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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg





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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone.

[*English*]

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

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.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting.

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the Chair. Should any technical challenges arise, please advise the Chair or the clerk.

[*English*]

I would like to remind all participants and attendees that you cannot take photos or screen captures.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for this study.

In the first hour, we have Stéphanie Chouinard, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science of the Royal Military College of Canada and in the Department of Political Studies at Queen's University, who is appearing as an individual.

Frédéric Lacroix, essayist, will also appear as an individual.

From Laurentian University, we have Robert Haché, President and Vice-Chancellor, who is accompanied by Marie-Josée Berger, Provost and Vice-President, Academic.

The witnesses have five minutes for their opening statements. As you know, Ms. Chouinard, I will be using cards to let you know that you have one minute left or that your speaking time is up.

Ms. Chouinard, the floor is yours for the next five minutes.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Royal Military College of Canada and Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the committee for having me, and greetings to Vice-Chairs Blaney and Beaulieu.

Thank you for inviting us to discuss access to postsecondary education in one's language, which is of the utmost importance for the vitality of the official language minority communities and especially for the Canadian francophonie.

In 1982, recognizing the fundamental role that schools played in the continued sustainability of the minority communities, the Canadian government saw fit to add to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms a right of access for stakeholders to education in the official language of one's choice, from kindergarten to grade 12<sup>x</sup>, or secondary 5 in Quebec. In 2021, it is now obvious that our society has changed and that those rights are now inadequate to meet the needs of our communities.

In particular, the qualifications expected in the labour market have changed over the past 40 years, and employers now expect their employees to have a higher level of education than previously. Workers now need higher-level diplomas and degrees in order to stay in the middle class. Consequently, more Canadians now attend postsecondary institutions than at the time the Charter was adopted.

In 1981, 37% of the Canadian population 15 years of age and over had a postsecondary diploma or degree. Today the figure has nearly doubled to 65%. As a result of this trend, which shows no sign of abating, minority language communities are now asking their respective provinces to create or, in certain instances, to protect postsecondary institutions where instruction is given in their language.

In other words, the needs of the official language minority communities now exceed the scope of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is also true of early childhood, which I will also be discussing with you today, as well as postsecondary education. To use the sociological terminology, the objective of communities today is to achieve institutional completeness in education, which would guarantee the members of those communities a complete education in their language regardless of the path they may choose to enter the labour market.

What happens when postsecondary education is not available close to home? By "close to home", I mean a distance of approximately 80 kilometers from the family home. A few studies conducted by the now-defunct Office of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario suggest some potential answers to this question. On the one hand, we see increasing numbers of minority school students gradually leaving their education system for majority schools starting in grade 8<sup>x</sup>. The reason for that is simple: those students feel a need to succeed in English in the next phase of their education and therefore opt for instruction in that language to avoid losing out. The lack of access to postsecondary education in the minority language in a given region thus has an impact on the education system.

This decision also has a significant impact on community vitality because early adulthood is the time in life when an individual's identity becomes established. Young people who leave their community institutions during this phase will identify less closely with their community once they become adults. Individuals who pursue their secondary studies in the majority language are more likely to work in that language and to find themselves forming exogamous families, which, as we know, are major contributors to intergenerational language transfer. In short, we have long known that education is the lifeline of our communities.

That being said, our definition of education must now extend beyond what the Constitution prescribes as a response to the needs of our communities. However, postsecondary institutions are so fragile precisely because they are not protected by the Constitution, as we have very clearly seen in recent years, as was the case with the Campus Saint-Jean and, less dramatically, the Université de Moncton and Université Sainte-Anne, or to the fact that French-language programs have been cut in order to save institutions, as was the case at Laurentian University.

Postsecondary education in the Canadian francophonie is currently in crisis, and the collapse of an institution such as Laurentian University clearly reveals the weakness of bilingual institutions, which strive to think and act in the minority community's interest. We realized years ago, in the case of primary and secondary schools, that the minority almost always suffers the consequences of the bilingual education model. It's time for us to take an independent approach— which we have previously established, practised and refined—from kindergarten to grade 12<sup>x</sup>. There's no doubt in my mind that the federal government has a role to play in this regard, one that it was already performing in part.

• (1540)

We must make sure that targeted, structural investment by the federal government isn't offset by a shirking of responsibility by the provinces. That's the central issue for us today.

I will stop there.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Chouinard.

I yield the floor to Mr. Lacroix for the next five minutes.

Mr. Lacroix, we are listening.

• (1545)

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. I'm very pleased to be following Ms. Chouinard because I make extensive use of the concept of institutional completeness in my analysis.

I have written a book entitled, *Pourquoi la loi 101 est un échec*, published by Boréal, in which I analyze the situation of anglophone and francophone public and parapublic institutional networks in Quebec.

I use the concept of institutional completeness to conduct that analysis. I think the concept is a very important prism through which to analyze fairness in the funding of anglophone and francophone minority institutions, and even majority institutions, thus in Quebec as well.

This concept of institutional completeness originated in the work of Fransaskois Canadian sociologist Raymond Breton in an article he published in 1964. Mr. Breton showed that the level of institutional completeness— that is, the range of institutions available to an ethnic or linguistic group—had a direct impact on that group's ability to sustain itself in its location over time, in other words, on its linguistic vitality.

In Quebec, as is the case everywhere else in Canada, two official language groups inhabit the same territory and each has its own institutional network. The group with the more extensive and stronger institutional network will attract members of the weaker group to its network. As a result, the weaker group will suffer from its institutional incompleteness.

This concept was used in court for the first time in the Montfort Hospital case in Ontario. Ms. Chouinard conducted a survey on the legal use of the notion. I included it in my brief and therefore won't go back over it.

In my book, I apply this notion to Quebec francophones, who are considered a majority group under the Official Languages Act.

In my view, the main problem with the Official Languages Act is the artificial double-majority concept. The act establishes that there is an anglophone majority outside Quebec and a francophone majority in Quebec. Each majority is associated with its own minority, francophone outside Quebec and anglophone inside.

However, the double-majority concept has no sociological basis. This becomes clear when we consider the fact that Quebec anglophones assimilate half the allophone immigrants who settle in Quebec. Quebec anglophones form only 8% of the population, based on mother tongue, but assimilate approximately 50% of immigrants.

In reality, Quebec anglophones have the linguistic vitality of a majority, even in Quebec. In actual fact, the Official Languages Act confirms a competitive and unequal bilingualism between English and French across Canada, including Quebec. Francophones' relative weight has declined sharply in Quebec since 2001, whereas that of anglophones has remained stable or even increased.

The linguistic dynamic in Canada is not governed by provincial boundaries but rather by the country's borders. This means there is only one genuine majority in Canada, and it is anglophone. Canada is an anglophone-majority country. In my view, the double-majority concept, which forms the basis of the Official Languages Act, is false and misleading. The act should be based on the recognition that there is only one real majority in Canada. It should be asymmetrical.

I have applied this idea to funding for universities in Quebec and calculated that the three English-language universities there—McGill, Concordia and Bishop's—receive 30% of total university revenue in Quebec.

I remind you that anglophones form 8% of the population. That means that the funding English-language universities in Quebec receive is 3.7 times greater than the demographic weight of the province's anglophone community. These universities thus constitute an institutional "overcompleteness".

On the other hand, French-language universities in Quebec are underfunded relative to francophones' demographic weight because they receive 70% of funding, whereas francophones form 78% of the population in Quebec. This underfunding of francophone institutions weighs directly on the linguistic vitality of the francophone group in Quebec.

It is interesting to note that federal research funding is largely channeled to the three English-language universities in Quebec, which receive 38.4% of federal funding allocated to Quebec. McGill University alone receives one third of federal funding to the province.

• (1550)

I see my time is up. The rest of my remarks are set out in my brief.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Lacroix, your time is indeed up.

I take this opportunity to remind witnesses that they may also submit their briefs to the clerk and we will consider them as we continue this study.

Mr. Robert Haché now has the floor.

Mr. Haché, you have five minutes for your opening statement. Ms. Berger may also speak.

**Mr. Robert Haché (President and Vice-Chancellor, Laurentian University):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. It is a pleasure to be speaking to you today from Laurentian University, which is located in Sudbury, in northeastern Ontario, on the land governed by the Robinson-Huron

Treaty of 1850 and the traditional lands of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek and Wahnapiatae first nations.

Allow me to begin by thanking you for this invitation to appear before your committee. Thanks as well for the important work you are doing here and in your communities to honour the francophone communities' experience in minority communities across Canada. Having lived and worked in both official languages in various regions of Canada, I have witnessed firsthand the impact that the federal government and this committee have had for decades on the protection of linguistic minorities and the promotion of bilingualism in Canada.

Laurentian University is the largest bilingual university in north-eastern Ontario and the only institution in Canada with a highly cultural mandate. It offers a university experience in English and French as well as a comprehensive approach to indigenous education.

Our university has been serving francophone students across northern Ontario, a fertile ground rich in Franco-Ontarian history, for more than 60 years. It has been the incubator of the Franco-Ontarian renaissance and a place where many of French-speaking Ontario's most important symbols and institutions have been conceived and celebrated. It is also acknowledged as the first bilingual university in Ontario, governed by the French Language Services Act.

We are determined to secure Laurentian's future as a university where French-language programs and teaching are appreciated and its bilingual character celebrated. We will remain committed to the next generation of young francophone leaders in the arts, social sciences, business, research and design, public administration, education and community development.

[English]

Earlier this year, Laurentian University faced an impossible choice: close the university's doors or set down the path of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act to ensure the university's survival. We recognized that this would be difficult and that our community would be impacted.

The CCA process is allowing us to restructure our academic and operational affairs in a way that will be financially viable for the university's long-term future. It is difficult. It is still painful for our community. We've had to say goodbye to talented and committed faculty, staff and researchers, many of whom worked right up to the end of the semester to help our students succeed.

Laurentian has revised its academic program offerings to focus on student interest, academic strengths and desirable outcomes for the students. Laurentian continues to offer 28 consolidated undergraduate programs and five graduate programs in French, which have strong enrolments, meeting the needs of our students. In all, given the focus on maintaining in-demand programming, fewer than 10% of all students enrolled in French-language programs are being directly affected by these changes.

These offerings keep us among the most comprehensive institutions with respect to our balance of French- and English-language programs. Furthermore, our francophone students continue to have a variety of French-language courses to choose from in their programs.

Lastly, I want to underscore that enrolment in our French-language programs has been increasing over time. This matters greatly. Contrary to the general trend in northern Ontario's declining population base, strong French-language program enrolment is a sign that Laurentian's francophone students and their communities remain engaged in what Laurentian has to offer.

We look forward to serving francophone communities in the north and across Ontario, Canada and beyond for many years to come.

[*Translation*]

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

• (1555)

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

We are now ready to begin the first round of questions. The first Vice-Chair, Mr. Blaney, will ask the first question.

I ask members please to state clearly to whom you are directing your question.

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I have a question for Mr. Haché, but first I would like to make two comments.

First, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

We welcome you with open arms for this study and for the one on the decline of French across the country.

Ms. Chouinard, my first comment is directed to you. Thank you for making us aware of the increasing role universities play in society and thus with regard to language for both Quebec and the minorities.

Mr. Lacroix, you are a prolific author. For example, you have written that Ottawa is highly unlikely to use its weight to support French across the country; that it should take a political tack because French is the only official language that declines from one census to the next; and that substantive equality between English and French, not mere legal equality, should obviously have entailed the adoption of asymmetrical linguistic norms.

You have referred to this in discussing studies on postsecondary education. Ultimately, as Ms. Chouinard said, the minority has suffered for the sake of the majority. I'm sure you'd like to comment, but I'm going to put my question to Mr. Haché.

Mr. Haché, you are at the centre of the study we've undertaken as a result of your university's situation. We regret the general situation, and I would clearly like to say to you, "What a waste!" What a

waste it is for a university to find itself in this situation. We are all attached to our university system and to our bilingual institutions.

Before you, we heard from other witnesses, notably from the Franco-Ontarian community, and it seems the relationship of trust with your university is now broken. The francophone community no longer believes you can be the driver of francophone vitality in northern Ontario.

You said some good things today, but, in actual fact, you've abandoned the three satellite universities with which you had cooperation agreements. I understand that what you're going through isn't easy, but the question I want to put to you is very simple.

Are you prepared to transfer the French-language programs that Laurentian University offers to an organization such as the University of Sudbury, an educational institution that would be solely by and for northern Ontario francophones?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Thank you for that question.

I understand the sentiment you express, and I also understand that we have work to do to restore the community's trust. This isn't an easy situation for us or for the community. We're still devoting all our efforts to serving our students.

Our French-language programs are important because they represent Laurentian University's future. We will continue to offer them at Laurentian for the future of francophone education in northern Ontario.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Can you tell us this afternoon whether the French-language programs offered this year will be offered at Laurentian this coming September?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** All the programs that have been retained will be offered in the fall and for the foreseeable future.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** This week, the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages indicated that she was prepared to make additional investments.

Going back to the question I asked you about the University of Sudbury, how do you view the relationship with that university? If you want to play a leadership role, why abandon your relationships with the three institutions that provided training in French?

I'd like you to explain to me how you could regain the trust of those institutions because you know the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario discussed *Laurentian University*. The relationship is quite troubled, Mr. Haché.

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Thank you for that question.

Laurentian's financial position has been deteriorating for many years. Many problems have arisen along the way, including in the relationship with the three federated universities, to the point where our financial situation was no longer sustainable. We had reached a dead end and substantial changes had to be made so we could continue pursuing the university's mandate.

In the review we conducted, we focused on the most popular programs, where enrolment was high, and we're moving forward in that frame of mind.

I should point out that the programs that were terminated were mainly ones that had only two or three students a year. From both financial and academic standpoints, it's unsustainable to have such low enrolment in certain programs, despite the efforts we've made over years to attract students.

In spite of it all, as I previously said, the francophone student population at Laurentian University has risen in recent years. As a result, the programs that will continue are programs that are of interest to students and that we will continue to support.

• (1600)

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** We're speaking generally about French-language programs. Mr. Haché, how do you see Laurentian University's situation in the next few months or when classes resume in the fall?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** We're very confident about September and the new term. Students are still applying for admission to the university, and we'll be there to support them. We expect them to return to the campus.

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

Mr. Blaney, that's all the time we have.

I therefore yield the floor to Mr. Lefebvre for the next six minutes.

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

My questions are for Mr. Haché, but I also have a brief question for Ms. Chouinard after that.

Mr. Haché, the cuts to French-language programming have stripped Laurentian University of its soul. You say you have a plan, and I'd like to hear it.

Before starting in on official languages and programs, I'd like to clarify some points. We've clearly spoken together over the past year. On a few occasions, we've discussed the Alphonse-Raymond amphitheater, where the Department of Canadian Heritage wanted to fund renovations.

Is that true?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Yes. The renovations are under way.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** They're being done by the federal government, which is supporting the renovation.

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Yes.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** On December 22, you convened a meeting with Mr. Serré and me to discuss Laurentian University's situation. That was the first time we had directly heard about the institution's financial situation.

I told you the federal government could support you for the official languages program. Is that true?

I also told you I might contact Minister Joly's office to see what we could do because, as you know, and as was said on Tuesday, al-

though the official languages program is a federal government transfer program, it is administered by the province. I also told you to contact the province and the federal government and that we could work together to advance this file.

Is that true?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** That's also what I remember.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** I also told you about the indigenous languages program, which the Department of Canadian Heritage introduced the previous year, and the fact that Laurentian hadn't filed for the first component. I urged you to take a look at the program and told you I would follow up with the Department of Canadian Heritage on the subject.

Is that true?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Yes.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** All right.

On the one hand, Laurentian approached the province and asked that the federal government and Minister Joly's office intervene on official languages. The university approached the provincial government and began those discussions.

Mr. Haché, during another committee meeting last week, you said you had also discussed Laurentian's finances with the provincial government. You'd been having important discussions with that government for some time.

I have to ask you a very simple question, the answer to which will enlighten some members who appear not to understand government jurisdictions.

What level of government is responsible for postsecondary education? Is it municipal, provincial or federal?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** It's a provincial jurisdiction.

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

That's why you're negotiating directly with the provincial government to see how it might help you, given your situation.

Is that true?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** It's true.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** On April 29, 2020, Laurentian University issued a press release entitled "Laurentian University Facing COVID-19-Related Challenges."

You stated on page 1:

...the University was already addressing a \$9 million shortfall in its upcoming fiscal year 2020-2021, resulting mainly from the permanent reduction and frozen domestic tuition fees and reductions in provincial funding levels.

Is that correct?

• (1605)

**Mr. Robert Haché:** A whole set of factors are at the root of the university's financial problems, including those indicated in that document.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Did they include budget cuts made by the federal government?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** It was more the budget cuts made by the province.

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

You began discussions. Does the federal government provide direct funding to you for Laurentian's activities?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** We receive some federal grants for bilingualism and French-language and indigenous programming. We get a not very large percentage from the federal government.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** You get that percentage through the province. You don't apply directly to the federal government for funding because it's the province that releases it to you.

Is that true?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** I believe so.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** What is Laurentian's overall budget?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** The budget totals approximately \$150 million.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** What is the federal government's share for official languages?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** I don't have the exact figure.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Perhaps you could send us the exact figure, Mr. Haché.

**Mr. Robert Haché:** I can send it to you, but it's a small fraction.

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

The funding that the federal government provides to Laurentian isn't a direct investment. It's the province that pays out that funding, which is used to finance your activities.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Yes.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** My colleague from Timmins—James Bay suggested last week that the federal government could have granted Laurentian a \$10 million loan, which would have helped it avoid filing under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

Would a \$10 million loan have been enough to avoid that?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Unfortunately, no.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Ms. Chouinard, the NDP thinks the federal government should offset the funding cuts that the Conservatives made to Laurentian University.

I'm unfortunately going to ask you to do a little work because this is a very important issue. Could you describe for us in writing what the socioeconomic and sociopolitical consequences are when the federal government always offsets provincial cuts?

As you said at the start of your opening statement, that's the key issue. Is it the federal government's role to meet those needs? What are the consequences when it does so?

**The Chair:** Pardon me, Ms. Chouinard, but that's all the time Mr. Lefebvre had.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead for six minutes.

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

First of all, thanks to our three speakers.

My question is for Mr. Lacroix.

I also read his book, in which he stated that English-language universities receive 38.4% of federal research funding. That's nearly 5 times the demographic weight of Quebec anglophones.

Since I don't think Mr. Lacroix had a chance to complete his remarks, I'm going to ask him if he would like to do so now.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Lacroix.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Federal funding to Quebec represents a substantial fraction of university budgets. We're talking about some \$900 million a year, which is a lot of money. The federal government invests in English-language universities to a disproportionate degree.

The federal government also provides funding through the Canada-Québec Agreement for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction to anglicize programs offered at French-language educational institutions. That money is therefore used, for example, to establish English-language programs at francophone CEGEPs and universities. So it seems to me the original mission of that funding has been changed in order to anglicize French-language universities and educational institutions.

The federal government has also invested heavily in Quebec's health system in order to anglicize services provided. Between 2008 and 2013, \$32 million was granted to McGill University to establish a program to train health workers to provide health services in English in defiance of the Charter of the French Language, which theoretically guarantees the right to work in French in Quebec.

I also took a look at bilingual and francophone universities outside Quebec through the prism of institutional completeness. I found that, in Ontario, for example, approximately 3% of the revenues of French-language and bilingual universities came from French-language programs, whereas, based on mother tongue, francophones constitute 4.7% of the population of Ontario. French-language educational institutions are thus chronically underfunded in that province.

That's also the case in Alberta, where French-language educational institutions are 80% underfunded.

As we establish profiles for all the provinces, we realize that all French-language educational institutions in Canada are underfunded, including those in Quebec.

In so saying, I don't mean the federal government is responsible for this situation, but rather that, through its investments in research and certain agreements such as the Québec Agreement for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, it invests a great deal of money that doesn't support French-language educational institutions.

I think that funding invested to support the vitality of English could simply be withdrawn and invested in French-language educational institutions outside Quebec. The \$50 million paid annually to support the vitality of English in Quebec could be invested in educational institutions outside Quebec because English has no need of it in Quebec. If you're looking for money, that's where you'll find it. Here's at least \$50 million that you could get your hands on in short order.

• (1610)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's excellent.

Could you tell us a little more about the double-majority concept?

The UN Human Rights Committee doesn't recognize Quebec anglophones as a minority because they're part of the English Canadian majority. However, in Quebec, the Official Languages Act is based on the minority concept. Doesn't that also constitute a democratic deficit in that area?

The English Canadian majority has imposed the Official Languages Act on Quebec and the Constitution Act, 1982 as well in support of that act. Quebec thus remains a minority in Canada. Would you like to tell us more about that?

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** Yes, as I wrote in my book, we should have introduced an asymmetrical official languages act. Asymmetry means acknowledging that there is only one real majority in Canada: the anglophone majority. Francophones form a false majority, even in Quebec. The sociological reality is this: francophones are unable to completely assimilate immigrants who settle in Quebec. Anglophones assimilate half of all immigrants. I know of no genuine minority in the world that can do that.

The underlying symmetry in the Official Languages Act is the origin of a major design flaw that prevents us from realizing what's happening on the ground, which is that French is on the decline everywhere in Canada, including Quebec. French is very quickly declining in Quebec as well.

The federal government's role in that decline is very prominent. In my view, the federal government must therefore abandon the double-majority concept and revise the Official Languages Act.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I would appreciate a brief answer.

You are proposing an exhaustive study on institutional completeness for every linguistic group in every province in Canada.

I'd like to know what Ms. Chouinard thinks of the proposal, but I believe my time is up.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Beaulieu, your time is up.

I used to have the option of being flexible, but, as you know, we've received instructions from the House to adjourn meetings at

the scheduled time. You can come back to your question in another round.

Mr. Angus, go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to Mr. Haché for his participation.

It's very important for francophone and indigenous communities, as well as people from northern Ontario, to understand the causes of the financial crisis at Laurentian University.

[English]

Mr. Haché, the last time we spoke, we talked about the decision that led up to the university's plunging into bankruptcy protection, which my colleague, Mr. Lefebvre, has said cut out the heart and soul of Laurentian. You said there were a number of meetings between the provincial and federal governments in the lead-up to that.

In your meetings with the federal government, did you ask for financial help or support to avoid having to go into bankruptcy?

• (1615)

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Indeed, we did have a number of meetings over the last year and the time leading up to this, with both the provincial and federal sides. In all cases, we were quite transparent about the magnitude and origin of our financial difficulties.

We made requests, seeking any possibilities of receiving assistance from the federal government. As was already described a bit, there were a number of suggestions that were made in terms of programs that would be available to us, which we continue to try to take advantage of.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you for that, because what surprised me is that Mr. Lefebvre said publicly that when you met with him there was "no ask, no number". You're saying that you actually asked and put a plan on the table. He said that the extent of the crisis was not made clear to Laurentian until the end of December, but you were meeting with them before that.

Did you lay out an ask, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** At the end of December, we were very transparent about the magnitude of the challenges we had. Without making a specific ask, we were highlighting the magnitude of the challenge, the gap that Laurentian had, and looking for any ways the federal government might be able to help us to bridge that gap.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** What about the December 6 meeting with Mr. Lefebvre? I think Mr. Serré was there. Didn't you tell them that you were in crisis?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** As I said, we were fairly transparent all through the lead-up to the process, both provincially and federally, in explaining in meetings that we had, the magnitude of the challenges we had at the university. Absolutely.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** You were transparent with the magnitude. I appreciate that. This is an absolute crisis that happened.

What surprised me was that Madam Joly, the Minister responsible for FedNor, who represents economic development as well as official languages and the Franco-Ontarian community, said that if she had been told, she would have intervened and worked with the province.

Do you think it might have been better to have gone directly to Madam Joly than to the two local MPs, because she said she would have acted?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** In hindsight, perhaps.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order on a technical matter.

**The Chair:** All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Arseneault

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I'm having trouble hearing what's being said.

I think Mr. Angus is speaking a little too quickly. I don't know whether it's my screen that's freezing up, but I'm having trouble hearing what's being said in sequence.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

I'll ask the clerk to check that.

Mr. Angus, would you please say a few words so we can check the sound?

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I am certainly willing to repeat a sentence or two. I hope none of this comes off my time.

Is that correct?

I can speak as slowly as you like.

**The Chair:** That's correct. They are technical problems. Don't worry about that.

[*Translation*]

Is it working, Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk:** Everything's fine with the sound on our end.

**The Chair:** Mr. Arseneault, can you hear more clearly now?

**Mr. René Arseneault:** No. It's the same. Perhaps I'm the only one affected. The sound was very low and cut off even when the clerk responded. It wasn't constant.

**The Chair:** I see.

Are any other members of the committee having the same problem?

Are you having the same problem, Mr. Beaulieu?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I didn't think it was that bad.

However, I've been told a few times that I have a bad connection.

**The Chair:** All right. We'll monitor that.

Mr. Angus, I must warn you that you have slightly less than three minutes left. Go ahead.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you so much.

You said that you were transparent about the magnitude of the crisis. Madame Joly said that she would have helped if she had been told, so I'd ask you, given what you know now, would it not maybe have been better to go above the local MPs and talk directly to the minister for FedNor? She said that she had the capacity to work with the province to help find a solution to this crisis at Laurentian.

**Mr. Robert Haché:** We did reach out broadly, in answer to your question, both federally and provincially. We absolutely did work with our local MPs as an important touchpoint. We have a strong relationship and an ongoing relationship with them, but we also reached out directly, and some meetings we were successful in achieving and others we were not. As—

• (1620)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** She said that she would have intervened and helped if she had been made aware. For me, we're looking at something that's been disastrous for our region, and we have a minister who said, "If I had been told, I would have been there."

Mr. Lefebvre said publicly, "In the end, Laurentian has done this to itself, with the blessing of the provincial government...". Yet we have the minister for FedNor, who said, "I would have helped if I had known."

Given the magnitude of the crisis, why didn't you reach out to her and say, "We need your help now?"

**Mr. Robert Haché:** As I said, we did reach out federally as well as provincially, through our MPs and otherwise. Certain meetings we achieved, and others we did not. Hindsight can be 20/20. If we had been more aggressive, more successful, perhaps there might have been a change, but perhaps not, as well.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I totally understand. We're talking about a catastrophe that has occurred here. I heard my colleague who said that there is stuff, so maybe official languages, maybe we could look at these programs.... We're looking at an unprecedented crisis, where a university was plunged into bankruptcy protection.

Mr. Lefebvre also told people in Sudbury that there was "no big cheque...coming". Madame Joly has put money on the table now. Would it have been better to have had the money on the table before rather than what we're dealing with in this situation now...?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Again, given the current discussions, I think the efforts that the federal government is making and may be willing to make I think will be extremely helpful going forward—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I absolutely agree. I think Madame Joly really cares. I'm just surprised that she said she would have helped and that she was not told. You met with the local MPs. You said that you were transparent about it, that you explained the magnitude of the crisis to them. That was not passed on to the minister, who is the minister for FedNor for our entire region. I think this was a really tragic and lost opportunity.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to inform members of the committee how the time we have left with the witnesses will be divided, as other guests will be joining the meeting during the next round of questions.

First, Mr. Godin and Mr. Serré will be entitled to four minutes each. Then Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Boulerice will have two minutes each.

Mr. Godin, go ahead for four minutes.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their participation.

My first question is for Mr. Haché. I want to review the timeline. From what I understand, my colleagues from the government party in your region did a good job of representing you to the office of the Minister of Official Languages, Mélanie Joly, last December. A notice of intent was issued in February, and Laurentian University was visibly preparing for major cuts. I had a chance to meet with groups that were making submissions to allow us to intervene. In April, the hammer dropped and a number of French-language programs were unfortunately cut.

Before her testimony on Tuesday, the minister simply announced publicly that the sum of \$5 million would be provided to assist Laurentian, once again implying that it wasn't the federal government's responsibility to assist postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Haché, I have to tell you I find it unfortunate that we're playing politics here. Paragraph 2(b) of the Official Languages Act provides that the purpose of the act is to

2(b) support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities and generally advance the equality of status and use of the English and French languages within Canadian society;

As can see, there was an ongoing operational problem between December and the moment when submissions were made by members of the present government. The minister came and told us that she had not been aware of the situation and that she would have intervened if she had been.

For my part, if I were to see that Laurentian University, or any other postsecondary institution, was running headlong into a wall, and if I wanted to protect both official languages in the minority communities, I would take action instead of hiding behind the division of federal and provincial powers. That's the minister's responsibility.

Mr. Haché, can you tell me how you interpret the actions of the Minister of Official Languages in the Laurentian University file?

• (1625)

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Thank you for your question.

I can only repeat that we have had many conversations at both the federal and provincial levels. I acknowledge the division of responsibility for university education between the two levels of government. We did what we could during those conversations.

We plan to continue working with the federal and provincial governments to secure a sustainable and productive future for Laurentian University.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you.

What I understand is that you don't want to state an opinion on the fact that the minister wasn't necessarily very proactive. She hasn't demonstrated leadership in this matter. I understand and respect the fact that you're in a delicate situation.

My next question is for Ms. Chouinard.

I hope you have the time to answer this time. You said that 37% of people 15 years of age and over had a university degree in 1981 and that the figure is 65% today. What we can see is that the student clientele enrolling in postsecondary studies has nearly doubled. So there's potential here.

Why hasn't Laurentian University managed to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to increase student numbers significantly and thus achieve a degree of sustainability?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I'm not sure I'm the person in the best position to answer that question.

What Mr. Haché said is that Laurentian's francophone clientele was growing. What I know—this isn't my institution—is that Laurentian lacked size in...

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Pardon me, Ms. Chouinard, I went to the wrong witness. I thought you were with Mr. Haché.

I apologize for that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, your speaking time is up.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Pardon me, Ms. Chouinard.

Things aren't going your way in committee today.

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

We will continue. Mr. Serré has the floor for the next four minutes.

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

[English]

I have to confess that I was deeply disturbed when I heard the news about Laurentian University's cuts. My colleague Paul Lefebvre and I were aware of budgetary concerns. However, they were far beyond what we had imagined, and we certainly did not see this going through the CCA process. It was tough and it hit the heart of Greater Sudbury.

Like many of you, we reacted emotionally. Laurentian is such an important post-secondary institution; it's much more than just bricks and mortar. Laurentian is a community of people who contribute to economic development and to cultural, economic and educational wealth. It's a really hard sense of loss and tragedy for the faculty and students who are pursuing their passions.

[Translation]

Mr. Haché, you mentioned that there was no department for post-secondary education in Ottawa. All proposals have to go through Queen's Park. Based on your experience, can you confirm that the federal government can't grant operating funding to you directly without going through the province?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Yes, I believe that's true.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you.

Mr. Angus has already left, but I'm going to ask you the following question, Mr. Haché. Mr. Angus has been a member for many years.

[English]

The lobbying register shows that he has never met with Laurentian University or you.

Can you confirm whether Mr. Angus has met with you or your predecessor for any support or any proactive support for the Laurentian University, yes or no?

**Mr. Robert Haché:** All I can say is that I have not had the pleasure of meeting directly with Mr. Angus in the time that I have been at Laurentian. I can't comment on my predecessors, unfortunately.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Serré:** The lobbying register shows that there have been no meetings.

As francophones from northern Ontario, we're going through a period of considerable linguistic insecurity and uncertainty. Mr. Haché, why did Laurentian University, which claims it's bilingual, cut its postgraduate instruction in linguistics programs, languages and literature?

• (1630)

**Mr. Robert Haché:** Thank you for that question, which is an important one.

All the programs we cut had very few long-term students. There had been two or three students per year in each of those programs over the previous 5 or 10 years. It was very difficult to support those programs even with the additional grants. In addition, classes with only two or three participants don't provide the best environment for students.

Laurentian didn't single out the programs that had to be terminated; it was the students who did so by showing a lack of interest in them year after year. We obviously retained the programs in which students were interested and that enjoyed high enrolment. This situation will also be an opportunity for us to establish new programs that are popular with students.

Lastly, it's important to draw a distinction between programs and courses. From a linguistic standpoint, in theatre and arts, for example, we will continue to offer a good range of courses. These are simply four-year programs that will no longer be offered at our university. However, we will continue offering exhaustive study programs in English and French. I should note on that point that we made cuts on both the English and French sides. There was no preference. The decisions we made were similar in both cases.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Haché. Thank you, Mr. Serré.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I now yield the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for two minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'd like to let Ms. Chouinard answer my question. I'd like to know whether she thinks it would be appropriate to conduct studies on institutional completeness across Canada, including in Quebec.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** Yes, absolutely. They're a tool that's not merely theoretical and that has proven itself. It would help us demonstrate, based on data, what the deficiencies are, where they are and how they could be more effectively corrected in order to meet the community's current needs more effectively, notwithstanding constitutional prescriptions.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I don't think anyone has ever really conducted a study that established the percentage of funding relative to the percentage of francophones for francophone universities outside Quebec.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** No, and it would be difficult to conduct that kind of study.

As regards federal funding to the provinces, for example, we know very well the amounts that are received. However, we don't know what they're used for or what percentage of that funding goes directly to minority institutions. That's an issue at the primary and secondary levels and at the postsecondary level as well. I see some of you agree with that. This could shed light on a few issues our communities have been dealing with for many years.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** All right. My next question is for Mr. Lacroix.

What impact does the overfunding of English-language postsecondary institutions in Montreal have on that city's language dynamic?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, Mr. Lacroix.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** English-language universities are on the rise in Montreal and occupy nearly half the institutional space there. Federal funding is one of the keys to the rise of McGill University, and Concordia University, in particular. Those two institutions will attract increasing numbers of students, and their funding applications are enormously successful. They're a wheel in motion: previous success with funding applications also guarantees increasing success in future.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Frédéric Lacroix:** I think you have to take that into consideration.

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

The last speaker is Mr. Boulerice.

You have the floor for two minutes.

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

Good evening to all the witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Chouinard

Do you think that federal investments in postsecondary education are enough to enable minority francophone institutions to achieve substantive equality?

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** I think federal government investment could be increased. If it is, however, you have to make sure it doesn't work to the benefit of the provinces, which might then decide to invest less in our institutions.

It's all about the money; that's really it. You have to make sure all additional funding that comes from Ottawa doesn't result in a decline in Edmonton, Toronto or Fredericton, for example.

That really has to be the focus if we want the federal government to invest more. It has to be structural, and it has to be long term, not on a case-by-case basis, as we've seen in recent years. You have to make sure that the province is also responsible for its part in this jurisdiction.

• (1635)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Yes, that's quite clear. We don't want to rob Peter to pay Paul because that'll ultimately get us nowhere.

Should we establish more accountability and transparency mechanisms?

I think you addressed this question briefly in your previous answers.

**Ms. Stéphanie Chouinard:** There should be more, absolutely. Part of the funding granted for official languages disappears in provincial budgets. However, it should be used as additional funding, not core funding. This is a serious problem. If we had better accountability for education funding focused on official languages, we could ensure that funding from Ottawa is spent where it should be spent.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Boulerice. That's all the time we have.

Now we must thank the witnesses for taking part in this study on federal support for French-language or bilingual postsecondary institutions in a minority situation.

Stéphanie Chouinard, you are an assistant professor in the Department of political science at the Royal Military College of Canada and in the Department of Political Studies at Queen's University. Thank you.

Frédéric Lacroix, essayist, thank you.

We also thank, from Laurentian University, Robert Haché, president and vice-chancellor, and Marie-Josée Berger, provost and vice-president, academic.

Once again, thank you.

Colleagues, we will take a brief pause to see off the witnesses who are here. Then we will welcome more witnesses for the next hour.

I suspend for a few minutes.

• (1635) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Good evening, we will resume.

For the benefit of the witnesses who just joined us, I will repeat a few simple guidelines.

First, I would like to inform you that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted. Like members, witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice because interpretation services are available. Lastly, I would ask you to direct your questions to the Chair. Thank you.

For the second part, we have Denis Constantineau, from the Northern Ontario Coalition for a French-language University, and Pierre Riopel, Chairman of the Council of Regents of the University of Sudbury.

Mr. Constantineau, you will be first to take the floor. You will have five minutes to make your opening statement, and I will inform you when you have one minute left or when your time is up.

We will then move on to Mr. Riopel.

Mr. Constantineau, please activate your mic and begin your statement.

**Mr. Denis Constantineau (Northern Ontario Coalition for a French-language University):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Northern Ontario Coalition for a French-language University, I'd like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you about the disastrous situation in which university education in French in Sudbury finds itself at the moment, further to unilateral decisions made by the supposedly bilingual *Laurentian University*, about the repercussions of its decisions, and the solution looming on the horizon.

The coalition has rallied institutions, individuals and organizations active in a variety of sectors in greater Sudbury and northern Ontario. It was established through PlanifSudbury, a francophone issue table, in response to the current events at *Laurentian*.

In February, as you have already heard, *Laurentian* invoked the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act on grounds that it was facing unprecedented financial challenges. This announcement sent a shock wave through our community.

As we feared, on April 12, *Laurentian* announced that it was eliminating 28 French-language programs, accounting for 40% of the 69 programs that were axed. By doing so, *Laurentian* failed to meet its commitments to the francophone community and lost its confidence. This measure put an end to dynamic programs that played a role in creating the contemporary Franco-Ontarian identity.

*Laurentian* University history professor Gaétan Gervais, together with Michel Dupuis and Jacqueline England, created our Franco-Ontarian flag, which was raised for the first time on the University of Sudbury campus in 1975.

Programs in French studies, francophone literature and culture, and theatre, also disappeared. They educated generations of young adults who pursued careers in the arts, education and cultural facilitation. The Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario, the Éditions Prise de parole publishing company, and the CANO-Musique cooperative were born there. They were the pioneers of what we now recognize as the key components of our community and of French-speaking Ontario as a whole.

By eliminating these programs, *Laurentian University* is depriving the community of its future leaders. By dismissing all the professors working in these 28 programs, it has stripped the francophone community of the sources of knowledge and research essential to its development.

It is also forcing many young francophones and francophiles to pursue their university studies elsewhere in Ontario, with all of the additional expenses this requires. It intensifies the regional exodus of young people to major cities, a problem all too common already in communities across the country.

These events illustrate the limitations of bilingual educational institutions. As federal transfer payments for official language minorities are never accompanied by an accountability framework, it's not surprising to hear that *French money* is being used to clear our snow-covered sidewalks.

Recruitment and promotion for French-language programs are not always a priority for bilingual institutions. *Laurentian* has been slacking off in this regard for several years. Despite all the efforts, resources made available to those in charge of these tasks were laughable. That's why francophones in our region have been demanding the creation of a French-only university for 50 years.

It was in the wake of these events that the University of Sudbury announced on March 11 that it wanted to become a university designed by, for and with francophones. It turned over its two available charters to the francophone and indigenous communities so that they could establish their own institutions. Our coalition is

working to achieve this objective and has formulated the recommendations that follow.

First of all, we suggest that all French-language programs at *Laurentian*, that were not eliminated, be transferred fully and immediately to the University of Sudbury.

We would also like federal transfer payments for official-language minorities that were formerly paid to *Laurentian* to be immediately transferred to the University of Sudbury so that it can begin planning its curriculum.

In addition, the Ontario government needs to intervene and make sure that *Laurentian's* 2021-2022 programs go ahead and that it should suspend the announced cuts, so that it can obtain the funding required to keep its creditors at bay, and facilitate the transfer of the programs in question.

We further recommend that a provincial implementation board be given a mandate to establish a structure for the delivery of French-language university education in the North, to determine its programming and to design the working and learning environment for such an institution. This board could study the needs and involve future students in its work as part of the process of developing its programming. The board could submit a transition plan between the interim programs available and the opening of a French-language university for the North.

Lastly, we would like recognition for the importance of the indigenous studies programs offered for over 40 years at the University of Sudbury, and for steps to be taken to support indigenous communities to help them become sustainable.

Let's be clear, we do not want *Laurentian* to disappear. Our community needs this institution. However, we want a university that is entirely designed by, for and with francophones to stand proudly beside *Laurentian*.

Thank you. I'd be glad to answer your questions.

● (1645)

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

I'd like to remind the witnesses that they can send us a brief via the clerk so that we can give it consideration as part of our study.

Mr. Riopel now has the floor for five minutes.

**Pierre Riopel (Chairman of the Council of Regents, University of Sudbury):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the members of the committee for having me, and for their interest in French-language postsecondary education in Mid-Northern Ontario.

I had a discussion with my colleague Denis Constantineau to prepare for this meeting and fully agree with what he said today.

My name is Pierre Riopel and I am Franco-Ontarian. I'm the Chairman of the Council of Regents at the University of Sudbury. My 30-year career in education has been as a school- and college-level administrator. One of my former colleagues is with us today.

I have the soul of a teacher, and would ask you to allow the history teacher I once was to give you a short history of the University of Sudbury, an institution that is dear to me.

In this history, there are four important dates.

The first is 1913. That's when the Jesuits founded Collège du Sacré-Cœur in Sudbury, a French-language classical college. This was against the background of Regulation 17, which prohibited education in French in Ontario.

Collège du Sacré-Cœur became Université de Sudbury in 1957. Everything was in French—administration and teaching.

In 1960, Laurentian University, A bilingual institution, opened its doors. That's when the Laurentian Federation was established, with the University of Sudbury as a member.

This model operated successfully for 60 years. However, we have all just witnessed the withdrawal of *Laurentian University* from the francophone side of things, but never more so that in the process unwinding publicly before the Superior Court of Ontario under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, the CCAA.

The final date is 2021. Under creditor protection, Laurentian University offhandedly and abruptly disbanded the Federation and massively cut back its programs to eliminate all kinds of services and jobs.

Rector Haché made some revealing admissions when he was cross-examined on April 23 as part of the CCAA process. The Laurentian University application under the CCAA is approximately 1,500 pages long in four volumes. No mention is made of the French Language Services Act. Rector Haché expressed no concern about Laurentian University's inability to continue to provide existing services in French. None! However, Laurentian University has since 2014 been designated under this program, which requires it to rigorously maintain specific French-language faculties and programs.

Moreover, by severing federative links between Laurentian and the University of Sudbury, the latter lost its ability to fulfil its obligations under its designation in the French Language Services Act. None of this appears in the legal documents presented by Rector Haché to the court.

Overnight, the University of Sudbury lost its right to teach students of the Laurentian Federation. Before Laurentian submitted its application under the CCAA, on February 1, there had been no consultation with the francophone community. Likewise, there was no consultation prior to the announcement by Laurentian University on April 12 of significant cuts to its French-language programs. The cuts are the outcome of financial calculations without regard to the repercussions of these decisions on students, teaching staff, employees and the entire community<sup>x</sup>.

In light of these events, the University of Sudbury is currently focusing all its efforts on creating a new future. We have hired some

legal consultants, including constitutional expert Mr. Ronald Caza; we adopted two resolutions on March 11, one of which is to transform the University of Sudbury into a French-language university. We also struck two special committees, one francophone and another for indigenous communities, and have established a francophone working group to develop a business plan with the assistance of PGF Consultants<sup>x</sup>.

As my colleague Mr. Constantineau mentioned, we have received a great deal of community support. We also received a petition signed by more than 400 francophone professors from across Canada and around the world. A campaign was also set in motion by the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, the AF0, which led to Rector Haché and the chair of the board of governors receiving 3,000 letters of support from individuals.

The time has come to realize this French-language university project, given that a university like this has been wanted, imagined and desired by several generations of Franco-Ontarians. The time has come to create our French-language university in Sudbury, by, for, and with the Franco-Ontarian community. It will be a historic occasion.

Thank you very much for your attention. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

• (1650)

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

Thanks to both of you for coming in within the allotted time.

Without further ado, I now give the floor to Mr. Blaney for six minutes.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, our two witnesses not only observed the time limits, but they gave us a ray of hope this afternoon by reminding us that in every crisis, there is an opportunity. It's heartening to see that there are some extremely serious people seeking solutions.

Gentlemen, you have heard the questions I asked Mr. Haché, who appeared to be saying that everything was going well...[*Technical difficulty*]

**The Clerk:** Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

There seems to be sound on Zoom, but there's none in the room. That means the interpreters don't have access.

Could you suspend the meeting for a few moments, Mr. Chair?

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1700)

**The Chair:** We are now resuming our work.

Mr. Blaney was asking a question.

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor for four and a half minutes.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** My question is for Mr. Riopel and for Mr. Constantineau.

Laurentian University appears to be saying that the process can be set in motion. It would appear that in September, things will continue at Laurentian.

When do you think you would be ready to take over at the northern Ontario francophone university, and what are your expectations from the federal government?

We know that the minister put some money on the table this week.

I'll conclude by saying that the committee will support you all the way.

**The Chair:** Who is your question for?

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Initially for Mr. Riopel.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Riopel.

**Pierre Riopel:** Thank you very much.

Historically, Franco-Ontarians were in favour from the beginning. What we are requesting is the immediate repatriation of everything being done in French at Laurentian University.

There are three months remaining before the September term begins. Time is short. We know that we are being very ambitious, but such things have previously been dealt with at the high school and college levels. There are solutions.

There is certainly, through the province, support for the project. We were very pleased with Minister Joly's announcement about the \$5 million, because we were in the middle of talking about management and governance by, for, and with francophones.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** So you intend to launch your new program in September 2021 and take everything that is francophone—please excuse the expression—away from *Laurentian University*.

Is that right?

**Pierre Riopel:** Ideally, yes.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** All right. Thank you.

Mr. Constantineau, what do you think about this?

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** Some of these points are important. You spoke briefly about the dream of *Laurentian*, which is still speaking on behalf of the community. Let's be clear. *Laurentian University* no longer looks like us and no longer brings us together. The community has lost confidence in this bilingual institution, which can no longer speak on behalf of the francophone community in Sudbury and the Mid-North. It's obvious.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Do you have the support of the MPs who represent these regions?

It's important because they have influence. I know that Mr. Lefebvre is here. Can you tell us who your MPs are?

Who represents the riding in which Laurentian University is located?

Are these MPs backing you? Have you presented your project to them? Are they looking for solutions for francophone university education in northern Ontario?

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** We at the Coalition have had numerous discussions with Mr. Lefebvre and Mr. Serré about this. Communication is very good and the support is there. We are of course making a distinction between federal and provincial areas of jurisdiction, but they have answered the call and are supporting us in this.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Excellent. I'm keen to hear what they have to say, because it's important. We, of course, are prepared to make recommendations accordingly.

Mr. Riopel, I am running out of time, but could you take a few seconds to add your comments?

**Pierre Riopel:** I completely agree with my colleague Mr. Constantineau. We speak regularly with Mr. Lefebvre and Mr. Serré. We have also been discussing things with our provincial MLAs, Jamie West and France Gélinas, who is the MLA for my region of Nickel Belt. She is therefore Mr. Serré's counterpart.

I can also say that we have been having fairly regular conversations with Senator Moncion and Senator Forest-Niesing, who was my predecessor at the University of Sudbury.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Excellent.

I wouldn't say that everything is hunky-dory, but it's reassuring to see that my colleagues are on board and that we're all headed in the same direction.

We have nothing against *Laurentian University*, and all we want to do is make sure there is continuity and that solid foundations are established by and for francophones. You can count on the members of this committee to move in that direction.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your collaboration, Mr. Blaney.

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

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Constantineau and Mr. Riopel. Thank you for attending.

It's important for us to know what's going on in our community.

In his opening address, Mr. Constantineau mentioned that Laurentian University was the cradle of Franco-Ontarian identity. That's why it's heart-rending for us to see what happened. I had mentioned it at the very outset to Mr. Haché. By eliminating these programs, they took away the University's soul. It no longer looks like us and no longer draws us together, which is worrisome.

It's important to determine what we have to do to ensure that students and the francophone community have a place that looks like them and where they can get together.

Your coalition project with the University of Sudbury is very interesting, as I told you. It needs to be studied very closely.

Mr. Riopel, on the matter of transferring programs from Laurentian University to the University of Sudbury, you mentioned that it all began with discussions you held with representatives of the provincial government and that this was the key.

Could you give us a brief update on these discussions?

**Pierre Riopel:** We approached the Ministry of Francophone Affairs and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities a while ago now.

I can confirm that we sent an official letter to minister Ross Romano today, clearly stating our intent to repatriate the programs. Nearly everyone in the provincial government was informed of this.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** I know that discussions are being held about what might be done locally. Can you tell us about plans for the University of Sudbury?

I also know that there have been discussions about the creation of a network that would bring together Université de Hearst, the University of Toronto and the Université de l'Ontario français. Can you update us on these discussions?

**Pierre Riopel:** I'd be glad to.

We held discussions with our friends at Hearst. To locate it geographically, I can tell you that Hearst is a six-hour drive north of Sudbury. So it's a hike. We also held discussions with our friends at the Université de l'Ontario français, who are in Toronto, so about a five-hour drive south. All three are open-minded, of course.

In postsecondary education at the moment, it's in the nature of the beast to have networks and articulation agreements, and for our students to be able to take courses at other institutions, and to use technology, as we are doing right now.

I am happy to tell people that a network would be great and I don't see a problem there, but that what I want first is a university. We can create a network afterwards. Our intent on this subject is clear.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** It's the heart of the matter. We need to determine what we can do locally. That's the debate going on at the moment.

Mr. Constantineau, can you tell us how the community sees this transfer of programs from Laurentian, as requested by the University of Sudbury and supported by the coalition? What do you see for the future?

We want this whole idea to be a success. I have no doubt that it will take shape and that it will be successful, but it's important to have the support of the community.

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** It's pretty clear that this plan has community support throughout the province. No one will say that

it's not a good idea and that they don't want a French-language university for Ontario's Mid-North. So the support is there, and that's important.

I'd like to return to what Mr. Haché was saying earlier, to the effect that only 10% of students were affected by the axing of Laurentian University's programs, because that's not the case.

Students whose programs were not affected are leaving because there are no longer enough options for the other courses they need. Some professors are also leaving from programs that were unaffected. One sent me an email yesterday evening, telling me that he had accepted another job elsewhere. And yet his program had not been affected. So there are repercussions that go well beyond the elimination of programs at Laurentian University.

There is unequivocal community support for the creation of a French-language university.

• (1710)

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** I also heard similar comments from people who had to leave the university, not because their program had been cut but because too many of their courses were offered only in English, which was very worrisome.

Thank you very much for having agreed to join us today. The conversations will continue.

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

I will now give the floor to the second vice-chair of the committee.

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

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank our two guests, whose presentations were very interesting.

According to an article published on the Radio-Canada website, a number of representatives of bilingual universities, including the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University, met secretly with a view to having the Université de l'Ontario français project cancelled on grounds that bilingual universities could provide an alternative solution.

What do the two witnesses think about that? There appears to be rather fierce competition from the bilingual universities, and there are not many universities by and for francophones. I'd like to hear what you have to say on this.

Mr. Constantineau could answer first, followed by Mr. Riopel.

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** Thank you.

I believe that takes us back to the starting point. In 2021, the era of bilingual institutions came to an end because they were no longer meeting needs. We found that was the case at the school and college levels. Now, we see that it's time to deal with the educational gaps at the university level, because there is nothing at the moment in the Mid-North.

It's over for the idea of a bilingual university. People want a French-language university administered by, for and with the community. That's what they need.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you.

I'm not sure whether Mr. Riopel would like to add something.

What's clear is that the "by and for francophones" idea is very important for elementary and secondary schools.

Shouldn't this project be backed heavily by Franco Ontarians? Many worked on behalf of the Université de l'Ontario français, but the pandemic got in the way.

Shouldn't the next major effort focus on the creation of universities by and for Francophones?

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** As Mr. Riopel Just pointed out, an application was sent to the provincial government and the reaction will depend on the government's response to this application.

**Pierre Riopel:** I read the same article you did, Mr. Beaulieu, so I'm somewhat familiar with the situation.

This mobilization effort, which was called the "resistance" in 2018, is in the DNA of Franco-Ontarians.

In all previous situations pertaining to our francophone institutions, our high schools and our colleges, we have always come out on top.

That's why I'm very optimistic.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Excellent.

Before the Minister of Official Languages appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages in March, she announced a \$5 million amount that could be used by the University of Sudbury.

Do you have any further news about this? I personally think that the funds would be better used in that way.

**Pierre Riopel:** When I read the short section of the sentence that said "might be", I was somewhat worried about the verb tense. However, I'm delighted that the question is being dealt with directly and that it was specified that the money would help find a solution by, for and with Franco-Ontarians.

The project being worked on by the University of Sudbury is aimed precisely at that. We want governance in French and we want to operate in French, not within a bilingual structure, as Mr. Constantineau mentioned.

I would like to add in passing that two northern Ontario éminences grises commented on the issue in February. They are Pierre Bélanger, a businessman and former teacher, and Réjean Grenier, an editorial writer. They are both alumni of Laurentian University, and they agree that it's time to turn the page and move into <sup>x</sup> the 21st century because the era of so-called bilingual institutions is over.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** According to one of the researchers who appeared here, Ontario francophones account for 4.7% of the population and receive 3% of the provincial budget for postsecondary education. In Quebec, anglophones account for just over 8% of the population and receive 30% of the budget for their postsecondary institutions.

Why do you think there is so little funding for French-language postsecondary educational institutions, particularly from provincial governments?

• (1715)

**Pierre Riopel:** In all likelihood, it means that we have some catching up to do. We've proved our worth in school and college institutions. Give us a chance to do the same with universities.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I couldn't ask for more.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. I'd also like to thank our other witness.

Mr. Boulерice, the next five minutes are yours. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulерice:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Mr. Constantineau and Mr. Riopel for being with us today.

Right off the bat, I'd say that I'm totally onside with your initiative and your plans for a university by and for francophones in mid-northern Ontario.

As Mr. Blaney said earlier, if the committee can come up with a positive and constructive contribution on the subject, I would of course like to be involved.

I'd like to hear your opinion about the mechanism which, it would appear, requires provincial-federal participation. Do you feel that this would give a provincial government that is less favourable towards the rights of francophones and services in French the right to veto certain initiatives?

Don't you think this might be a mechanism we should review one day?

**The Chair:** Could one of you field this question?

**Pierre Riopel:** As someone who is not a legal expert, I find it a little difficult to answer this question. I believe that it's a matter of jurisdiction. I think that it's an additional barrier that needs to be overcome, particularly in the postsecondary field.

As for governance, I do not administer budgets on a daily basis. At the previous meeting, I listened closely when people talked about the concept of accountability. I believe that's extremely important. I experienced it in schools, for example, at a time when anglophones were in the majority on school boards.

As Mr. Constantineau mentioned a few moments ago, we used to get *French money*. All of a sudden, the *French money* was disappearing and we didn't know where.

We were told that money was being spent on French-language schools, which was not necessarily always true. We know it, and it's a fact. Let's just say it complicates things for us.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulерice:** Okay.

Do you have anything you'd like to add, Mr. Constantineau?

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** Not knowing where the money is going certainly complicates the whole issue.

Mr. Haché was talking earlier about programs that had been cancelled because there weren't enough students. What people fail to say is that for a long time, there was no investment in these programs, professors weren't replaced when they left, and the programs weren't promoted. Now, in 2021, we're told that there are only two students left in such and such a program, that it's not viable, and that it's going to be eliminated. If the program had been handled appropriately, and received some funds, then who knows whether it might not be viable today. It becomes a purely financial exercise, which is not really the right way to run a university.

**Pierre Riopel:** I'd like to add that bilingual institutions receive funding precisely to deal with this type of situation.

It's exactly the same thing for schools. There are small high schools in northern Ontario, and they receive funding to compensate for the fact that a high school might have only 48 students. This kind of funding exists.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** From the governance standpoint, what do you think would be the best mechanism to ensure that federal postsecondary education transfers meet the postsecondary education needs of Francophones in minority communities, and that this money is not used for other things? For example, funds are transferred, supposedly to help francophones or French-language teaching, and ends up being used for snow clearance, as we heard earlier.

Can you answer this one for us, Mr. Riopel?

**Pierre Riopel:** When all is said and done, I think it becomes a question of accountability. An explanation is needed on where the money went. We're also hoping that it's not just pennies, but really dollars, lots of dollars. I think that having an accountability system would solve the problem.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** I have a final question. Despite the underinvestment in *Laurentian University's* French programs in recent years, are you sure that you would be able to offer these programs and this service at the future Sudbury French-language University?

• (1720)

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** I alluded earlier to the implementation board, one of whose roles would be to determine which programs are really viable with appropriate investment and which new programs would be required for the development of the community and for the future of the university

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

In order to meet the time requirements, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Serré will have three minutes each, while Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Boulerice will each have a minute and a half.

Mr. Dalton, it's over to you for three minutes.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. Riopel and Mr. Constantineau.

My mother is Franco-Ontarian. She is a native of northern Ontario, more specifically Opasatika, which is not far from Kapuskasing. I'm therefore quite interested in your specific situation, and the circumstances for francophones everywhere in Canada.

This situation is somewhat confused. Mr. Haché said that the number of Francophone students is stable and is even increasing. However, we can see that many programs have been cut. Can you explain that to us? Were there also significant cuts made to English-language programs, or was it mainly for the francophone programs at the university?

My question is for Mr. Riopel.

**Pierre Riopel:** It's not easy for me to comment on the numbers Dr. Haché mentioned because I don't necessarily have access to them.

Mr. Constantineau might be able to answer your first question more accurately.

As for your second question, according to what I've read, and to my knowledge, the francophone community was affected disproportionately compared to the anglophone majority at *Laurentian University*. It's really very worrisome for us.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Right.

In the first hour, a witness told us that in 1981, the percentage of Canada's population with a postsecondary degree was 37%. Today, this percentage has almost doubled to 65%. That's a huge increase. I feel that we need more program funding, particularly from the federal government.

Do you feel that federal funding is adequate to guarantee substantive equality for French-language and bilingual postsecondary institutions for the linguistic minority?

**Pierre Riopel:** The short answer is no, because there are often additional costs for minority language communities. That's clear. It's also the experience I had at the high school and college levels. The fact that we are in a minority language community is something we have to take into account.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you.

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

We'll continue with Mr. Serré.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Riopel and Mr. Constantineau, for having worked for decades on behalf of the francophone community throughout northern Ontario and elsewhere in Canada. I also thank you for your testimony.

As I have only three minutes, I'll get straight to my questions. My first concerns the letter you sent to Mr. Ross Romano, the Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities.

What are the next steps? Is the application related to the \$5 million that Minister Mélanie Joly already offered the province of Ontario?

**Pierre Riopel:** I'm the person, as the Chairman of the Council of Regents, who signed the letter. The key request in the letter was for the immediate transfer of all French-language programs and services from Laurentian University to the University of Sudbury.

Needless to say, we also asked for ongoing funding.

We had not reached the stage of laying claim to all or part of the \$5 million.

• (1725)

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Right.

You said you had the support of the local MPs.

Can you tell us more about Mr. Carol Jolin, the President of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario? Can you talk about the support you've been receiving from northern Ontario, and elsewhere?

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** Mr. Riopel alluded to this. There was a letter signed by 350 university professors. I have a list of about 40 organizations that sent letters of support and adopted resolutions at their respective boards of directors. Some associations represent 50 to 100 organizations province-wide.

The support comes from all sectors, not only from people who teach at university or who work in education in general. There is support from health sector workers, because we know that education is a key social determinant of health. There is support from people who provide services to seniors or who work in early childhood education, as well as from school boards, of course. And then there is very broad support from the community on this issue.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** My fellow citizens also talk about the issues surrounding the Université de l'Ontario français, in Toronto, and about Université de Hearst and the University of Sudbury.

I know that you have only been working on this for a few months, but can you explain how the creation of a network might reassure people in the community who might worry about seeing too many universities here and there? My fellow citizens have spoken to me about the need for a network of this kind.

**Pierre Riopel:** I would say to you, Mr. Serré, that we're talking about geography here. I think that's the essential element. We're also talking about autonomy. Université de Hearst and the Université de l'Ontario français want to be autonomous within a network and want to collaborate on behalf of our young people.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Riopel and Mr. Serré.

We have enough time for two brief interventions.

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

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you.

There appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, we hear a lot from the various federations of school boards that there are not not enough places in francophone schools. On the other, Mr. Haché told us that very few students had been enrolling in the French-lan-

guage programs that were cut. We heard that the Université de l'Ontario français was having trouble recruiting students.

How to explain all of that?

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** I'll have a go.

The day after the programs were cut, my son sent me a message saying that he could no longer study at Laurentian University because he had a BA in history and an intermediate senior teaching certificate, both programs that were cut.

First of all, you can't attract young people to the university if it doesn't offer the programs they want. Secondly, when only partial programs are available and the students have to take courses in English to complete them, it's not attractive for them and they look elsewhere. Program availability is essential.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Riopel, what do you think about these recruitment problems, and the decline in enrolments in those Francophone programs that still exist?

Is that what's happening?

**Pierre Riopel:** With the right approach, it's possible to recruit students. At Laurentian University, English-speaking students have been recruited from abroad for about 12 years now, whereas it's only been over the past three or four years that Francophone students have been recruited from abroad.

So recruitment is definitely an additional problem, but energy and money are also required.

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

We'll end this round with Mr. Boulerice.

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

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to make good use of my time .

I'd like to go back to the impact of having educational programs available in French. You said that it had a historic impact in northern Ontario in several fields, including literature and midwifery. It also had an impact on the vitality and future of francophone communities.

What do you feel will be the outcome of not having a French-language university in northern Ontario on the future and the vitality of your communities?

• (1730)

**Mr. Denis Constantineau:** I can speak about this from a practical standpoint. I'm the executive director of a health centre that works closely with researchers at Laurentian University in areas like immigration, poverty and homelessness. We would lose access to these researchers, their knowledge and their direct contribution to our community.

**Pierre Riopel:** A university is essential to a community's development. If we operate in a bilingual framework, that's what we'll get. What we are proposing as a project will in fact ensure the vitality of my community, of our Franco-Ontarian community in Sudbury, which depends heavily on university education. I know something about this because I worked in the college system for a few years. It's exactly the same principle.

The francophone community is alive and well here because of the presence of Collège Boréal.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's all the time we have for this meeting.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for having agreed to take part. In passing, I'd like to congratulate our analyst and our clerk for having

brought you together this afternoon. You already know one another well.

I would now like to thank Mr. Denis Constantineau, of the Northern Ontario Coalition for a French-language University, and Mr. Pierre Riopel, the Chaiman of the Council of Regents at the University of Sudbury.

Thank you.

I would also like to thank the technicians and the entire team who were with us this afternoon.

On that note, I will adjourn the meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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