about immigrant retention. I found your comments quite compelling. I actually had a conversation about that with FCFA representatives back when I was the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. An immigrant who is alone will be less inclined to stay in the community where they first arrived in Canada. The issue has more to do with the retention of immigrants than with their settlement and integration.

Support for the family reunification of immigrants could go a long way towards the retention of francophones, especially in regions, but also in larger urban centres like Montreal.

Do you have any other suggestions to help with that, Ms. Forest?

If you keep your answer brief, I'll have time to ask Mr. Jedwab a question.

Ms. Mariève Forest: I'll do my best.

I'll start by putting the issue in context, if I may. The reason I brought up retention is this. If immigrants adopt the same language behaviours as Canadian-born francophones, language retention will pose a challenge. I wasn't saying that language retention is more of a problem among immigrants.

Now, I'll circle back to your first question about programs. I think more could be done to mobilize temporary residents. We recently conducted a study showing that most of the francophones who were not born in the country and had come to Yukon were temporary residents. However, we aren't able to guide or support them in becoming permanent residents. There's still a lot to do on that front, so it's a promising avenue.

Ms. Soraya Martínez Ferrada: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Ms. Soraya Martínez Ferrada: Mr. Jedwab, when you appeared before the committee a year or two ago, you said that linguistic duality was “a foundational proposition”, one that was “fundamental to our country, its continuity and its cohesion.”

How can we achieve that goal if the proportion of francophones within Canada's population is declining?

• (1700)

Mr. Jack Jedwab: An effort is needed to increase the percentage of Canadians who speak French outside Quebec. For example, I think a lot more could be done to encourage anglophones in Ottawa, the national capital region, to become bilingual. It requires finding direct and indirect ways to promote French. A national ad campaign could even work. Seldom do I see ads on the public broadcaster's network that are aimed at the country's anglophones to promote the importance of learning French.

Personally, I am not satisfied with the level of bilingualism among anglophones outside Quebec.

Ms. Soraya Martínez Ferrada: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jedwab. You showed tremendous discipline.

We have time for another quick round. Our vice-chair Mr. Blaney asked me to split the remaining time as equally as possible, so each party represented on the committee will have two minutes.

The Conservative Party will start off the round.

Mr. Williamson, you may go ahead. You have two minutes.

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

I have a simple question for Mr. Dupuis. On second thought, it may not be quite that simple.

I am from New Brunswick, where we have French-language schools and English-language schools. No one here ever really says that French-language schools should not receive support. It is an argument you hear in other places, though, Ontario and Alberta, for instance. Our province, however, doesn't have as much money as Alberta and Ontario do. Why, then, is the message different?

What can the federal government do to change things?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: That's quite the question.

I think it's time for the federal government to sit down with the provinces, territories and communities to think about and discuss what more we can do collectively. It's time to stop looking at the

issue through the jurisdictional lens. Supporting Canada's francophone community requires partnership and commitment. We want to see all three parties—the communities, the provinces and territories, and the federal government—thinking about the future of official languages together and working in conjunction with one another.

No one is against official languages, but we must find ways to advance French and francophone interests in the future, for the next generation. It's a matter of national unity.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Jedwab, do you have anything to add?

I have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Jack Jedwab: Which topic would you like me to comment on?

Mr. John Williamson: In New Brunswick, a maritime province, we have French-language schools and English-language schools, but we don't have the same problem other places seem to have in terms of supporting French-language schools.

Why do you think that is? What can we do on a national level to remedy that?

Mr. Jack Jedwab: I don't think the situations of communities across the country are entirely symmetrical. We can't compare the circumstances of anglophones who live in certain parts of Quebec with the circumstances of francophones living in Chicoutimi or even New Brunswick. I know it's nice to have a national plan that relies on a symmetrical approach to foster as much equality as possible, but proportionality should really be applied. Some communities are more vulnerable than others, so it's important to take the level of vulnerability into account to determine where resources are needed to help more vulnerable communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jedwab.

Ms. Lalonde, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will take advantage of these two minutes to ask Mr. Jedwab a question.

We know that the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec is declining. But we have heard that the demographic weight of anglophones in Quebec is also declining, to the benefit of speakers of third languages. You referred to this earlier.

What is the influence of third languages on the vitality of the French language in Quebec?

Mr. Jack Jedwab: In terms of allophones, that is to say those who speak a third language, a large number of those who define themselves as allophones are able to speak French. I think the issue is more about determining how to include them in the definition of francophones.

Some definitions are more restrictive and others are broader in terms of who is included in the category of francophones. The same applies to defining who is anglophone. Under the most restrictive definition, a person's mother tongue must be French to be considered a francophone. This may well limit the number of francophones, since it excludes from the definition people with a third language as their mother tongue even though French is the language they speak most often at home. Consider the growing number of people with Arabic as their mother tongue and French as their second language. Are they francophones? Personally, I think so.

Depending on the definition, the picture changes. If we want a full picture, we must agree on the most inclusive definition to determine which people are considered francophones in Quebec and elsewhere. That's what Mr. Dupuis is doing: when he says 2.7 million people, he uses a broader and more inclusive definition of francophones.

• (1705)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: On that point, that is precisely what Ontario has chosen to do.

Ms. Forest, thank you very much for your testimony. I know that this is your first appearance before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Could you talk about the role of the provinces and territories in OLMC protection strategies?

Perhaps Mr. Dupuis would like to talk about it as well.

As for the demographic weight of francophones, can the investments made in recent years help?

The Chair: Ms. Forest, I will give you five to 10 seconds to answer.

Ms. Mariève Forest: Thank you for your question, but it is a little beyond my expertise.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Ms. Forest.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My question is for the FCFA.

Do you think it is still possible that a bill to modernize the Official Languages Act will be introduced before the summer?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I think it is possible. It is our hope that a bill will be introduced before the end of the parliamentary session.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If no bill is introduced, do you consider this to be a failure on the part of the government?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: The expectations are very high, since we have been talking about this for four years. It is time to introduce a bill on the matter.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Ms. Forest, you talked about institutional completeness. What I understand by that is that linguistic groups with stronger institutions have a stronger power of attraction.

Does it make sense to you that the federal government allocates 40% of its funding to English-language universities in Quebec, which it also does with CEGEPs?

The federal government invests about \$50 million in English-language elementary and secondary schools, but nothing in French-language schools. What do you think of the lack of symmetry with which we are still operating?

Ms. Mariève Forest: The data tends to show that it is not necessary to move towards that symmetry. When we look at the numbers, we see that less than 2% of post-secondary students study in French, whereas 3.8% are francophones. In Quebec, it's the opposite. There are about 14% anglophones but 20% to 25% are enrolled in anglophone universities and colleges.

It's a complex picture. We need more data than that.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Absolutely.

I would like to come back to what Mr. Jedwab said earlier. A number of studies have shown that francophones who attend English-language CEGEPs do not do so to learn English. They already know English very well. Rather, it is the pull of the workplace that drives them to attend English-language CEGEPs, which are heavily overfunded.

Ms. Mariève Forest: It's also a matter of prestige.

There are prestigious English colleges in Quebec, and McGill University. It goes beyond the prestige of English.

It is difficult to study the matter of attraction. How can we attract students to French-language institutions? It's a big question and it's worth examining very seriously.

Mr. Jack Jedwab: Quebeckers have a strong desire to be bilingual.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have the thankless task of interrupting people when their time is up.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Ashton. Perhaps she will ask some questions along those lines.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask Mr. Dupuis a question about Minister Joly's statement.

You have seen the minister's discussion paper. Do you have any additional suggestions to make or shortcomings to point out? Do you think she is headed in the right direction?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I think she is headed in the right direction. We were pleased to see that a central agency, the Treasury Board, was appointed to coordinate the official languages policy, to ensure that it is implemented and that there is accountability. It is important to ensure that the proposed legislation looks at this horizontal role. It must be entrusted to one single government agency.

In terms of language of work, we look forward to seeing whether francophones outside Quebec will be able to work in their language in the regions where the communities are. That is what we hope to see.

The powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages must be strengthened even more. The commissioner must be given the power to impose monetary penalties.

Finally, with respect to part VII of the act, we must not just wait for regulations. Clear principles must be defined in the Official Languages Act. It is important to clearly define positive measures, consultation, what “by and for francophones” means, and how we will support this principle.

It is also important to define the objective of the new policy for francophone immigration. Is the objective to restore the demographic weight of francophones or to increase it? Is it an objective for outside Quebec or for the francophonie all across the country, including Quebec? These are some of our questions.

• (1710)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Jedwab, did you want to add anything on that or on any other topic?

Mr. Jack Jedwab: I would like to briefly talk about bilingualism, if I may.

There is a paradox in the desire of Quebecers to have it both ways, to be bilingual and to promote bilingualism outside Quebec. To illustrate this paradox, my daughter has a law degree from the

Université de Montréal and my son is doing his master's degree in engineering at the Polytechnique, but the president of the Parti Québécois studied at McGill. The paradox is that francophones are attracted to the prestige of universities such as McGill, and anglophones, like my children, are graduating from the Université de Montréal.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jedwab and Ms. Ashton.

With those words, we will conclude this meeting with the witnesses. I want to thank you very much for your participation.

We began with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. I want to thank Mr. Dupuis, director general, for making the presentation and answering questions, and Mr. Johnson, who also appeared as a witness.

Second, I want to thank the two witnesses who appeared as individuals: Dr. Mariève Forest, sociologist, president and founder of Sociopol and visiting professor at the University of Ottawa, and Dr. Jack Jedwab, president and chief executive officer, Immigration and Identities, Association for Canadian Studies and Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration.

Again, if you have any information to forward to us, please feel free to send it to the clerk. I wish you a great rest of your evening.

We will now go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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