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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1610)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 36 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee is meeting on the study of the federal support for French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in a minority situation.

I have a few things to tell you.

[*Translation*]

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

I assume everyone is wearing a headset with a boom microphone.

Today, we are beginning our study of federal support for French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in a minority situation. We will be spending four meetings on the study.

Welcome to the witnesses. We have with us the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Official Languages, a committee regular. Welcome, Minister. Joining her are officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Denis Racine, director general, official languages branch, and Julie Boyer, assistant deputy minister, official languages, heritage and regions.

You have seven and a half minutes for your opening statement, Minister. After that, we will move into questions from members. I have started the clock. The floor is yours, Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. I hope everyone is doing well. I'm happy to see you all.

I am pleased to be here with two of the wonderful officials I am fortunate enough to work with. As Mr. Dubourg mentioned, I have the support of Assistant Deputy Minister Julie Boyer.

Ms. Boyer, I believe this is your first time appearing before the committee. Thank you for being here.

Also with me is Denis Racine, who has a lot of committee experience; he has appeared with me a number of times.

[*English*]

It is a pleasure to have the chance to join you, and of course I'm here to answer your questions.

[*Translation*]

Having appeared before the committee on numerous occasions, I want to underscore just how important its role is. In the current landscape, it is vital to really understand how to protect, preserve and promote the vitality of official language communities all over Canada, as well as how to continue strengthening Canada's two official languages.

The committee's studies guide and inform government decision-making on crucial issues. That is why I am delighted to appear before the committee as part of its study on the Government of Canada's administration of federal funding and the positive measures taken by federal institutions to support post-secondary education for official language minority communities.

Although post-secondary education is an area of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, as everyone knows, the Government of Canada has been supporting the education efforts of the provinces and territories for more than half a century. We put bilateral agreements in place to promote minority-language education and second-language instruction. Federal funding is administered in accordance with a strict framework.

Our government takes very seriously its responsibility to support official language minority communities.

[*English*]

It is always a priority for us to be there, side by side, with our official language minorities.

[*Translation*]

We have always stood up to protect francophones in minority communities, and we recognize that post-secondary institutions are a cornerstone of the vitality of linguistic communities.

We are committed to supporting the development of those communities, promoting bilingualism, modernizing the Official Languages Act and providing a modern vision of Canada's linguistic duality. In the 2020 throne speech, our government made clear its intention to strengthen the Official Languages Act, taking into consideration the unique reality of French in North America.

In the 2021 budget, our government earmarked nearly \$500 million in investments to promote French and improve bilingualism, with \$121.3 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to make high-quality post-secondary minority-language education available across Canada.

Lastly, our government's public reform document, which I was pleased to share with the committee in April, clearly lays out our vision. We believe that all Canadians should recognize themselves in the Official Languages Act and that both official languages should be on equal footing, in other words, substantive equality should exist between English and French.

The government is responsible for ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to learn, speak and, live in, French in Canada, as is the case in English, of course. Education plays a crucial role, from preschool to post-secondary learning.

I'd like to share some facts with you. Every year, our government invests \$235 million to support bilateral agreements between Canada and the provinces and territories further to the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction. That is a very long name for a protocol, so it is often referred to as the official languages in education program, or OLEP. Approximately \$149 million is allocated to minority-language education, and \$86 million is allocated to second-language instruction.

The overall framework I'm describing encompasses positive measures to support post-secondary education in minority communities. Every agreement includes a provincial or territorial action plan, as well as supported projects for each educational level.

The provinces and territories determine which projects receive support and how much funding goes to each level, from preschool to post-secondary. However, since 2019-20, the agreements have contained stronger accountability measures and a requirement to consult stakeholders. Under the agreements, periodic reporting is also required for the activities undertaken and their impact on communities.

Federal funding of post-secondary education under the agreements sits at roughly \$40 million a year, about 17% of total education funding. I should add that programs provide financial support to community-based not-for-profit organizations in the education sector, such as to implement projects and cover operating costs.

Provinces and territories can receive additional funding for emerging needs, teacher recruitment and retention initiatives, and infrastructure projects. All of these positive measures matter because educational institutions are essential to the vitality, development and future of French-speaking communities throughout the country.

We understand that post-secondary institutions are essential to the vitality of official language minority communities. I am concerned about the situation at Laurentian University, as we all are. The same is true of Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. We are looking for solutions. We are working with the Province of Ontario to ensure northern Ontario has a post-secondary institution run by and for francophones. Today, in fact, I sent a letter to my Ontario counterparts to ensure \$5 million is set aside to address the

post-secondary education needs of northern Ontario's French-speaking community. We have always stood up to protect francophones in minority communities and we always will.

I look forward to answering your questions and engaging in a productive conversation. Ms. Boyer and Mr. Racine can also answer your questions, of course.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for your opening statement.

First up is the vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Blaney, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the committee, Minister. It's always a pleasure to have you, especially when you come bearing financial solutions to a problem we are trying to address. As you know, we are studying federal support for post-secondary institutions, but the situation at Laurentian University was really the impetus.

You announced \$5 million in funding. Can you tell us more about the criteria?

The French-speaking community is calling for a moratorium to ensure Laurentian University's programs continue to be offered until resources have been fully transitioned to francophone institutions.

Does the \$5 million come with conditions, or can the money be used now to address the problem northern Ontario is facing?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for your question, Mr. Blaney. It's very germane. Not only did I have some related discussions today, but I have also had ongoing conversations with members of the community for months. I have been in contact with a number of stakeholders. I have spoken to faculty union representatives, students and members of the francophone community, as well as people such as Ronald Caza, who is directly involved in the University of Sudbury case, and Dyane Adam, who oversees the Université de l'Ontario français.

At this stage, two considerations are key. First, an interim solution has to be found to address the programming that has been cut and sent outside northern Ontario, including the midwifery program that was available in French. Second, a long-term solution has to be found, one that is developed by, for and with francophones.

The solution has to come from the community, and that means people really have to communicate. Once the community brings forward its solution, people know the money will be on the table. The solution may involve the University of Sudbury or a partnership between the University of Sudbury and the network established through the Université de l'Ontario français. Meanwhile, if they need money to move the plan along, we can help them.

That is what we are suggesting, but we have to work with the Government of Ontario, because the creation of a university is governed by Ontario legislation. My counterparts Ross Romano and Caroline Mulroney have to sign off on the project, not only jurisdictionally, but also financially.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I see.

Are you saying you will provide the \$5 million only if the Government of Ontario shells out the same amount?

Conversely, is this important project a constitutional priority for you? Will you show leadership and support the project as soon as the community has a concrete plan?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have to work with the province.

For the Université de l'Ontario français, we had to make sure we had a fifty-fifty cost-sharing agreement. At the time, our position was that we would put money on the table, convince the province to participate and work with the community. After extensive talks and negotiations, we were able to create the university.

The wait is dragging on, with a process under way pursuant to the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and people waiting to see what will happen with Laurentian University. In the meantime, professors have lost their jobs and students have lost access to French-language programs in the Sudbury area.

We felt it was necessary to stop wasting time, so we put money on the table to help get things moving.

• (1620)

Hon. Steven Blaney: You are saying you are going to give \$5 million.

Will you require Ontario to put up the same amount, or are you prepared to commit immediately to helping francophone communities?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We are already committed, as I said. We have earmarked \$5 million, but we are waiting for Ontario to do the same.

Hon. Steven Blaney: All right. The funding is conditional, then. That wasn't clear from the letter.

In any case, we want the community to have access to the money. Obviously, another jurisdiction is involved, and we sincerely hope the province provides funding for the project. However, we do not think the federal government should put off providing urgently needed support to minority communities until the province forks out the money.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Blaney, I urge you to speak with your counterparts in Ontario, because I have no doubt they would be encouraged to hear from their fellow Conservatives in the House of Commons and listen closely to what you had to say.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Surely, they listen closely to you as well, seeing as you are the minister. My job, however, is really to make sure the federal government does its job and shows leadership, and since you are the heritage minister responsible—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —not the heritage minister, but the minister of official languages.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Yes, you are responsible for official languages.

That is why it's important to us that the federal government assume its role as a leader. I was disappointed to hear you say that the \$5 million was conditional. It seems some squabbling is going on, when all we care about is the money going to the communities.

I wish you would have said that the \$5 million did not come with conditions and was ready to be handed over to the communities because they needed it. The situations you talked about are dire. One of your colleagues has to deal with the reality day in and day out. That is why I wish you would have said that you were giving the \$5 million, that you were counting on the provincial government to lend its support, and that you were showing leadership by not attaching any strings to the funding, which by the way seems to have been voted. The government recently announced funding in the amount of \$121 million.

Is it true that funding for the official languages in education program has not increased since 2009?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, that isn't true.

Hon. Steven Blaney: What do you mean?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well—

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have the report here. It says, and I quote:

...federal funding for the Official Languages in Education Program has not increased since 2009.

That is in the report released today by the Commissioner of Official Languages, which is quite critical of the federal government's response and treatment of communities.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds to answer, Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is not true. In 2019, we injected an additional \$60 million in OLEP, which Mr. Racine and Ms. Boyer can confirm.

Hon. Steven Blaney: That is not mentioned in the report.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Lefebvre for six minutes.

Mr. Lefebvre, you may go ahead.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here once again. You always make yourself available, not just for committee meetings, but also any time an opportunity arises to have a discussion. I appreciate that.

As you know, I'm less than 1.5 kilometres away from Laurentian University. The situation facing the university is one of the reasons we are gathered today. I want to take a moment to talk about how, we, in the federal government came to find out about the situation at Laurentian University, what we were able to do and what we can do to help.

When did you find out that Laurentian University was in financial trouble?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Personally, I found out at the same time as everyone else, when the news broke.

It is true, however, that you contacted my office in December, Mr. Lefebvre. It seems Laurentian University was losing money because of the COVID-19 pandemic and had submitted a request for assistance.

That was in January, so my office decided to reach out to the Ontario government directly to raise the issue facing Laurentian University and see whether it was possible to change the funding allocations under the agreement. We were prepared to do that.

I should point out that many of the country's universities were concerned about the decline in international student enrolment and the challenges posed by virtual learning.

Laurentian University's request seemed reasonable given that it was in more or less the same boat as other universities in the country. That was in late January. The department contacted the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities but did not receive a response. Then, on February 1, we found out that Laurentian University had commenced proceedings under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The announcement was a huge surprise to all of us.

As I said, we are clearly looking for solutions.

At the same time, people don't know much about how bilateral agreements in education work between Ontario's government and the Canadian government. Those agreements enable the federal government to transfer funds to Laurentian University.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Essentially, the Government of Canada gives about \$253 million over three years directly to the Government of Ontario. That is by far the largest of all the envelopes. For the sake of comparison, the federal government's envelope for the Government of New Brunswick, which is next in terms of amount, is \$90 million. There is a huge difference between the two.

It is really the Government of Ontario that then decides how to distribute the money. Another area where we could provide support is in terms of infrastructure projects. For instance, the Government of Ontario can inform the federal government that it wants to give money to the University of Sudbury, and then ask it whether it also wants to participate in the funding. That is what we did by giving about \$1.5 million to Laurentian University for the renovation and use of the Alphonse Raymond building. The province also contributed \$1.5 million to the project.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: My colleague Mr. Blaney also talked about another fact that is not well-known.

Why doesn't the federal government give the money directly to Laurentian University, to the University of Sudbury and to community groups with a plan?

Can the federal government directly fund post-secondary education institutions such as Laurentian University or the University of Sudbury or any other university in the country?

How is the money transferred?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There is a reason for the federal department's lack of involvement in education: in the Constitution, education is a provincial responsibility. The only jurisdiction the federal government can use to get involved is its jurisdiction over official languages. It is actually enshrined in the Constitution that language rights are protected by the federal government.

So, thanks to its investment power, the federal government can decide to invest money to protect language rights and support the vitality of francophones in northern Ontario.

Therefore, strong institutions funded by the federal government must be created, such as post-secondary education institutions. However, the government can only do that through the provinces.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I would like you to confirm something for me, as this is a very important issue.

Had Laurentian University contacted your office directly saying that it needed financial assistance and asked you to lend it money, how would you have reacted?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We would have told the university that we would call the Government of Ontario to find a solution.

That is exactly what we did with the Université de l'Ontario français. We can apply political pressure to push the Government of Ontario to respect our vision for language rights, which we must defend in the current circumstances

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I announce that Mr. Beaulieu will have the floor for the next six minutes.

Mr. Beaulieu, we are listening.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Good afternoon, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would like to consider the issue from a global perspective. Are you familiar with the principle of institutional completeness?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, I have an idea of what you mean.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This is not a trick question.

According to sociologist Raymond Breton, the more developed a language community's network of institutions is, the less likely the community is to be assimilated and the stronger its vitality is.

According to Frederick Lacroix, a Quebec author and researcher, francophones make up 80% of Quebec's population and, to ensure the future of French, we must be able to integrate newcomers, to include them. I think that about 90% of funding for institutions in Quebec such as post-secondary institutions should go to francophone institutions. Therefore, the principle of institutional completeness also applies to this situation. The principle has also been invoked to keep Montfort Hospital and for situations outside Quebec.

I don't know whether you can explain this to me: in Quebec, the Quebec government allocates about 30% of its budget to anglophone post-secondary institutions, while anglophones account for just over 8% of the population. However, in Ontario, those whose mother tongue is French account for about 4.7% of the population, and they receive 3% of the provincial budget. They are already disadvantaged by the provincial funding.

In Quebec, the portion of the federal budget that is allocated to anglophone universities is growing. Mr. Blackwell calculated that, from 2000 to 2017, 38.4% of federal funding, or \$363 million, was allocated annually to anglophone universities. This means that francophone universities are receiving only 61.6% of the funding.

How would you explain this? Outside Quebec, it is sort of the opposite situation, and francophone post-secondary institutions are underfunded. Do you think that is fair?

• (1630)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for the question, Mr. Beaulieu.

I don't know where Mr. Lacroix is getting his numbers, but they certainly do not come from official languages programs. Université Laval and Bishop's University are the only two universities in Quebec that have received money from us, and Université Laval is not even an anglophone institution.

That money is allocated to those universities because the Government of Quebec gives them priority. The Quebec government presents various projects to support the community, and the Government of Canada does not impose priorities on it.

As for the rest, I would tell you that, as a Montrealer, I am very proud of our universities. They make Montreal an extraordinary city with researchers who are among the best in the world and university hospital centres that help us have access to the best health care in both official languages. In short, I am very proud of the work done at our Quebec universities.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Do you think the funding for francophone institutions should be proportional to the demographic weight of francophones?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Those are two different things.

When it comes to university funding, research chairs come into play. But they don't come under us, at official languages, but rather under another department. I am talking to you about post-secondary education assistance for official language minority communities, as well as projects supporting the university sector in Quebec.

We should certainly provide francophone minority communities with even more assistance because we know there is a risk of assimilation and we recognize that French in the country has been declining. That is why we recognized, in the Speech from the Throne, that French was a minority language and that we must do more to protect it. That is why we will introduce a bill on this issue, and why we want to strengthen—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't mean to interrupt you, but I see that I don't have much time left.

We definitely agree on that. We want francophone and Acadian communities to have sufficient funding to develop and counter the very worrisome assimilation rate, which has been growing with every census. We also want the decline of French in Quebec to be countered, because, if French were to decline in Quebec, it would decline even more everywhere else.

What do you think about the fact that, when it comes to the reform of the Official Languages Act, the Government of Quebec is saying that positive measures should always be implemented by consulting Quebec and with its consent?

• (1635)

The Chair: Minister, please answer within 10 seconds.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It will be my pleasure to continue the conversation on this with the Government of Quebec. I had an opportunity to talk to the minister of education, the minister in charge of Canadian relations, the minister of justice and the Quebec premier's cabinet. The conversations are ongoing, and I think we will definitely reach a good agreement.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Boulerice, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for joining us today. We really appreciate it.

My first question is about Laurentian University. The university needs about \$100 million. You are announcing today unilateral assistance, if I have understood correctly, of about \$5 million. That falls far short of the mark.

How can the university be saved by meeting only 5% of its needs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Laurentian University certainly must continue its process. I find that process appalling, as it is not normal for a university, a public institution, to end up having to use the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. That makes no sense, as the biggest creditor is the provincial government. It makes no sense to decide to give up on a university.

This is not the first time that has happened, as you know. You are a member from Quebec, as am I. In our beautiful city of Montreal, the infamous Îlot Voyageur project nearly bankrupted the Université du Québec à Montréal, UQAM. At the time, the Government of Quebec decided to cover the cost instead of ensuring that UQAM would end up in court.

Of course, \$5 million is a start. It goes without saying that the money is meant to help the community get organized.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Okay. So we agree that it is a start, that more must be done and that things must be taken further. You have started to take action for Laurentian University, and so much the better. You did the same for the Université de l'Ontario français.

What about Campus Saint-Jean, in Edmonton? Where does your government stand on that issue?

What is happening over there is extremely worrisome. There is a real risk of losing French programs that cannot be replaced. There is actually nothing else.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is still shocking, as the Government of Alberta decided to fight in court instead of providing its portion of the funding. We have allocated \$3.7 million for Campus Saint-Jean, and that money has remained on the table. It will be my pleasure to continue to find solutions for Campus Saint-Jean and to pressure the Government of Alberta, but I am still appalled that the Franco-Albertan community must fight in court, spend money and use the court challenges program to defend its language rights.

In the meantime, the Government of Alberta would rather pay legal fees to challenge Franco-Albertans' language rights.

So much for resource allocation, right?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, so much for that. That said, I also know of a federal government that is challenging the rights of residential school survivors. We could talk about that. You are paying lawyers a lot of money to challenge indigenous rights.

Concerning Campus Saint-Jean, are you telling me you will wait for the provincial government to take action before you do your share to defend and save Campus Saint-Jean?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: In the budget, we received an additional \$121.3 million for post-secondary institutions. So we will definitely be using an open hand philosophy and trying to help Campus Saint-Jean.

It is not true that we will give up on it. We are not that kind of a government. That is not how we have treated our language minorities over the past five years.

As Minister of Official Languages, it is not true that I will personally participate in language rights violations in Alberta.

• (1640)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: We received a report from the Commissioner of Official Languages today, a rather damning report on the situation of French and on respect for bilingualism within federal institutions.

I would like to hear your comments on that. In 2019, you promised to modernize the Official Languages Act. In the end, you produced a white paper of sorts, a discussion paper.

I have already introduced three bills in the House of Commons. We looked at whether you have done the same, and I don't think you have ever introduced a bill.

Do you want me to help you introduce a bill?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am obviously very eager to produce something, especially a bill. I will definitely make sure to introduce a bill in 2021.

It would be my pleasure to work with you on introducing a bill, as that is extremely important.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, it is very important, but when are you planning to introduce a bill on the modernization of the Official Languages Act?

It is nice to have other consultations, discussion papers and so on, but we saw today in the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages that the number of complaints has tripled in recent years. It has tripled, and that is significant. It is high time we had a new bill.

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Boulerice, I have a request from Mrs. Lalonde.

Do you have a point of order, Mrs. Lalonde?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I have a great deal of respect for my colleague Mr. Boulerice.

I wanted to know how his question relates to the motion before us.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice is talking about introducing bills. That concerns official languages.

I will actually ask Mr. Boulerice to try to ask questions related to the study we are conducting this afternoon.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Boulerice. You have one minute of your six left.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Great.

I just wanted to talk generally about the defence of francophones' rights and about public services in French.

I see that my colleague Mr. Angus is here. I would like to give him the last minute of this first round, should he like to ask questions.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, 45 seconds now remain.

Go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madame Joly, thank you.

My question is simple. Mr. Haché said there were multiple meetings with the federal government, but you said you didn't meet with them, so did Mr. Lefebvre let you know that they were facing bankruptcy? That's what Mr. Haché told us—that they were in crisis and that after the meeting they had to make the decision to go into bankruptcy.

Who told you that they were in crisis, or were you not told?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I was not told. If I had been told, I would have clearly called the province to find a solution, because—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I believe you.

Mr. Lefebvre was speaking with them in December. You said that he was the contact person. I just wanted to confirm that.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: He contacted my office in January to talk about it.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Good afternoon, Minister Joly.

I believe in miracles. We saw an incredible miracle today. Just before our meeting, there was a \$5 million announcement. It's encouraging, but to me it shows a vulnerability on the part of the government, in this regard, to Laurentian University and other institutions. Perhaps the government could do a lot more. I have a few questions to ask.

Ms. Joly, your government is willing to help francophone, francophile and bilingual students and the post-secondary campuses where they study, but you are placing the obligation to act first on other governments. That's not exactly what you said, but you said they had to come to the table and you were going to lobby the governments of Premier Kenney and Premier Ford. That's politics.

I wonder why aid is always attached to conditions and why you don't give money without conditions.

• (1645)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I just want to tell you that right now we don't have any problems with Dennis King, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories or the Horgan government in British Columbia. We only have problems with governments that cut funding to their university campuses when it directly affected francophone communities.

This is not politics, Mr. Dalton. It's because these governments are making decisions that do not take into account language rights in this country. Unfortunately, that's too often the history of our country. That is why we must act, as a federal government, to protect language rights. I take my role as a defender of language rights very seriously.

Moreover, you talk about a \$5-million miracle, but I want to confirm that there will be several other miracles, since the budget provides for \$121.3 million more. So we can expect to have at least

40 miracles. It will be my pleasure to announce them to you one after another.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Fine.

The federal government gives money directly to universities all the time. A few months ago, your own parliamentary secretary announced \$45 million for projects at McGill University with no matching funds from any other government.

So you can do that if you have the will to do so, correct?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: You are talking about research funds. This has nothing to do with official languages funds. It has to do with research chairs, and the Department of Industry manages that. All university researchers in the country apply, and the chosen researchers decide what research will be supported. It works much the same way for the Canada Council for the Arts, an organization that is normally completely neutral and independent of government.

What I can tell you is that, on our side, the funding is through bilateral agreements and is intended for small infrastructure projects. I say small projects because we rarely get to \$5 million.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I see.

Shouldn't there be some leadership from your government, since access to minority language education is mentioned in federal documents?

You didn't need the other governments to be at the table to give \$10 million to Loblaw's for refrigerators, even though grocery stores are not under federal jurisdiction. That was a small project, wasn't it?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This is completely unrelated.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Yes, it is related, in an important way.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Dalton, I have a lot of respect for you. I know you were in provincial politics before. You have a lot of experience as a politician, so I know you understand that this question was perhaps out of order.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm listening, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I would like to return to two points of order that were made.

Earlier, Mr. Boulerice asked a very legitimate question. We know that in the white paper there are commitments to post-secondary education. That is what we are talking about today, and we want the federal government to take a leadership role.

Mr. Boulrice's question was a good one, as was Mr. Dalton's, who asked why the minister did not decide to convey funds unilaterally. He gave an example that may have bothered my Liberal colleagues, who are not proud of it. But the fact remains that the question is very relevant: why is the federal government not playing its leadership role?

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, I understand what you are saying. However, when I spoke on Mr. Boulrice's question, I said that we were talking about introducing bills. I know there is some connection to the topic we are discussing.

However, we are talking about Loblaws and other topics, and I would ask all members to try to ask questions based on our agenda. We are talking about post-secondary education and we need to try to stay on topic.

Mr. Godin now has a point of order.

• (1650)

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Chair, I think that as parliamentarians we can use terms, situations and contexts that lead us to the main topic. I think we have that right as parliamentarians. I would like my colleagues in the governing party to respect that practice.

The Chair: Of course. As usual, the committee is functioning well. I am appealing to your co-operation to keep it that way, as we are debating an extremely important issue.

That said, I will recognize Mr. Serré for the next five minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, thank you for your support for francophones in Northern Ontario. I sincerely thank you for working with Laurentian University to find a solution. In addition, I thank you very much for creating the Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury for the francophone and anglophone communities.

As a Laurentian University graduate, I was extremely upset, astounded and frustrated, when I learned of the cuts to Laurentian University that were announced on April 12. Many students and families have suffered the consequences.

Minister, in this committee, we often talk about responsibilities and roles. Right now, there is a working group that wants to make the University of Sudbury the French-language university of mid-north Ontario. What advice would you give to this task force?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for your question.

I have had the opportunity to speak to various members of the group that has a mandate to strengthen the University of Sudbury. Because the francophone community is in a minority situation, there is a need for community leaders to talk to each other and get organized to find a solution. I told them to talk to people like Dyane Adam and Carol Jolin from AFO, and all the different leaders who work in post-secondary education.

It's important to have a coherent position. That's what happened with the University of French Ontario. This university was created because there was unanimity on the issue, and it is that sort of consensus that will help the community come up with a project. We are

putting \$5 million aside for francophone programs because we want people to know that we will be there to help them, even if the discussions are still ongoing and even if they have to get organized. We will invest money to support the creation of this project.

You don't create a university overnight, especially when it's a new one. It takes some expertise in the field and it takes a lot of work. You also have to work with the province, because it has the power to introduce legislation and provides a lot of the funding for programming. That's why we wanted to give these folk some kind of financial comfort so they can move forward.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you for your response.

The opposition members on this committee, particularly Mr. Angus, who is a Northern Ontario MPP, have only repeated that we knew that Laurentian University was going to come under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. As you said, that is not true at all.

Mr. Lefebvre and I have met with Laurentian University officials, as we have since 2015. We are working hard with Laurentian University and we have discussed their concerns. However, no one in the community, including Mr. Lefebvre and myself, thought the university would go to court. The opposition says that we knew about this. This is not true, and political games are being played on the backs of Laurentian University employees and students.

Some people say we can stop this legal process. Can the federal government do that? Have you taken any steps in that direction?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, it can't. Of course, this is the lawyer in me talking to you. The courts are independent; there is independence in the judicial system.

In April, when I first talked to President Haché, I asked him why he hadn't come to us and talked to us about it. I told him that we could have worked with him. I asked him if he had talked to the province. He said yes, and that the province was very aware of the situation.

In short, that decision was made by the province, and it was basically to push Laurentian University into the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. I find that unfortunate.

Now, the damage is done and we have to get into solution mode. So that's why I will gladly work with my counterparts, Caroline Mulroney and Ross Romano, so that we can find a solution by and for francophones.

At the time, there were only bilingual universities, especially in Ontario. The University of French Ontario was the first institution administered by francophones and for francophones in Ontario. We can, therefore, found a second one.

• (1655)

Mr. Marc Serré: I thank you for working with the province to find a solution. We are doing the same locally. We need to continue to find solutions. We need to continue to help our francophones and our post-secondary institutions.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré. That's all the time you had.

As we had discussed with the team, the analyst and the clerk, the minister has to leave the meeting at 5:00 o'clock. So we have two two-and-a-half-minute slots left, the first being for Mr. Beaulieu and the second for Mr. Boulerice.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you. I will hurry.

Madam Minister, earlier, you refused to comment on the extravagant funding for anglophone post-secondary educational institutions provided by the federal government, by saying that your department is not responsible for it. However, you gave the example of grants under the official languages program to Bishop's University and Université Laval. I asked you a question earlier about the fact that the Government of Quebec is asking that all positive measures be done with Quebec's consent. There are a whole series of requests in relation to the reform of the Official Languages Act.

Could you tell me one of Quebec's requests on which you agree?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We agree with a number of requests from Quebec. Recognizing that French is a minority language is one of them. There are a number.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That is not a measure.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Supporting francophone communities in minority situations is another request on which we agree.

You talk to me a lot about the extravagant funding for anglophone universities in Quebec. That issue is bigger than me, Mr. Beaulieu. Maybe you should ask the leader of the Parti Québécois, a McGill University graduate, why he studied, why he was entitled to study, in English in a post-secondary educational institution in Quebec. He claims—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Your answer is a little simplistic.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My answer is not simplistic. It simply shows the moral leadership.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Even the leader of the Parti Québécois feels that there should be equitable funding for francophone universities—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's the same for Martine Ouellet. She is a McGill University graduate. I can give you a lot of other examples.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Fine, but it's very easy to give individual examples.

You haven't told me about any of the measures. You have only told me about general principles. It's easy to say that you want to stand up for French. However, when the time comes for action, you do nothing.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: For federal companies, we will reach an agreement with the Government of Quebec. We recognize the right to work in French, the right to be served in French, and the right not to be discriminated against in federal companies.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have another question for you. At the moment, the Quebec component of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future, provides funding only for the English side in all kinds of ways, anglophone pressure groups, and so on.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is not true. We give \$600 million per year to the Government of Quebec for integration—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In the official languages program—

The Chair: One person at a time. You have 15 seconds left.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That's fine.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu, I will answer later.

The Chair: We also have to protect our interpreters.

The floor is yours, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Minister, I asked you a question about the official languages program. You strayed a long way from that subject and you told me about culture, and so on. When I asked you other questions, you didn't want to answer, because your department is not responsible.

Within the official languages program, what are you going to do to stand up for French?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Madam Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As part of the modernization of the Official Languages Act, we recognize francophone immigration. We allocate \$600 million per year to Quebec for francizing immigrants. First, the money that the federal government gives to Quebec allows immigrants to be francized.

Second, we have many other cultural levers: Telefilm Canada, Radio-Canada, and so on. In a word, all the great institutions that ensure the strength of French in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Thank you very much, Mr. Beaulieu.

Just before Mr. Boulerice takes the floor, I want to remind you that Ms. Boyer and Mr. Racine will stay with us after 5 p.m.

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

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, I am speaking to you as a graduate of the Université de Montréal and of McGill University. Perhaps you can use that in your future comments.

Does the bankruptcy of Laurentian University not reveal that our whole post-secondary education system in Canada is underfunded? It's not just about programs for francophones in northern Ontario and Franco-Ontarians in general, is it?

I ask that question because I was asked the same one by the Canadian Association of University Teachers. They are afraid that this bankruptcy is the canary in the coal mine, as people used to say, meaning that it is the first example of the privatization of our post-secondary education.

What are your thoughts on that?

• (1700)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I feel that there are two aspects to your question.

First, universities, especially those that serve official language minority communities, have certainly been weakened by the pandemic. Those universities live on various sources of funding, especially foreign students, whether we like it or not. So when those students are no longer there in person, that income disappears. The only thing left is income from food outlets, parking, and so on. Their situation is weakened as a result.

That is why we are looking at an investment of \$121.3 million. We knew that the problem was going to spread and that we were going to have to solve it. So we set aside some new money.

As for the other aspect of your question, we have to create ways to protect those institutions. That is why we want to do it in a future bill that will modernize the Official Languages Act. I think that that's more or less the question you wanted to ask me earlier. It's very important to recognize that post-secondary education is essential to a community's vitality

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, you have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Okay.

As you said earlier, you don't start a university by snapping your fingers.

Some programs may well be abolished, such as the training program for midwives at Laurentian University. I agree with you. Do you commit to ensuring the survival of francophone programs in general, and that one in particular, because it is unique in Ontario?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes. I actually talked to Ms. Adam about it this morning. We are trying to find solutions.

I am ready to put money on the table to support that specific program.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

I know that you have to leave us, so let me thank you for appearing before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We will be continuing with Julie Boyer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, and with Denis Racine, Director General, Official Languages Branch.

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

The Chair: Goodbye, Madam Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Goodbye.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, the floor is yours for the next five minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the Minister for coming to the committee. I feel that is important. If there is one quality I appreciate in this Minister, it is that she makes herself available. That is to her great credit. The same cannot be said about her actions or the measures the government puts in place, but I do want to thank Ms. Joly as a person. I hope that you will pass that message on to her.

Now I would like to take this opportunity to ask Mr. Racine and Ms. Boyer some questions.

Earlier, Ms. Joly mentioned that the government intends to provide \$5 million in financial assistance to Laurentian University. We heard the same thing in the media today. However, since this catastrophic situation began, she has been telling anyone who will listen that it's not the federal government's responsibility. It is always the provincial government's responsibility. However, when I talk about the situation, I think of my colleague Mr. Lefebvre, the member of Parliament for Sudbury, who is suffering the consequences because it is happening in his backyard and he knows many of the people involved.

Is the Minister skating on thin ice, so to speak, by coming out and promising \$5 million in assistance?

To what extent do second-language post-secondary education institutions come under federal jurisdiction?

Isn't the federal government somewhat out of line by promising \$5 million in assistance?

The Chair: The floor is yours, Ms. Boyer.

• (1705)

Ms. Julie Boyer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, Department of Canadian Heritage): I will speak first and then I will hand over to Mr. Racine.

It is important to say that education is a provincial responsibility. When we negotiated the protocol for agreements for minority-language education and second-language instruction, which will come to an end in 2023, we agreed on the parameters for cooperation. We reiterated that education is in the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces. We therefore have to work with them in order to come to an agreement and to determine how we can support them.

Perhaps Mr. Racine would like to add to my answer.

Mr. Denis Racine (Director General, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): I think that we must bear one thing in mind. As the Minister and Ms. Boyer have said, since education is in provincial and territorial jurisdiction, it's important that requests come to us from the provinces.

In their current form, support programs for official languages do not allow us to fund post-secondary institutions directly and we have to do so through the provinces. It is therefore up to the provinces to propose activities, projects or programs for the post-secondary institutions. That is how the partnership can take shape.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Racine. I completely understand.

However, there were signs. Last February, it was clear that Laurentian University was heading straight into a wall.

I fully understand that education is in provincial jurisdiction. However, I also fully understand that championing the official languages is in federal jurisdiction. Today, the Minister decides to give out \$5 million. She is also very often critical of provincial and territorial governments.

As administrators, could you not have shown some leadership by making the first move? Your first mission is to protect and promote the official languages. So I am wondering why no specific action was taken and why no pressure was exerted before today.

I understand that provincial governments have other concerns and their own business to attend to. But the federal government has just one responsibility, that of promoting the official languages. So why did the federal government show no leadership?

Mr. Denis Racine: At the Department of Canadian Heritage, we are always in contact with our provincial counterparts.

When we were made aware of the situation, we began a dialogue with the province, which still continues today. We encouraged them to find a solution and to tell us how much the federal government should contribute to put the solution into action.

We are in constant dialogue with our counterparts in the province of Ontario, as we are with those in other provinces, in connection with the bilateral agreements that we have with each one of them.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Boyer and Mr. Racine.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

The next five minutes go to Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Racine, before February 1, did the province's department of education communicate with you with a view to obtaining financial assistance to support the official languages at Laurentian University?

Mr. Denis Racine: We received no specific request for Laurentian University. Under our bilateral agreements with Ontario, funding was allocated for post-secondary education, and a part of that funding goes to Laurentian University.

We received no request from the province about the situation at Laurentian University.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: How much money did the federal government contribute to Laurentian University through the province?

Mr. Denis Racine: Under the former protocol, the contribution was simply a global amount for post-secondary education. Last year, for the first time, the amounts were for post-secondary institu-

tions. If I am not mistaken, about \$1.9 million went to Laurentian University in 2018-2019 or 2019-2020.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

I would like some things to be clarified for Mr. Godin.

Can the Department of Canadian Heritage fund post-secondary institutions directly through its programs? If Laurentian University, the Université de Moncton or the Campus Saint-Jean asked you to fund its activities, could you do so?

● (1710)

Mr. Denis Racine: The answer to that comes in two parts. Since education is in provincial jurisdiction, we cannot fund the expenses for which the provinces are responsible. So we cannot fund operational or administration expenses, given that they are the responsibility of the provinces.

However, under the support programs for official languages, we can join with the provinces to sweeten the pot. We can help them to develop initiatives, improve programming, develop new programs, and even support recruitment. Those are only some of the examples. We recognize the specific needs for French as a minority language across the country.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: To make sure that I fully understand, could you tell me how much of the total envelope for the official languages in education program, the OLEP, is normally used in a year by the provinces to support post-secondary education?

Mr. Denis Racine: The funding varies from province to province. Earlier, I told you that an amount of \$1.9 million went to Laurentian University.

The funding varies from province to province and from year to year. Some of our funding is allocated to post-secondary education through bilateral agreements. We also have what we call complementary funds. These are used to fund special projects and projects that last for some time. They are used as a top-up, or to meet a particular need for a specific time.

So the funding varies from year to year, with no specific formula. We do not promise that a specific amount will be allocated to everyone in the post-secondary area. It's based on needs and on initiatives that the provinces design and submit to the department.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: So the provinces decide. You make the funds available and a province determines how it will distribute them.

Mr. Denis Racine: Discussions are held with the provinces about action plans. The bilateral agreements actually work through action plans. The federal level and the appropriate provincial level must agree on an action plan. We start with a basic discussion to agree on the initiatives that will result in funding. That is shared between the federal and provincial levels. A province can decide on its own to fund 100% of an initiative. But, within the framework of collaboration between the federal and provincial levels, things are done by discussion and mutual agreement.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: You mentioned a \$1.9 million OLEP envelope that was given to Laurentian University for 2019-2020. Yet, Laurentian University's budget is over \$200 million. So it's not this funding alone that will ensure the quality of French-language programs. That's kind of the point; the minister explained it. My colleagues think that the federal government could have transferred \$100 million, but that is simply not possible. Post-secondary education is a provincial responsibility. The minister said so and you said so as well.

It is clear, however, that we have a role to play in ensuring the strength of our French programs. This is the money in the budget that we provided. A record \$121.3 million was provided. This has never been done before. I think it can help, but for us at Laurentian University, it's too late. That's why the community is looking for a plan with local stakeholders. The goal is to ensure the sustainability of our programs here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre. That is all the time you had.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Blaney for five minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's very clear, basically, and we understand that the money has to go through the province.

My question to Mr. Racine is very simple. If the province comes up with a \$5-million project, can the money intended to rescue Laurentian University flow through the province?

Mr. Denis Racine: If the question is whether the money should or can go through the province, the answer is yes. This will follow a proposal from the province.

Hon. Steven Blaney: That's what I wanted to know. Thank you very much, Mr. Racine.

So, clearly, the federal government can provide \$5 million, go through the province and help the community.

If the Liberals want to play politics and set conditions, that's another story. Nevertheless, that is normal, given that we are politicians. I'm not going to drag you into that, Mr. Racine. You have answered my question. The federal government could allocate \$5 million to Laurentian University tomorrow morning if the province submitted a plan.

I would especially like to return to the white paper on official languages. The minister herself emphasized that she wanted to recognize how important post-secondary institutions are to the vitality of communities. We also discussed the decline of French.

Are you able to tell us whether a bill could be tabled? I know that the question was put to the minister and that she was unable to answer it.

The Conservative members of this committee are ready to support the modernization of the act that communities have been asking for since 2016.

Could a bill be introduced by the end of June?

• (1715)

Mr. Denis Racine: Unfortunately, I cannot answer your question. I don't know exactly when the bill will be tabled.

Hon. Steven Blaney: All right. I agree that it is rather a political issue.

I apologize if I put Mr. Racine on the spot. I was asking him the question, as I did not have time to ask the minister.

It's important to us that the federal government take a leadership role. Do you have any examples where the federal government has supported post-secondary institutions without there necessarily being a matching provincial contribution in certain circumstances?

Mr. Denis Racine: There are many examples of our funding post-secondary institutions across the country.

It is always important to remember the overriding condition of the famous equal sharing of the funding amount between the federal government and the province. However, nothing prevents the province from providing more. In some situations, and this is the case this year, the province provides more than the federal contribution for certain projects that have to do with post-secondary education.

I reiterate that it varies. That said, in each of the provinces and territories, whether it's the French program at Simon Fraser University, Campus Saint-Jean, Collège Mathieu, or the Université de Saint-Boniface, among others, federal funding is provided to post-secondary institutions through bilateral agreements that we have with the provinces and territories for mother tongue and second language instruction.

Hon. Steven Blaney: So there is flexibility on both sides. The province or the federal government can provide more funding, but there is a general principle of matching funds.

Thank you.

An amount of \$121.3 million has already been budgeted. We have talked a lot about the education continuum. We also know that the federal government was doing more to fund secondary and primary education. Now we see the great need for early childhood, post-secondary, college and university education. I would even add continuing education.

Within this \$121.3 million funding, is there money specifically for elementary and post-secondary education, as seems to be the case for Laurentian University?

Mr. Denis Racine: There are two possible answers to your question.

First, the budget clearly states that these funds are earmarked for post-secondary education.

Secondly, the education continuum was recognized when we signed the most recent protocol with the provinces and territories. Previously, the focus was on primary and secondary education, but it is now recognized that there is a continuum and that the pre-school and post-secondary levels are part of the educational process.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Okay.

Will there be funds to encourage English school boards to offer French immersion programs?

Mr. Denis Racine: In Quebec, funding is a little different.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I am sorry to interrupt you. I am asking for all the provinces. I'm talking about the English-speaking provinces where we want to give anglophones the opportunity to have French immersion programs.

Are there any funds set aside for this?

Mr. Denis Racine: Yes, that's right.

In the last federal budget, \$180.4 million was invested in second-language education. This includes immersion programs across the country.

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, Mr. Serré will speak.

The Chair: Okay.

You have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister mentioned earlier that \$253 million was given to the province of Ontario.

As part of the \$121.3 million in funding for the official languages in education program, or OLEP, \$1.9 million was set aside for Laurentian University.

Can you explain what this \$253 million package to the province of Ontario is all about?

• (1720)

Mr. Denis Racine: In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the Province of Ontario will invest more than \$379 million in all minority-language education.

Meanwhile, the federal government will contribute \$83.2 million. The province's funding exceeds the federal contribution, of course, as it covers school board operations and classroom instruc-

tion, among other things. The federal support complements and enriches the program offerings.

These funds are divided between primary and secondary education. In addition, a portion of these funds is allocated to post-secondary education.

Mr. Marc Serré: You were talking earlier about the discussions you are currently having with the Province of Ontario. You indicated that you had not received any proposal before February 2, date on which Laurentian University filed for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. What is your relationship today? Is there a dialogue, an exchange of ideas?

I represent 45% of the population of Sudbury, which is quite interested in this issue. And we've talked to the minister, and the government has set aside quite a bit of money for this in the budget. What are the dialogues with the province? Has the province submitted any documentation, proposal or plan?

As Mr. Boulerville mentioned, the midwifery program is extremely important. It was unique, not only in Ontario, but in all of French Canada. Laurentian University offered the only French-language midwifery program outside of Quebec. Midwives practising in New Brunswick and Nunavut were trained at Laurentian University.

What steps have you taken and what have you received from the province?

Mr. Denis Racine: Discussions are underway with the province on the issue of Laurentian University and education in general.

I can't really comment on the province's response with respect to Laurentian University. The province tells us that a process has to be completed. With respect to Laurentian University, the province will have to determine what the solutions will be to the post-secondary education situation in Middle Northern Ontario.

We have made it clear to the province, at the public service level, that we expect to receive two proposals. We expect the province to come back with a solution, but also with a proposal that might resonate with us. We could look at that proposal quickly and see how we could work together to ensure a quality post-secondary education offering in Middle Northern Ontario.

I can't tell you what the solution will be, because that's up to the Ontario government.

Mr. Marc Serré: Has the province responded that it will not propose a solution until the legal process is complete?

Mr. Denis Racine: According to what our provincial counterparts tell us, there are steps that need to be taken before they can even come to a conclusion about the solution.

They are in the best position to explain the situation to you.

Mr. Marc Serré: Do you have any means, such as through the Auditor General, to ensure that federal funds have been well spent by the province?

Mr. Denis Racine: We receive financial reports from the provinces as part of the bilateral agreements.

Under the old protocol, the requirements were less stringent than they are under the new protocol. Under the new protocol, we get much more detailed financial reports, and we can see where the investments are going. So far, there have been no situations of concern and funds have not been paid out where they should not have been.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine and Mr. Serré.

You know that the House Administration says that committees must finish on time. That is good timing, because we have two last interventions of two and a half minutes each. Mr. Beaulieu will speak first and then, Mr. Boulerice.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I want to supplement Mr. Blaney's questions.

Would it have been possible for the government to set aside \$5 million for post-secondary education in French without requiring a \$5-million match from the province? I don't know if this has ever been done.

Mr. Denis Racine: In the area of education, the official languages support programs rely on collaboration with the provinces based on 50-50 cost sharing. This is the mechanism by which we can provide funding to the provinces for post-secondary education and education in general.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, I asked the minister a question about research grants. If education is a provincial jurisdiction, does that mean that all these grants are subject to federal-provincial agreements?

Mr. Denis Racine: The criteria or terms of the programs vary from one department to another. It must be said that our department is not the only one that gives money to university or post-secondary institutions across the country. Other federal departments do this as well. However, our programs are different and the conditions are different. So it's possible that, in a given case, one department has the authority to fund universities directly, for example in the area of infrastructure. In this case, it's up to other departments.

In the case of official languages support programs, we must provide funding on a 50-50 basis.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Earlier, in response to my question, the minister said that the federal government had given grants to Bishop's University, among others. Was this done under a federal-provincial agreement?

Mr. Denis Racine: We have an agreement. We are working with Quebec in the same way that we work with the other provinces in the area of minority-language or second-language education. In fact, funding has been granted through a bilateral agreement with Quebec for projects in the area of post-secondary education.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This means that, in general, all funding for English-language elementary and secondary schools under the official languages support programs is provided under federal-provincial agreements.

Mr. Denis Racine: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine and Mr. Beaulieu.

We will end the last round of questions with Mr. Boulerice.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Racine and Ms. Boyer, thank you very much for being with us today.

I am trying to untangle the issue and to understand. On the one hand, there is a lot of talk about matching funds. In other words, the federal government can only provide financial assistance if the provincial government matches the funds. The federal government then provides additional assistance. On the other hand, the federal government can sometimes act on its own. This has happened in the case of the Université de l'Ontario français, for example, as well as in the case of Laurentian University, for which \$5 million was apparently set aside.

I'm trying to figure out what's going on. Is it mandatory for the province to put money in, or can the federal government sometimes make a contribution even though there is no obligation on the part of the province?

Mr. Denis Racine: There was no unilateral federal intervention in the case of either the Université de l'Ontario français or Laurentian University.

In the case of the Université de l'Ontario français, it is a 50-50 split with the Province of Ontario. The only difference, in the case of the Université de l'Ontario français, is that the Government of Canada agreed to contribute almost 100% in the first four years of the agreement, and Ontario was then to take over and fund 100% of the costs for the last four years of the agreement. That was the agreement. In the end, it's a 50-50 split.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: In fact, it's as if the federal government had made an advance payment.

Mr. Denis Racine: It was agreed that the federal government would contribute for the first four years to kick-start the project. However, the Province of Ontario has committed to contributing 100% of the cost in the later years of the agreement. This is provided for in the terms of the agreement.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: That is fine. I see that Mrs. Lalonde is very happy with your answers on this issue.

What is your game plan at the moment for Campus Saint-Jean in Edmonton?

• (1730)

Mr. Denis Racine: The minister and we, the officials, have indicated to the province that we hope to get proposals to address the situation at Campus Saint-Jean. I would remind you that the University of Alberta has suffered a reduction in the funds it receives from the province for its operating budget. We are very open to any proposals we can take part in to remedy the situation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

This is where the meeting ends.

This was the first of four sessions on post-secondary education. I want to advise committee members that the six witnesses who will be appearing on Thursday have already confirmed their attendance.

On behalf of all committee members, I would like to thank Ms. Julie Boyer, Assistant Deputy Minister of Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, and Mr. Denis Racine, Director General, Official Languages Branch, for their contribution to this study.

I would also like to thank the technicians, the clerk and the analysts who worked with us during this extraordinary session.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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